

Walter C. Jackson: Pastoring pastors and helping churches in South Central Texas

June 6, 2018

Since June 2012, Walter C. Jackson has been the director of missions for the [Guadalupe Baptist Association](#), which serves 55 churches in seven counties and is based in Victoria, Texas. 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 leader to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Where else have you worked, and what were your positions?

I pastored Silver Springs Baptist in Magnolia for almost two years, Seventh & Main Baptist Church in Bonham for four years, Highland Park Baptist in Texarkana for three and half years and FBC DeKalb for eleven years.

I also currently teach a class for the South Texas School of Christian Studies located in Corpus Christi.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Northwest Houston.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

I grew up in the Methodist church. My mother was a Sunday School

teacher. On occasion, she would take me with her to the Bible bookstore and would let me pick out a “Chick evangelistic tract,” those small cartoon stories that led to an evangelistic presentation of salvation.

One November day, when I was ten years old, I was in my bedroom reading the tract “The Fool” and, for the first time, when I got to the end of the little story, realized I was lost and needed to give my life to Jesus. I went out into our garage, got down on my knees, put my elbows up on an antique trunk and followed the prayer at the back of the tract.

That day, knowing that God loved me and could not lie, that if I confessed my sin and invited Jesus into my life I would be saved, I did just that. A side note: that old antique trunk now sits in my office as a personal altar of praise to God for that day.

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

I like to proudly say I was a part of the first graduating class of Cypress Creek High School in 1980. I received my Bachelor of Arts from Houston Baptist University, with a double major in Christianity and psychology, my Master of Divinity from Southwestern Seminary and my Doctor of Ministry from Trinity Seminary.

Ministry/Profession

Why do you feel called to your particular vocation?

When I had been in Bonham about two years, our director of missions retired. I was asked to serve on the search committee with four other pastors. As we met at the associational office, these other pastors, who were older than I was and had more years of experience than I did, began to talk about what they wanted in the next DOM.

I will never forget the feeling I had as they talked about this, and in my heart I thought “That is the dream ministry.” If I had had just a few more years of experience as a pastor I would have asked that day to be removed from the committee because I wanted to throw my name in the hat for the position.

I continued pastoring and staying very involved in each of the associations where I served. Around 2008, the desire really began to grow in me again, and God began to confirm the calling, leading me here to the GBA in 2012.

Please tell us about your association—where it’s located, the key focus of its work and ministry, etc.

We are in South Central Texas. Our office is in the city of Victoria, and we have churches in the six counties that surround Victoria County. We are located across the street from the University of Houston Victoria and Victoria College. Because of this we double as the BSM building, and one of our key works is in reaching the campuses.

Recently, the Lord has begun bringing the world into our building. We offer a free lunch for students each Tuesday, supplied by a different church each week. A group of women who are learning English have begun coming. We are now offering a time for them to stay after lunch and work on their conversational English.

As I type this, there are ladies from Italy, Iraq, Turkey, Taiwan, Egypt and Pakistan all enjoying lunch and will soon be playing games that help them speak English. Their husbands are here working, and they are wanting to go to school, so they are taking ESL classes and now also coming here. What an opportunity.

What do you like best about leading your association?

Why?

When I arrived here and began having the opportunity to preach in our churches, I would ask the congregation if any of them knew what a DOM did. Rarely would a hand go up. I explain that I am “a pastor to pastors and helper of churches.” I believe that concisely says what I do. I love being able to encourage pastors and staff and helping churches find resources they need to accomplish their mission.

What aspect(s) of associational ministry and/or its mission do you wish more people understood?

During my first two years, as I attended meetings with other DOMs, I would come back to Victoria and feel like a failure as I listened to all the things the other associations were doing. Finally, it dawned on me that just as every church is different, so also are associations.

The need here in the GBA was not the same as elsewhere in the state. It was Roger Yancy (the supreme DOM) who helped me to see this. He asked me once about what I did the most of in our association. As I explained it to him, he responded, “So how much do you think it would cost each church to retain a consultant to do what you are doing for them?”

That was a powerful conversation for me. I wish people in our churches would realize how valuable their own DOM is for this need. We spend a great deal of our time studying church life so that we are able to give sound counsel when a church has a need. We serve as the local resource, in essence, for all things church related.

How has your association and its mission changed since you began your career?

I think “changed” would be the word I would use. There has been a wonderful increase in the relationships between pastors in our area. I have

worked to help pastors meet each other and spend time with each other. It has been encouraging to hear when a pastor will tell me he called one of the other men and they have gone to lunch together. Or that a pastor called another just to check on him and have prayer with him. This wasn't happening a few years ago.

How do you expect your association and/or its mission to change in the next 10 to 20 years?

This is probably something that most other DOMs would attest to, but the financial situation is even now an ongoing concern—not just for the sake of my continuing to have a ministry, but for some of our churches.

The always-changing oil production, the remaining aftereffects of Hurricane Harvey, the fluctuation among the industry plants in our area—we have seen these things impact our churches recently as people have been transferred out of the area or just lost their jobs.

As I know is the case everywhere, we have some churches that are really struggling financially to exist. We also have the potential in the next five to 10 years of having a handful of pastors who could retire. Because most of our churches are small, it makes finding another pastor difficult.

Also, the mobility of people today and desire for “more” in a church: we have people that drive by, in some cases, three or four churches to go to another church. This is another factor making it harder for the smaller churches to continue.

What one aspect of your job gives you the greatest joy or fulfillment?

Time spent with pastors.

About Baptists

What are the key issues—opportunities and/or challenges—facing Baptist churches?

I believe that learning new ways to impact our culture is essential right now. That too many churches have become myopic in their vision and are missing the point of reaching their communities.

I believe Terry Coy's book, "Return to the Margins," hits the nail on the head in that we, once again, as churches and individually as Christians, have got to find ways to impact society from the "margins," the sidelines. It is not profound to state that we find ourselves on the outside looking in, where once the church was prominent in our society and Christians were held to a level of respect. Those days are gone. As one of our pastors says with his staff regarding financial constraints, we must "learn to do better with less."

What are the key issues facing Baptists as a people or denomination?

I am troubled (perhaps because I'm now considered old) by the idea that a "regular" attender is a person who is at church once or twice a month. I struggle to see a real level of commitment to the local church.

I know all the sayings about not having to go to church to be a Christian; however, we are made for fellowship and ministry together. As busy as families are today outside the church, I see many churches struggling to exist. So the state of the smaller local church over the next five to ten years is a concern to me. I wonder if, rather than so much emphasis on starting new churches, we should put more effort into helping existing, struggling churches?

About Walter

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

I wrote a book two years ago targeting young ministers as they are beginning their ministry, (shameless plug: "[Start Strong](#)"). In the beginning of the book, I stated that when I was young in the ministry, I did not know that I should have sought a mentor. However, in not knowing what I did not know, God blessed me with a wonderful pastor.

Brother Billy Crosby came to Northwest Memorial Baptist Church (now Houston Northwest Baptist), and God used him to change my life and call me to the ministry—not in a personal, one-on-one kind of way, but his preaching brought about a love for God’s word in me. And his genuineness in loving people had a great impact on me as to what a pastor is. To this day, though Brother Billy has retired and lives in Louisiana, I still refer to him as my pastor.

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

Chuck Swindoll and Max Lucado have been favorites for a long time. Dr. Jimmy Draper’s book “Don’t Quit Before You Finish” is a book I wish he had written thirty years ago. Most recently, Barna’s book, “Churchless,” and Peter Greer and Chris Horst’s book “Mission Drift” have helped me in my desire to find things that will help pastors and churches.

That is my emphasis in reading these days: works that I find will help churches. Of course, Thom Rainer’s books and blog I read regularly.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

My favorite verse is John 3:30, where John the Baptist speaks in reference

to Jesus: "He must increase, and I must decrease." I will admit I don't always live up to this, but it is my desire.

If you could get one "do over" in your career, what would it be, and why?

This goes back to my days at HBU and then Southwestern. I would have studied more in learning Greek. I was never a scholar, very average, in fact. I went into the languages wanting to learn how to learn, to know how to find and use reference works. If I could do it over again, I would work much harder at understanding the languages of the Bible.

Dr. Robert Creech, our Greek professor at HBU, gave the opportunity in second-year Greek for some extra credit, which I needed, if we would read the book by A. T. Robertson, "The Minister and his Greek New Testament." I did, and afterward I told Dr. Creech I thought that should be required reading for Intro to Greek students. It changed the way I thought about learning New Testament Greek.