

DAVID CURRIE – A LEGACY OF INVESTING IN PEOPLE

by Bill Jones

TBC Communications Editor; and Member, TBC Board of Directors

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

A few hours after I finished writing this column, I learned that David has announced that his retirement is effective immediately and that he will not continue with TBC as executive director emeritus, as previously announced.

Retirement Is Only a Word

Baptist preachers never really retire – they just follow God's call to the next place of service.

At 65, my Dad – Jase Jones – retired from the Home Mission Board. But he had already begun working to bring his vision of the T. B. Maston Christian Ethics Scholarship Foundation to fruition. Then he chaired its Board of Trustees for the next 13 years.

A week before his 79th birthday, I drove Daddy to San Francisco, where he began a teaching stint as adjunct professor of Christian Ethics at Golden Gate Seminary.

Then there's my brother-in-law, Palmer McCown. In 2001, he retired after 22 years as Baptist student minister at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene. But it wasn't long before he was following God's call to First Baptist, Abilene, as minister to senior adults. And he loves it – ministering to senior adults (of which he is one, of course), just as senior adults ministered to him and my sister, Patsy, when they were students at Hardin-Simmons many years ago.

Last week, David Currie announced his impending "retirement" as executive director of Texas Baptists Committed. But I doubt that he'll be working any less. He'll still be ranching, and he'll continue writing and speaking, inspiring and challenging Baptists to stay true to their Baptist heritage. After all, all of these things are part of who he is.

David's Legacy in My Own Life

But this column isn't about David's "retirement" – it's about his legacy.

Please excuse me for making this column very personal. David Currie's legacy as executive director of TBC is not only about mobilizing Texas Baptists to keep the BGCT free of Fundamentalist control. It is also a legacy of investing in people's lives and giving them an opportunity to serve. And the best way I can illustrate that legacy is to tell my own story.

All I ever wanted was an opportunity to contribute.

In March 2000, I was a member of a church that was lurching toward Fundamentalism. In a letter to the church, the pastor announced that he would be appointing a task force to reassess the church's "relationship to the Baptist General Convention of Texas."

After 13 years of warning people, mostly in Sunday School class discussions, of the threat posed by Fundamentalism to our Baptist principles, I decided that the time had come to clarify my concerns to the pastor. So I wrote a statement of my position on what had come to be

known, over the previous 20 years, as “the Controversy.” Then, after much prayer and with some concern over possible repercussions, I mailed my statement to the pastor.

Though the pastor was initially gracious and appointed me to the task force, he continued to act in ways that compromised the church’s commitment to Baptist principles and, in my view, its commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I challenged him and others in our task force meetings, receiving support from some members and disdain from others.

At that time, I had followed and supported the work of Texas Baptists Committed almost since its inception. In the fall of 2000, I sent David Currie – whom I had briefly met only once at a TBC meeting a few years earlier – a copy of the five-page “statement” that I had sent to the pastor. Fighting the battle in my church was a pretty lonely effort, and I wanted someone who, I knew, agreed with me to know what I was going through and of the stand I had taken.

Shortly after that, I received an email from David, thanking me for my letter, expressing appreciation for my statement, and asking me to give him a call sometime. We soon became friends.

But David has not only been a friend – just as I’ve invested much of myself in the work of TBC, David Currie has invested in me.

In late 2000, I received a call from Charlie McLaughlin, then the associate executive director of TBC. Charlie asked to publish an excerpt of my statement in the next *TBC Newsletter*. He didn’t have to ask twice. All I ever wanted was an opportunity to contribute.

In January 2002, I received a call from Ray Vickery, then pastor of Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas. I had never met him and wondered why he would be calling me. He asked me if I would be interested in “serving on the Executive Board.” Being unschooled in the Texas Baptist world at that time, I asked, “*what* Executive Board?” (No kidding!)

Well, Ray was a member of the Committee to Nominate Members of the BGCT Executive Board. I thought that maybe he had the wrong Bill Jones – I was “just a layperson” (*I’ve since learned that there’s no such thing*) and had never been involved in anything at that level; he *had* to have the wrong Bill Jones. So I asked, “where did you get my name?”

His reply?

“*David Currie*”

I spent the next 3 years attending BGCT Executive Board meetings and voting on some of the most important initiatives of that day – supporting SBC missionaries who had refused to sign, under coercion, the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message; establishing a mechanism for commissioning chaplains – a mechanism that would not be bound by the restrictions of the SBC system; and many others. Most of all, I spent 3 years learning about the personalities, ministries, and institutions of the BGCT. BGCT leadership has come under a lot of criticism in recent years, but I saw people who love Jesus and care about ministering to people.

Through this time, I continued to support TBC and attend TBC meetings, as well as the Annual Meeting of the BGCT. David and I continued to keep in touch, occasionally talking by phone.

In January 2006, in the foyer of Park Cities Baptist Church, as we gathered for Foy Valentine’s memorial service, I saw David motioning me over. He told me that the TBC Board had elected

me as a member earlier that week. Just as with the BGCT Executive Board position, I hadn't known I was being considered, and I had never asked for it, but I was extremely gratified to be asked. Again, all I had ever wanted was to contribute.

So here was another opportunity for service, and David Currie was yet again the one who had recommended me. Somehow, I think Foy would have liked the idea of David giving me this good news at his memorial service – Foy and my Dad had been great friends, and Foy and I had become friends in his last years.

In the fall of 2006, I began editing regularly for David. (In my “day job,” I edit training materials for Bank of America, and I had offered my services – on a volunteer basis – to David and TBC.)

In January 2008, at the annual TBC Board meeting, David Currie and Bill Tillman, then chair of our Board, recommended that the Board give me a title – which turned out to be “communications editor” – and begin paying me a monthly consulting fee for the time I was giving to TBC in that role.

The Board approved their recommendation unanimously, and my role expanded from simply being “David’s editor” to that of overseeing all of TBC’s communications – including the *TBC Newsletter*, membership newsletters and communications, and the Web site. All I had ever wanted was an opportunity to contribute.

New Friendships Through Service

As you see, one person can have a great impact by investing in people.

And I haven't even mentioned that David was the one who told me about Baptist Laity Institute mentor training in my area in 2001. I went, and that led to several years of involvement in teaching Laity Institute courses. And these things have “ripple effects” – besides the blessing of teaching about church history and our Baptist heritage, my involvement with the Laity Institute led to several treasured friendships.

That “ripple effect” of relationships formed extends to all of my involvement in Baptist life. I can't begin to count the number of wonderful people with whom I have gotten to visit at TBC meetings, BGCT Executive Board meetings, TBC Breakfasts, Mainstream Banquets, BGCT Annual Meetings, and so on. From leaders to laypersons, all of them have enriched and blessed my life – and many of them have become good and lasting friends.

Every bit of this can be traced back to David Currie – and his willingness to take notice of my passion for Christ and for Baptist principles, and to find ways to get me more involved in Baptist life.

A Legacy Multiplied

But I'm just one person. I've seen the impact that David has had on so many – the numerous laypersons who have become involved because David has provided opportunities for them or has made their names known to others who were in a position to provide those opportunities. *David has been committed to giving visibility to those who were otherwise invisible, giving voice to those who were otherwise ignored.*

In recent years, the BGCT has elected its first Hispanic president, first African American president, and first woman president. All of this came to pass because David Currie recommended them and the TBC Board affirmed his recommendation.

David Currie's ministry has been one of intention – he has never been content to just let things happen. It's ironic that critics have tarred (and often feathered) David and the TBC Board with the accusation of "trying to control the BGCT" when the truth is precisely the opposite. David Currie is the one who has worked hardest to open up the BGCT, to end the "old boys' network" under which only white males need apply for leadership. David Currie is the one who has worked hardest to make leadership opportunities available to everyone – from country pastors to Cowboy church pastors to the humblest layperson to members of every ethnic group. And David's only criteria are that you love Jesus and love freedom.

In the coming days, as we near the end of David's tenure as TBC executive director, a lot will be written and spoken about David Currie, the defender of Baptist freedom. At the height of the battle for the BGCT in the 90's, David was the inspiring speaker who traveled the state to remind people of the threat posed by the Fundamentalists, and the savvy politician who turned out the vote needed to turn back that threat at Annual Meetings. In recent years, he has been the one who has continually reminded us that the threat is as real as ever but that it is now being insidiously carried out privately through the churches rather than publicly at BGCT meetings.

This is a legacy that has been essential to the freedom of Texas Baptists. But much of it was achieved because of the other legacy of David Currie – investing, one by one, in people who are committed to that Baptist freedom. It's a legacy from which all of us would do well to learn.

A Personal Word to David

I close with a personal word to David himself.

David, thank you for the opportunity to contribute and to serve. And I know that I speak not only for myself but for thousands of others who are serving Texas Baptists in a multitude of ways today. I'm grateful for your friendship and for your investment in my life, and I'm proud to be known as "David's editor." And as long as you continue writing *A Rancher's Rumbblings* – and as long as you can stand me – I'll be happy to continue serving as "David's editor."

I know that Baptists all over Texas and throughout the country join me in praying for God's richest blessings for you and Loretta as you continue to follow God's call.