

# **Michael Dean: The gospel is everything. ‘Stay riveted to the gospel.’**

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Michael Dean was senior pastor and lead teaching pastor of [Travis Avenue Baptist Church](#) in Fort Worth, Texas for 28 years. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on church and ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated minister to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

## **Background**

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

I was born in Orange to Jack and Nell Dean. My dad was in the U.S. Air Force, and we moved around overseas and in the United States until I was 13, when we settled in Wichita Falls. Wichita Falls had been home to my dad’s side of the family for several years; so, I was blessed to spend the remainder of my teenage years near grandparents, aunts and uncles.

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

My family typically wasn’t a church-going family, but as my sister and I reached our teen years, I think my parents saw the need for some spiritual input in our lives. We started attending a Southern Baptist church near where we lived, where I heard Pastor Ed Spivey faithfully proclaim the gospel. God used that experience to awaken me to my need for Jesus.

I recall feeling two overwhelming emotions: guilt and a sense of purposelessness in life. At the close of a worship service one Sunday, I

couldn't resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit any longer, and I responded to the gospel invitation given by Pastor Spivey. He led me to receive Jesus as my Savior. I was baptized the next Sunday evening.

I still remember the joy of knowing my sins were forgiven and I had a new purpose in life.

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

After I was saved, I really didn't take advantage of the opportunities my church offered for growth in discipleship. Consequently, I grew very little through my teenage years. Before long, I no longer was attending church. I rarely prayed or read my Bible. I certainly didn't share my faith with others.

When I started my freshman year of college at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, I was invited to a Bible study at the Baptist Student Center. There, I was exposed to believers who took their faith in Christ seriously. I attended the BSU State Convention in the fall of 1972, where I heard Dr. Bill Pinson preach on the Lordship of Christ. I realized I was not as fully surrendered to Christ as I should be, and I committed my life to living for him.

Immediately, I became involved in campus ministry. I also had the opportunity to serve as a student minister in two churches during my college years.

At the time, I thought I was going to go into the business world, but I was willing to serve churches any way the Lord opened for me. During that time, a fellow student minister who was mentoring me asked me if I had considered the possibility that God might be calling me to ministry as a vocation. As I prayed seriously about his question, I discerned God indeed was calling me to serve him in a local church.

At first, the last thing I felt qualified to do was be a local church pastor. Over time, however, the Lord gave me a love for his church that led to my being ordained at the First Baptist Church of Iowa Park in 1976 under the leadership of Pastor Ken Flowers.

I immediately determined to finish college as soon as possible and enroll at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to be trained to preach God's word and to shepherd a local church.

In 1977, I married Nan Cranford, whom I had met in Baptist Student Ministry, and we moved to my first pastorate at Hillcrest Baptist Church in Wichita Falls.

### **In addition to your years at Travis Avenue Baptist Church, where else did you serve in ministry?**

During college, I served as the youth minister at Eden Hills Baptist Church in Wichita Falls (where I was saved) and at First Baptist Church of Iowa Park.

During my seminary training, I served as pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Wichita Falls (1977-1981).

After seminary, I served as pastor at First Baptist Church of Artesia, N.M., (1981-1987) and Calvary Baptist Church of Beaumont (1987-1991).

In 1991, I became the senior and lead teaching pastor at Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

### **When did you retire from full-time ministry?**

I retired from Travis Avenue Baptist Church on Sept. 30, 2019, and we moved to Glorieta, N.M., and attend First Baptist Church of Santa Fe. Since we never "retire" from the call of the Lord, we hope to stay involved in the work of God's kingdom in any way the Lord may open for us.

## **How have you occupied yourself since then?**

We have stayed busy getting settled in our home in the mountains of New Mexico. I have had a number of invitations to speak in churches, as well as Baptist state convention and associational events.

Having served in Fort Worth, near Southwestern Seminary, I have developed a passion to mentor young ministers. The Lord is opening doors for me to continue that ministry with men around the country.

## **About ministry life**

### **What was your favorite or most joyful aspect of ministry? Why?**

One of the guiding Scriptures in my ministry has been: "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:28-29).

I feel the greatest responsibility of a pastor or elder is to teach and preach the word of God. The shepherd is responsible to feed the flock of God. I love getting into the study early each morning and preparing to teach and preach in the various venues where the lead pastor ministers the word of God to the people.

### **What part of ministry delivered the greatest heartache or headache?**

Shepherding God's flock is leadership. Leading God's people to change to conform to the will of God revealed in Scripture is met often with resistance. This requires great patience as we wait for the Holy Spirit to do what only he can do in terms of forming Christ in the souls of believers.

Walking with church members through this process is challenging and sometimes frustrating. I have to keep reminding myself that I, too, am on that journey to fullness in Christ. The Lord has been patient and merciful to me; I must show the same to his sheep.

### **Name the most significant challenges and/or influences you faced during your ministry.**

Most of my pastoral ministry has taken place in established churches with long histories. Churches have to change to remain viable in changing cultural settings. In established churches, the changes required often are very difficult.

One of the greatest challenges of ministry in the local church is to stay riveted to the unchanging mission of Christ to make disciples, while also receiving the fresh vision of how Christ would have the church adapt to reach ever-changing populations.

### **What element of ministry do you wish you could have changed?**

I would like to have spent more time developing local church leaders. I found myself “oiling the squeaky hinges” rather than investing in the future by equipping leaders.

### **What would you tell the young you, just starting out in ministry?**

Stay riveted to the gospel. The proclamation of the gospel is the means by which God saves and sanctifies souls.

Many things in ministry cry out for attention and require an enormous amount of time. Nothing matters for eternity like souls who have been shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Share the gospel often in personal

conversation and in preaching.

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

The complexities of human existence will morph dramatically. Church leaders of the next decades will have to grapple with how to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lostness of humans layered over with unimaginable sin and suffering.

## **About Baptists**

### **Why are you a Baptist?**

I am a Baptist by conviction. Baptist distinctives are most closely aligned with Scripture. Additionally, like no other denomination, Southern Baptists are committed to the task of taking the gospel to the nations. I want to be part of that.

### **What key issues do you see for Baptists going forward?**

Maintaining doctrinal integrity—the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture—while keeping our hearts and faces turned toward the nations where the gospel must be proclaimed.

If we spend all of our energy policing doctrinal orthodoxy while neglecting the global mission of Jesus, we disobey the Lord. If we ignore doctrinal integrity and focus solely on the mission, we risk losing our gospel moorings, and thus the only hope we have of changing the world.

## **About Michael**

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

- Pastor Ed Spivey faithfully proclaimed the gospel, led me to the Lord and baptized me.
- Dr. Bob Reccord disciplined me as a college student showing me how to read Scripture, pray and share Christ.
- Pastor Ken Flowers gave me an opportunity to learn to be an under-shepherd.
- Pastor Lamoin Champ taught me to pray and gave me a hunger for revival in my generation.

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

I'm grateful for each of my seminary professors at Southwestern Seminary and Golden Gate—now Gateway—Seminary. I particularly am indebted to the men who taught me how to walk with God in and through gospel ministry.

There are so many skills we need to learn as seminary students, but nothing is as important as how to let ministry be the overflow of the fullness of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. Effective ministry simply is not possible apart from the work of the Spirit in and through me.

## **If you could get one “do over” in ministry, what would it be, and why?**

I would pay more attention to my wife and children. I knew this was important and, at the time, thought it was a priority, but I'm sure I missed the mark too often. Ministry has a way of consuming one's energies to the degree that the higher priorities are neglected. Success in ministry easily can become an idol. I would like to have been more observant of the needs of my family.