

# **Randy Hatchett: Ideas and where they are formed matter**

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Randy Hatchett is a professor of theology at [Houston Baptist University](#), having been on faculty since 1990. He is a member of Sugar Land Baptist Church. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on Christian higher education. 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?**

My greatest job was serving as pastor to the wonderful folks at Baker Baptist Church south of Weatherford, Texas. After five years, I took a teaching position at Williams Baptist College in Arkansas. I also taught some at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Tarrant County Junior College when I was finishing my degree.

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

I grew up on the far north side of Fort Worth on Diamond Hill. Diamond Hill Baptist Church was my home church. We had several wonderful ministers, like Jack Carr and Monte Martin, and some princes serve as supply and interim pastor, including Leon McBeth, Huber Drumwright and the Old Testament scholar Ralph Smith.

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

My parents displayed a wonderful Christian testimony. Even now, my father's prayers mean the world to me. I heard the message loud and clear in my home and home church. As a young boy, personal faith was awakened in me, and I trusted Jesus to forgive me and guide me.

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

I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Dallas Baptist University. I earned a Master of Divinity degree and a Ph.D. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

## **About education**

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

I could have been happy in the pastorate. But I had as discernable a call as I ever have known to begin teaching in Arkansas. Wonderful people spoke into my life, like Larry Braidfoot at Dallas Baptist University and Yandall Woodfin, John Newport, David Kirkpatrick, Bert Dominy and James Leo Garrett at Southwestern Seminary. Several of these asked me to ponder the teaching ministry. The prospect of contributing to a person's lifetime of ministry is an overwhelming privilege.

### **How does being a Christian influence your work in education?**

Schools and universities are an environment of academic, professional and spiritual formation. Thankfully, there is a vibrant Christian presence at numerous state or secular institutions. There is, however, a great need for explicitly Christian voices and environments. Christian schools meet these needs and provide an important witness to the larger culture and industry

of higher education.

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

It is wonderful to witness a student grasping that ideas or doctrines matter in real life. No doubt, people are led more by the heart than the head, but the way we live and treat people and the goals we pursue are rooted in ideas.

For example, the world typically asserts lesser people serve greater people. Yet, Christians confess the Son served his Father out of love and shared mission, not inferiority. Serving need not show weakness or inferiority. Maybe greatness is about how many you serve and not how many serve you. Ideas matter.

### **What is your favorite class to teach? Why?**

Hermeneutics or interpretation theory is my favorite. It is great to see young readers make progress by employing wise strategies and learning how to find their way around in the Bible. But it is wonderful to see students awaken to the mystery, power and grandeur of Scripture.

This awakening requires not mastery but a humble surrender. When students see the Bible more truly, they come to understand that making sense of the Bible requires more than method and gray matter. It requires the character of Christ.

### **Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing education.**

First, online and for-profit ventures will put an enormous financial pressure on universities and seminaries. Real scholars, real books and actual personal engagement with students will be hard to protect.

Second, accreditation bodies and state and federal governments will make

maintaining traditional Christian convictions and practices very difficult.

Third, under mounting pressure, local churches and denominations may not make the investment or see the need for Christian formation and intellectual training. Modern instincts inform us that we need motivational speakers or managers and not pastor or theologians.

## **What do you wish more people knew about education?**

While it may appear studying and learning is a solitary affair, what you do with what you learn is shaped by your place and your people. Environment and community give education real traction. The most profound learning is tied to the church.

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

Although most of the credit goes to my wife, Debbie, our home was full of books and readers. Our four children are great readers and writers. To this day, I am captured when Debbie tells a story or reads to our grandchildren.

## **About Randy**

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

Simply baptism. Believer's baptism is a distinguishing conviction. It assumes a conversion, a confession and a church comprised of Christ-followers. While I long for a unity and oneness for the larger church, I practice baptism as a witness to a better way.

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

At Dallas Baptist University, Larry Braidfoot adopted my friend Ed and me. He listened well and inspired me to learn as an act of discipleship.

At Southwestern Seminary, numerous professors encouraged and inspired me. Garrett offered kindness and friendship and displayed high academic standards. Dominy and Kirkpatrick were encouraging voices. I will never forget Kirkpatrick challenging me, “Hatchett, your reputation belongs to Christ.” That is, obey and don’t worry what people will think.

Additionally, friendship with several fellow students—Jim Denison, Randy Richards, Rodney Reeves and David Capes—was and is life-giving.

Daniel Vestal and Duane Brooks have inspired me as pastors and trusted friends.

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

Robert L Wilken in *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* confirmed for my soul and my mind that I was right to look to the early church for guidance; it is beautiful.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together* inspired me that learning and discipleship are communal undertakings.

*The Book of Common Prayer* (1928) came to me serendipitously. I don’t understand fully why it became the book for praying and singing the Psalms, but I am glad it did.

Gordon Fee in *Paul the Spirit and the People of God* provided a window into the Holy Spirit and the church.

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

I would be hard-pressed to offer a passage more formative than John 20, which records the resurrection appearances and the challenge to believe and bear witness to encountering the risen Jesus. The work of biblical scholar Raymond Brown opened my mind and heart.

## **How else have you served the church in addition to your teaching?**

My president, Robert Sloan, has encouraged me to serve actively in local churches. It has been my privilege to serve about 20 congregations as interim minister. Most of these have been in Houston and Fort Bend County. Serving the church has helped remind me of the church context that most of my ministry students will serve one day.

## **What have you been writing?**

I edited Bruce Shelley's *Church History in Plain Language*, 4th edition.

My colleague Ben Blackwell and I have written an introduction to theology, *Engaging Theology: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction*, published by Zondervan in 2019.

I have a forthcoming book on the Bible and evil.