

# Russell Allen: Privilege with incredible responsibility

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**Russell Allen** has been pastor of [Woodlawn Baptist Church in Austin](#) for three and a half 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 else have you served in ministry, and what were your positions there?**

I began ministry as a freshman in college at Riverside Baptist Church in Trinity and then served First Baptist Church in Taylor and First Baptist Church in Grandview, all as minister of students. Then I spent 10 years in Grandview as lead pastor, and now I'm at Woodlawn.

**Where did you grow up?**

Taylor

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

I accepted Christ as an 8-year-old after discussion with my parents. I prayed to receive Christ as my Savior in the pastor's office at First Baptist Church in Taylor. The really cool part of that is 14 years later, that very office became my office while I served as student pastor for six years.

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

I attended Sam Houston State University and received a bachelor of science degree in kinesiology with a history minor and a plan to teach and coach. But I followed the call to ministry and attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and received a master of divinity degree.

## **Ministry/church**

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

At the age of 13, I sat in a hot tabernacle at Highland Lakes Baptist Encampment and felt like God was “calling” me to something more. I didn’t really know what it was, but something. Looking back, it was clear he had a plan for ministry for me that has been led by him each step of the way.

I believe all Christians are called to the ministry. It just so happens I am one who is called to lead our church family. It is a privilege with an incredible amount of responsibility. We are all called to change the world in the name of Jesus Christ. I just get to do it full-time vocationally.

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

Relationships. I have been fortunate in that every church God has called me to has been a multigenerational church. I love people of all ages and the different perspectives they all have. Now that I have children of my own, it is even more valuable to have the older generation to look to as examples for my own growth as a parent and to watch their investment in my children and my children’s love for them.

### **What one aspect of congregational life would you like to change?**

A lead pastor is always going to say his church could serve more! If the body of Christ would truly be the body of Christ and everyone would use the gifts they have been equipped with, it would be amazing to watch the church move forward and make a worldwide impact. We would see revival

like the world has never known if our churches would be the church the way the church was designed to be.

**If you could launch any new ministry—individually, through your congregation or through another organization—what would it be? Why?**

I have always had a dream of having a pastoral care retreat. It would be set up like a bed and breakfast for pastors and their spouses. One of the concerns I have as pastor is burnout. So often, our smaller-church pastors don't have the financial resources to be able to just take a weekend away with their family. I would love to be able to have a place to ride horses, fish, ride ATVs, lay in a hammock and just relax for a weekend or a week to help refresh the pastor and to prepare for another stretch in ministry. I would want to take the opportunity as well to educate the church on the need for their pastor to "get away" so they get the pastor's very best.

**What do you wish more laypeople knew about ministry or, specifically, your ministry?**

I don't think most laypeople realize how lonely ministry can be. When I say that, I don't just mean for the staff person but for his wife and family as well.

Many pastors are very outgoing in their personality type and appear to have lots of friends. Unfortunately, the reality is many pastors have lots of relationships but very few that contain any depth. The people who understand the weight of ministry often are other pastors who don't have time to invest in another pastor. It is a vicious cycle.

Another thing I hear often is: "I got close to the last pastor's family, and they left, and it left a void. I don't want to expose myself to being hurt again when you leave." No one wins with that type of attitude. We must make ourselves vulnerable in relationships. We were created for fellowship,

and we need the encouragement and community of the body to be all we were created to be.

## About Baptists

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

Today's culture is not interested in institutions. They have a lack of trust in institutional leaders. I am concerned that churches are trying so hard to be culturally relevant we are moving away from the truth of the gospel. The gospel must always be our baseline. We have to move the world toward the gospel and not move the gospel toward the world.

The church must become relevant to the community, or we simply fade into the "noise" of the rest of the world. The challenge for us at Woodlawn is with so many options of quality events in Austin on a daily basis, we have to make sure what we do in ministry is excellent. Too often, I am afraid as a church or denomination, we don't set the standard high enough in the events we plan.

## About Russell

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

Dr. *Dan Crawford* at Southwestern Seminary showed me that you can be "normal" in life and still be in ministry. He taught me the importance of prayer and personal study being the foundation of my ministry. Today, he has moved from mentor to friend.

*Don Coleman* was the Baptist Student Ministry director at Sam Houston. I served on the freshman council, which required church attendance regularly. In November, Don asked me where I was attending, and I told him I hadn't found one I "liked." He told me to look at the board outside his

office and find a church to “serve.” I began teaching youth at Riverside Baptist Church, and my ministry career had begun. A lesson for us all—quit looking out for what is best for you and start serving him!

Finally, I wouldn't be where I am today without the greatest dad in the world! *Walter Allen* made sure our family was in church, and he set a positive Christian example of a husband and a father for me. I am thankful God placed me in the home I grew up in!

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

When most pastors are asked this question, I am afraid the answer might be negative. I am concerned that many families suffer under the pressure of the pastor's schedule.

Fortunately, everywhere I have served, family has been the key to ministry. We have served alongside other families on mission trips and camps, and our church offices have been family-friendly. That is a blessing.

More important are the relationships with other church members. We have benefited from the community of others our age and in our stage of life from a fellowship standpoint but have been encouraged and mentored by the older generation of people we have had the privilege of serving—from words of encouragement, to loving on our kids, to being a great example of what family and marriage look like in different stages of life.

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

John 10:10—Jesus came that we have life and have it more abundantly! We so often sell God short in many areas, but this verse is one that says Jesus came for us to have “superior, extraordinary, surpassing, uncommon” life.

Even on bad, difficult, hard days, we have a God who loves us enough that we can have that kind of “life.” The world should look at us as believers and

see this type of life and want what we have so badly that our churches would be overflowing, but we don't take God up on this offer. Instead, we choose to live a life of defeat and not victory! We choose to live a life of mediocrity and not the "uncommon life."

I do my best every day to live life to the fullest, not just to honor God but to squeeze every ounce of the blessing that is today!

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