

# John Litzler: An attorney with the gospel at heart

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Deep in the Hearts of Texans began in 2016 by featuring pastors and grew to include denominational leaders and other ministers in Texas Baptist life. After hearing from some readers interested in profiles of Christians in the marketplace, Deep in the Hearts of Texans is growing again by including those profiles.

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John Litzler is a member of Shearer Hills Baptist Church in San Antonio. He is an attorney working exclusively with churches and other Christian non-profit organizations. He serves as the director of the Church Law Division of Christian Unity Ministries and as the Baptist General Convention of Texas legal consultant.

From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on being a follower of Christ in the marketplace. To suggest a Texas Baptist leader in the marketplace to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

## Background

### How long have you been practicing law?

I earned my law license in 2011, but it wasn't until 2015 that I began specializing in the area of church law.

## **What other businesses have you been in, and what were your positions there?**

Prior to 2015, I practiced in the areas of family law and insurance defense. I also taught a legal course to high school students. While in school, I was a college ministry intern, and I even served as an interim youth minister.

## **Where did you grow up?**

Sulphur Springs, Texas

## **How did you come to faith in Christ?**

A friend invited me to Vacation Bible School at his church one summer. Though we had just gone through the same LifeWay VBS curriculum at my home church a couple of weeks before, God spoke to me differently that second week. I guess for most of us, it takes hearing the same message repeatedly before we surrender.

## **Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?**

- The University of Texas, Austin: Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy, 2008
- Baylor School of Law, Waco: Juris Doctor, 2011

## **Life in the marketplace**

### **Why do you feel called into the marketplace?**

Many of Christ's disciples were fishermen, and he used their profession to teach them and to teach others. There were the miracles of walking on water, calming a storm, multiplying fish to feed thousands and filling nets with fish. God performs miracles in the marketplace.

God has given me a passion for the church. I've been blessed with the skills, abilities and training to guide the church in legal health and to be an advocate for the church in times of crisis.

## **How does being a Christian influence your decisions in the marketplace?**

Because I work exclusively with Christian organizations, the gospel is at the heart of all that I do. I think the same is true for those in the marketplace that don't work with churches on a regular basis.

The primary goal of business is to maximize profits. The primary goal of Christians is to spread the gospel and make disciples. Sometimes these two goals aren't compatible, and—for the Christian—the former must yield to the latter. When this happens, it can be a powerful testimony for Christ.

## **What is your favorite aspect of the marketplace? Why?**

I can't talk enough about how much I love my area of the marketplace. I truly believe we have the best judicial system in the world. Though there is always room for improvement, I am still amazed by the most foundational concepts in American jurisprudence. When accused, we have the right to be tried by a jury of our peers. We resolve civil conflicts in courtrooms and not in the streets. Americans love our democracy and the freedoms it provides. At the root of those freedoms is a judicial system that upholds the rule of law. It's a privilege to practice law.

## **How do you expect the marketplace to change in the next 10 to 20 years?**

I feel as though churches used to hold a prominent place in our society, particularly in Texas. In the past, most people wouldn't have considered suing a church, even if the church had made a mistake or if the person was not a church member. That's changing. Churches increasingly are involved

in legal matters. I believe I'm at the forefront of a new area of legal specialization. I expect a lot more "church lawyers" in the next few decades.

## About Baptists

### **What are the key issues facing Baptists—denominationally and/or congregationally?**

Preservation of separation of church and state. This is a bedrock Baptist principle rooted firmly in our history and the language of the First Amendment. As American culture becomes more antagonistic toward the Christian faith, the natural tendency is for Christians to blur the lines between the church and our government.

Baptists need to oppose the urge to equate loss of religious privilege with religious persecution. The temptation to rely on governmental policies that establish Christianity as the preferred religion will only grow. As Baptists, we should set the example for our brothers and sisters of other denominations of how to resist those temptations.

### **What would you change about the Baptist denomination—state, nation or local?**

If I could do anything, I'd unify it. I'm thirty-three years old, which means I wasn't alive or was very young when the initial wave of conflict caused rifts in our national and state conventions. There are entire generations—Millennials and Gen Z—of Baptists who have heard the stories of what happened and long for reconciliation.

Each new issue or conflict creates an opportunity for us as Baptists. We either can continue the fracture, focusing on where we disagree, or we can demonstrate to the world that Christian unity doesn't require we agree on

tertiary matters.

## About John

### **Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?**

My parents have been great mentors for me. In particular, my father James Litzler has been both an occupational and spiritual mentor. Dad has been a practicing attorney my entire life, and he's never too busy to pick up the phone for me when I need to talk through a tricky legal scenario. I couldn't have asked for a better model of what it looks like to serve God in your vocation.

Our executive director at Christian Unity Ministries, Blake Coffee, has been another wonderful mentor to me. Blake is also an attorney, and he's a remarkable example of what combining ministry and marketplace can and should be.

### **What is the impact of the marketplace on your family?**

Being self-employed provides great flexibility in spending time with family, but it's also difficult to find balance. I am incredibly blessed to be married to Stefanie, the most wonderful person I know. She serves as a Baptist children's minister. The one-day weekend—I work Fridays, and Stefanie works Sundays—can make visiting extended family challenging. We have a beautiful baby girl, Vivian, who was born last July. She's our first child; so, it may be a few years before I know the full answer to this question.

### **Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite books or authors, and explain why.**

My favorite author is Mark Twain. I just love his satirical wit. I will read and re-read anything he wrote. I particularly enjoy *The Diaries of Adam and*

*Eve.*

One of my favorite books is *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* by Nabeel Qureshi. He provides a skeptic's view of Christianity and a crash course in apologetics as he embarks on his faith journey to learn the truth about Christ.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is another favorite book. Lee's character Atticus Finch taught me a love for justice and inspired me to pursue a career in law. He reminds me of my father.

### **What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?**

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8)?

When my dad wrote me letters in college, he included this verse every time. It's wonderful instruction at any age, but particularly when you leave home for the first time and begin deciding what following God will look like in your new, much more independent, stage of life.

### **Name something about you that would surprise people who know you.**

Food habits. I'm a native Texan living in San Antonio who doesn't like Tex-Mex. With how often I frequent coffee shops—almost daily—it usually surprises people to learn I don't like coffee. I love the atmosphere of both Tex-Mex restaurants and coffee shops, though.

### **If you could get one "do over" in the marketplace, what would it be, and why?**

It's difficult to say this because of how much I loved my law school experience and the friendships and relationships I built there, but I think I

would have taken some time away from education between completing my undergraduate degree and beginning law school. I spent the first several years as an attorney unsure of the direction I wanted my career to take. It might have been wiser to go through that process before incurring all the student loan debt.