

# Jordan Villanueva: I didn't get here on my own

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Jordan Villanueva, former lead pastor of Indian Hills Baptist Church in Grand Prairie, recently became instructor of Christian studies in [Howard Payne University's](#) School of Christian Studies. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on the church and ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated leader to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

## Background

### **Where else have you served in ministry, and what were your positions there?**

I first served as youth minister at Primera Iglesia Bautista in Brownwood. I then served in the youth ministry at First Baptist Church in El Paso, and then as youth pastor at Grace Temple Baptist Church in Oak Cliff.

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

I grew up in Azle, just outside of Fort Worth, and attended Primera Iglesia Bautista in Azle. I spent a lot of time growing up on the north side of Fort Worth.

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

I grew up in and out of church. I heard the stories, and I heard the gospel. However, I knew of God but did not know him personally. It was not until I was 17 years old that I came to a fork in the road in my life.

I had hit a valley due to the choices I had made. I realized in my mother's driveway I had been putting my hope in the wrong things. I did not have a typical "walk the aisle" moment. I had the realization, sitting broken on the hood of my car as a teenager in mother's driveway, I needed to make Jesus the Lord of my life and follow him.

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

I graduated from Howard Payne University with a Bachelor of Arts in youth ministry and Spanish. I received my Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. I am working on my Ph.D. at Southwestern Seminary, with a focus in church history.

## **About ministry life**

### **Why do you feel called into ministry?**

I received my call to ministry as a teenager at Campamento at Mount Lebanon Camp in Cedar Hill. My dear friend Tiny Dominguez was the speaker and was giving the call for anyone who felt God calling them to serve him in vocational ministry.

I had just graduated high school and was about to begin attending HPU to play soccer, never thinking I would be studying to become a pastor. Yet, at camp that summer in 2008, I felt the Lord calling me to step forward and to serve in this capacity.

It just so happened, that fall I was going to attend a Baptist university with a Christian Studies department. I believe the Lord made that happen.

### **What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?**

I really enjoy investing in young people, whether to disciple someone who

just recently has come to faith, or even walking alongside younger pastors and ministers. I may not have as much wisdom and experience to give away as some who have been in ministry for decades, but I want to give away what I have to offer.

## **How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?**

I started out in youth ministry. I served in student ministry for seven years. The honest truth was I thought I would be in student ministry forever. The Lord had other plans. Yet, even though my title and responsibilities changed, the foundational principles never did. I have continued to teach truth and love people even in this new context.

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

I see a pruning season coming. Not in the sense of people, but programming. I believe the church has become metaphorical hoarders in the sense we have created this huge institutional cruise ship that is extremely heavy and slow to turn due to all the stuff that has been associated with the church.

I believe the pandemic has shown that type of institution can't function well in this fast-changing world. The church needs to have the capability to pivot in different ways going forward. I believe we will begin to take away the fluff in this stripping-down process, so we will get back down to the basic fundamentals of what it looks like to love God and love people.

## **About Baptists**

## **Why are you Baptist?**

I became a Baptist by condition and stayed a Baptist by conviction.

I came to know the Lord through the work of the Baptist General Convention of Texas by growing up in a BGCT Hispanic church plant, by attending events such as Congreso, and attending one of the BGCT's universities. I was conditioned to be a Baptist early on, because that was how I became a follower of Jesus. However, as I grew in age and wisdom, I came to the conviction I am a Texas Baptist.

I come to this conviction through theological means. First, I agree with the ecclesiological position of Baptists when it comes to who makes up the local church and how the local church is autonomous yet cooperates with others. I also hold to the theological position of the priesthood of the believer. I believe Jesus is our great mediator, and through his mediation, we all have direct access to the Father. Finally, I affirm the right of religious freedom every person has.

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

The biggest issue I see is the lack of grace I see spewed out on social media among ourselves. Jesus says, "By this they will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Right now, it does not look like we are Jesus' disciples.

Unfortunately, we have begun to draw lines in the sand again. If this continues, at some point there will be no one else in the circle with us. The early church was described in Acts as having all things in common. They definitely had their differences culturally, socially and linguistically. Yet Jesus was the commonality.

Jesus brings unity. Before saying, "I disagree," we must first say "I

understand.” Then, if we still disagree, we do so in love and still have the ability to cooperate with one another for the sake of the gospel.

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

I would love to be part of the generation that brings the two state conventions in Texas back together. I obviously was not around when the split happened, but I have heard the stories. I’ve seen the scars.

The truth is, that fight was not my fight. I believe there were a lot of hurt feelings during that tumultuous time. But hopefully, we have come to realize we agree a lot more than we disagree when it comes to doctrine and pragmatism.

## **About Jordan**

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

There are three men the Lord used to shape me into who I am today. The first individual influenced me from afar. Jon Randles was so influential in my early years as a follower of Christ and in my preparation for ministry. I had the opportunity to learn from Jon from a distance by hearing him at Congreso, revivals at Howard Payne University, and for undergraduate seminars at HPU. He helped instill the mindset I have today that I am not called to be anyone else but who the Lord has made me to be, and I should do so in boldness.

My dear friend Tiny Dominguez often was a speaker at Congreso and Campamento growing up. Also, because of mutual friends, I had the opportunity to learn from him up close. He was the preacher who delivered the call in which I received my call to ministry.

Tiny was instrumental in showing me what it looks like to be a Hispanic preacher. He also modeled what humility looks like in a preacher. No matter how big a platform he may have had, he always had time to talk to some kid from Azle. I am grateful to this day that I still receive phone calls from Tiny, checking in on me and telling me he is praying for me. Also, I would like to think Tiny's humor influenced me a lot in my own preaching, although I would like to think I'm funnier.

The Lord used my father-in-law Dr. David Lowrie Jr. to show me what it looks like to pastor a church well and still be a wonderful husband and father. David gave me a chance to intern at his church, First Baptist Church in El Paso, after I graduated from HPU. During my internship, I always would look forward to my weekly time with him when we walked through God's word together. David was one of the first preachers who really made God's word come alive for me. I developed a hunger for God's word I still have today because of his preaching.

I am grateful for the opportunity I was given to see him away from the church, as well. He is the same person at home he is at church. Obviously, I am grateful to have the opportunity to be married to his sweet daughter Jamie. He always tells people, if we would have known I was going to marry his daughter, he would have asked harder questions when I was interviewing for the internship. I'm blessed to be able to call David family.

### **What did you learn on the job you wish you learned in seminary?**

I wish I would have taken the course Pandemics 101.

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

I recommend Augustine's *City of God* to anyone wrestling with the current state of our culture and nation, though it is a massive work.

I also enjoy a lot of Thomas Aquinas' scholastic works. One of my favorites is his *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*.

The last old author I recommend is Jonathan Edwards. I am grateful for Dr. Caldwell from Southwestern Seminary for fostering a love within me for arguably our nation's greatest theological mind. I recommend starting with Edward's writing on the freedom of the will.

A recent work that has blessed me tremendously in light of the pandemic and recent cultural shifts is Tod Bolsinger's *Canoeing the Mountains*. It is one of those leadership books that will go down in history as an all-time classic when it comes to navigating leadership land mines in a Christian context.

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

My life verse always has been Ephesians 3:20-21. "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

I have a pretty vivid imagination, and yet the Lord still blows me away with his grace and the ways he blesses me on a daily basis. Never would I have expected the Lord would bring me to the place I am today. We all have heard of that old cowboy proverb: "You know what happened if you see a turtle on a fence post. You know it did not get there on its own."