

Matt Homeyer: God's call is like a life preserver to the drowning

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Matt Homeyer is assistant dean of external affairs at Baylor University's [Truett Theological Seminary](#), where he has served since 2015. He is a member of [Calvary Baptist Church](#) in Waco and is interim pastor at Bosqueville Baptist Church.

From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on education, 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, and what were your positions there?

- Fellowship Baptist Church, Marble Falls, 2007-2015, senior pastor.
- First Baptist Church, Hubbard, 2003-2007, student pastor.

Where did you grow up?

Kenedy, Texas, and the First Baptist Church of Kenedy

How did you come to faith in Christ?

Like all good Baptist children—VBS! Bro. Bob Wimpee gave an invitation one morning at Vacation Bible School when I was 8, and I felt led to stay after and visit with him, along with a few other children. He presented the gospel to us and encouraged us to visit with our parents.

I vividly remember sitting cross-legged on my parents' bed that evening as I prayed the best prayer my 8-year-old self could muster, asking Jesus to forgive me of sin and to be Lord and Savior of my life. I was baptized a few weeks later in a Sunday night service.

When were you called into ministry?

I first felt God's call to ministry while singing at a youth choir concert at First Baptist Church in La Vernia.

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

- Baylor University, Bachelor of Arts in speech communication, 2003.
- Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Master of Divinity, 2007.
- Truett Theological Seminary, Doctor of Ministry, 2016.

About ministry

How has your place in ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?

The lesson I've taken from my experience and the experience of helping other ministers reflect upon their ministry is, for most ministers, one's calling continually is sure, but the shape and form of one's ministry may shift over the years.

I hold on to God's call on my life like a drowning man to a life preserver. Job descriptions and titles, on the other hand, are to be held more loosely. God willing, life is long and will contain many chapters of ministry. Be content with this season, and trust God for future seasons. This is my daily struggle and prayer.

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

In the United States, ministry will become harder. All the stressors that make ministry challenging will be exacerbated. Cultural divides seem destined to deepen, cracks of differences bound to grow into unspannable chasms.

Tolerance is our national virtue and, as a result, followers of Jesus will find themselves increasingly out of step with broader societal movements. As boomers age and pass away, churches will struggle to adapt to these challenges, as well as to find ways to fund ministry and mission.

What is the upside? Hopefully, churches will muster the courage to seek imaginative and effective means to communicate the gospel for changing times. Many churches likely will go the way of Blockbuster

, but other existing churches will thrive, and many others will be born and communicate the gospel in unique ways.

I believe churches, on the whole, will get smaller and deeper. Many will be boutique churches, strategically formed to reach a people or cultural subgroup—such as churches for gamers, artists, bikers and others. Also, on the whole, churches are likely to be less reliant on professional clergy and more adept at helping disciples learn to make disciples.

I pray for a renewed zeal to share Jesus with those who don't know him, and that this zeal is matched in pitch with a commitment for justice and healing.

Name the most significant challenges and/or influences facing ministers.

Wellness—mental, physical, emotional and spiritual. All indicators point to

pastors being less healthy than ever. We face our own wellness pandemic.

Leadership—leading congregations to follow Jesus together in increasingly divided times. Can we find ways for church to be a place where people with deep divisions between them can come together in Jesus' name and go out as brothers and sisters who transform the world?

What do you wish more people knew about ministers?

I wish churches knew how deeply most pastors love them. I hope I'm wrong about this and that churches instinctively know this.

Some pastors can be mean and do dumb things. That said, the vast majority are in love with their congregation and prayerfully agonize over them like a first-time parent over the child of promise. This deep affection is hard for pastors to talk about without becoming embarrassed or seeming to be self-promoting, but I wonder if church health might be improved by a working awareness of this love.

I also wish more churches understood how difficult the job of pastor can be. Many professions present unique difficulty, but few thrust such a wide range of vocational challenges on one person. Pastors of small and big churches alike must be communicators (and of the word of God, no less), teachers, chaplains, counselors, managers, human resource directors and visionaries—all at once.

Their hours are irregular, and the pressures of leadership are compounded by the reality heaven and hell are at stake in our work. If that weren't enough, pastors bear the stress—and the unique joy—of burying people they love, speaking holy words at some of the most momentous moments in peoples' lives, and continually calling their congregation back to the task of cross-bearing discipleship.

For one who is called to such work, it is work of deepest joy and fulfillment;

but, it is difficult and comes with a cost. Many church members understand this. But every pastor will receive the joking side-comment of how nice it would be to have to work only one day each week.

About education

Why do you feel called into your area of education?

The short answer is I don't feel called to higher education. My calling, since I was 18, is to pastor. Once received, it was like something blooming inside of me that had been waiting there for years, waiting for the season to open up in fullness.

There have been seasons of difficulty, doubt and struggle in following this call, but this call to pastor God's people remains the grounding purpose of my life.

I always assumed this would mean my job title read, "senior pastor." The opportunity to serve at Truett came unexpectedly and, I believe, was a Spirit work.

At Truett, I am able to serve the church by pastoring pastors and training students to serve in ministry. I think most of us at Truett—even those with a call to teach—feel our jobs are in service to our call to the church, not a separate call to higher-education.

What is your favorite aspect of education? Why?

I love seeing young ministers grow in confidence in their call as they grow more deeply in love with Jesus and Christ's church.

Students often come to seminary unsure of the nature of their calling. They've received an inkling of a call and come to seminary to explore this holy hunch. Regularly, over the course of their first and second year, a

Spirit work happens in the life of a student while in class, in conversations with faculty and friends, and through hands-on ministry. Their calling becomes sure and true.

They often don't fully realize the change they have undergone, but the faculty and staff are privileged to provide witness as we visit with, teach and pray for them. And we give thanks, and we ask God to call more of them.

What one aspect of education would you like to change?

I wish churches would integrate support of theological education into their mission and budgets. It is wrong for ministers to go into significant debt to follow God's call to ministry. I wish we could create a program where churches cooperated together to pay tuition for students called to congregational ministry or that would provide loan forgiveness after three to five years' service in a Texas Baptist church.

Texas Baptist churches support theological education very generously through their cooperative program gifts, but the needs are great. It requires local churches accepting this as part of their mission.

About Baptists

Why are you Baptist?

Honestly, because my grandfathers and dad were all deacons, my grandmothers and mom all taught Sunday school and choir, my uncle was a Baptist pastor, and then I chose to attend the largest Baptist university in the world. I was fated to be a Baptist. That said, I choose to be Baptist because of both our faith commitments and polity.

Beyond the standard marks of orthodoxy, I adhere to the traditional Baptist

distinctives—soul competency, priesthood of all believers, local church autonomy, separation of church and state, and observance of two ordinances.

I am Baptist also because it was Baptist family, Baptist Sunday school teachers and Baptist pastors who taught me to love and follow Jesus. They did so imperfectly but faithfully and with great joy.

I need a tribe to journey with who will continue to witness to me in such ways and will do the same for my kids. My tribe is Texas Baptists, and I am thankful for my tribe.

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

Denominationally, are Baptists destined to further fracture, divide and split until our witness in the eyes of others is shattered? Have we already reached that point? Will a compelling vision—and visionaries—arise that can unify a diverse spectrum of churches under a gripping kingdom vision that encompasses salvation in the name of Jesus, as well as justice for all God's people?

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

I support Texas Baptists unabashedly. That said, I hope we can discern what we *must* do during the next 20 to 50 years to equip churches to evangelize, disciple and seek justice in Texas and beyond; commit absolutely to these four to five areas; and be willing boldly to eliminate anything that would distract us from this mission.

This is true for both churches and denominations. There are many things we *can* do and only a few things we *must* do.

About Matt

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

My dad and grandfathers—Bobby Homeyer, Bob Homeyer and H.L. Hall—remain the best men I've known. They modeled quiet and consistent faith lived out in every aspect of their lives. They were the same men at church, work and home. If I live by their example, I believe I will find myself living smack-dab in the middle of the kingdom of God.

Ron Cook and my uncle Ken Hall have been mentors, and now friends, in ministry since I was in college. Their steady support and wise counsel gave me the confidence to take first steps in ministry, and they continue to be the first two calls I make when I need counsel, encouragement and wisdom.

There is a fellowship of young-ish pastors with whom friendships were formed during the crucible of ministry in our 20s and 30s. They have been my continual confessors, teachers and co-laborers. For them, I am ever thankful and look forward to several decades of serving together in the years ahead.

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

I find myself most drawn to books that feature stories of calling, vocation and redemption in everyday life. Not epic hero stories, but stories of characters who find deepest purpose in living well the daily life they are given, such as *Jayber Crow* and *Hannah Coulter* by Wendell Berry, *Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck, *Lonesome Dove* by Larry McMurtry, and *Gilead* and its accompanying novels by Marilynne Robinson.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

The verses that speak to me in this season and that won't seem to let me go is Colossians 1:28-29. I am seeking to live in deeper knowledge that it is Christ who provides energy to follow the call. Even when I am bone-tired, I want to live with a deeper awareness of that energy of the Spirit.