



Charles Frazier Stanley
Served as 44th SBC President:
1985 and 1986

Florida Pastorates:

First Baptist Church, Miami, 1962 – 1968

First Baptist Church, Bartow, 1968 – 1969

Introductory Overview

There were two significant childhood influences – prayer and scripture study – that molded and guided Charles Stanley throughout his life. “My mother taught me to love God’s Word. She didn’t do this by creating a reading and memorization plan. Rather, she read the Bible to me and explained how important it is to obey the principles that the Father commanded us to live by,” Charles Stanley wrote about his early childhood.¹ “Second, mother taught me to pray,” he recalled. “She showed me how to get on my knees before the Father by praying with me beside my bed every night.” Continuing, Stanley explained, “sometimes we opened the Bible during our prayer times to receive His direction, which showed me that listening to God is crucial to our walk as believers.”² Those two influences caused Stanley to have “a desire to know God and to depend upon him for every aspect of life,” he declared years later. Those influences plus several revelations from God during his spiritual journey came to define who Charles Stanley became.

That desire and obedience to follow God’s direction for his life, resulted in Stanley serving a variety of churches, including two Florida pastorates, and being called to lead for 51 years the First Baptist Church, Atlanta, during which time he was elected to two consecutive years as the 44th president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Growing up in Rural Virginia

Charles Frazier Stanley (b. 1932; d. 2023) was born in the rural farming community of Dry Fork, Virginia, near the city of Danville. His parents, Charley and Rebecca Stanley were members of the local Emmanuel Pentecostal Holiness Church, a congregation co-founded by Charles’ grandfather George Washington Stanley.

However, while only nine months old, Charles' father died from a kidney condition. Now at the beginning of the Great Depression, Charles and his 24-year-old mother were destitute. As he later recalled, "There was no backup plan, no safety net, no insurance, and no hidden store of funds."³ Rebecca Stanley soon went to work at the Dan River Textile Mill – 16 miles from Dry Fork – which yielded a little over nine dollars a week.

While working at the Mill, Rebecca met and married a man named John Hall, a truck driver. Rebecca later told Charles that he "needed a father figure." Sadly, that was not the case for nine-year old Charles then or later, who recalled, "John brought a great deal of anger, conflict and hostility into our once peaceful home, and it was often over very petty issues."⁴

Maturing in Spirit and Faith

In June 1944 a life changing spiritual event occurred for the 12-year-old as "Jesus finally got a hold of me." Charles and his mother were in their regular pew at the Pentecostal Holiness Church of North Danville. Stanley in the hearing of the sermon realized "how far I was from the Father because of my sin." Upon the invitation being given, young Charles was "the first down the aisle and on my knees."⁵

One scholar has noted that the Danville Pentecostal Holiness Church provided Charles Stanley with the foundational understanding of the "cardinal doctrines of the [Pentecostal] church, which included salvation, sanctification as a second blessing, the baptism in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues, divine healing and the imminent second coming of Christ. Stanley also saw the fervent altar calls where people loudly sought for the 'deeper experiences.'"⁶ Despite his active prayer life, Stanley later confessed, "I spent the early years of my Christian life struggling. Call it

carnal; call it fleshly; call it whatever you wish. It was anything but wonderful.”⁷

Stanley’s life through his late teenage years was affected by three significant people. As previously noted, Rebecca Stanley was the enduring role model of a godly mother who encouraged her son to follow her daily practice of scripture reading and committed prayer time. Another was Craig Stowe who was Stanley’s Sunday school teacher at the Pentecostal Holiness Church. According to Stanley, Mr. Stowe “was an incredible man of faith whom I loved dearly and who inspired me profoundly.” Stowe also, “was a great and steady source of encouragement” who “ended up being the closest I’ve ever had to an earthly father.”⁸

During his teenage years, Stanley felt the call of God to the preaching ministry. “There never was a time when I felt God say directly to me, ‘I want you to preach.’ But from the time I was saved, I never really thought about doing anything else . . . [something] I was destined to do.”⁹ In his biographical account Charles Stanley felt he carried a heavy load of emotional baggage – little self-esteem, lots of insecurities, and early life experiences of loneliness – which likely were motivators in his life-long spiritual pilgrimage to become more dependent upon God and the Holy Spirit, which are highlighted in this narrative.

After Stanley felt the call of God to enter the preaching ministry, he turned to his grandfather – the third significant person in his life – George Washington Stanley. Charles characterized his grandfather as “a Spirit-filled Pentecostal preacher.” He further described the preacher as being “absolutely on fire, bold, fervent and courageous for the Lord. . . God worked through him in an awesome way.”¹⁰ Stanley

spent several different summertime weeks visiting his grandfather on his North Carolina farm. “This is the most spiritual person I’ve ever talked too. He impacted my life profoundly.” Stanley later wrote that the time spent with Grandfather Stanley, “absolutely revolutionized the way I would live and serve the Lord.”¹¹

Preparing for Ministry Service

Charles Stanley came to understand that following God’s leadership in his life after high school graduation (1950) would require attending the university. But he also recognized he did not have, nor did he know anyone, who had the financial

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resources to underwrite Charles’ university education. But God had a plan. His first girlfriend – Barbara Ann Johnson – invited Charles to attend church at Danville’s Moffett Memorial Baptist Church. Given his Pentecostal rearing, Stanley was

hesitant and sought the advice of his mother. “If you can live as holy a life in the Baptist church as in the Pentecostal Holiness church, then it’s all right with me,” Rebecca Stanley told her son.¹²

In a short time, Stanley became involved in church activities and was given opportunities to preach. And as an affirmation that God was preparing for Stanley’s future needs, the Moffett Memorial Church Pastor David Hammock arranged for Stanley to receive a full four-year scholarship to enroll in Virginia Baptists’ University of Richmond.

While attending the university, Stanley met a co-ed named Anna Margaret Johnson [not related to his

earlier girlfriend Barbara Ann Johnson] while attending Richmond's Grove Avenue Baptist Church. He later wrote, "Annie was pretty, very bright, artistic, and best of all, she had a deep passion for God . . . It wasn't long before I thought that she was the most godly, purest, most committed, sold-out Christian gal I'd ever met."¹³

Upon graduating from the university in 1954, both enrolled at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In a short time, Charles and Annie became daily prayer partners at which point Charles began to realize he was in love and "grateful to the Lord for knowing better than I did what I really wanted and needed."¹⁴ The following summer, the couple married August 6, 1955. Then a year later in August 1956 he returned to Danville to be ordained by the Moffett Memorial Baptist Church.

Fruitland Church and Bible Institute, 1957 – 1959

In their second year (1956) at Southwestern Seminary the couple were seeking God's will concerning possible service as home missionaries. They went to Lake Lure, in Hickory Nut Gorge, North Carolina, where Annie's family owned a cottage. There one day Stanley met a deacon from Fruitland Baptist Church, near Hendersonville. In their conversation the deacon told Stanley that the church's pastor was going on vacation, and asked Stanley if he would come and preach for two Sundays, which he did.

Subsequently after the couple returned to seminary classes, in December 1956, they received a letter from the church leadership indicating their long-time pastor was retiring. The members had voted unanimously to call Stanley as their pastor and the church was willing to wait for him to graduate the following spring. And in God's Providence, in April,

just a month before his seminary graduation, a letter was received from the president of the Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute. Stanley was invited to “teach some classes to pastors who did not have an opportunity to attend seminary.”¹⁵ Although the dual invitations became matters of focused prayer, the couple finally recognized God’s hand had arranged those opportunities. Stanley graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity degree in June 1957, and he and Annie moved to their first pastorate and teaching assignment.

The members of the Fruitland Church were what Stanley described as “salt-of-the-earth-mountain folks.” However, in short order Stanley recognized that these members “lacked passion for the truth of God’s Word and how it could shape their lives.” He cited as an example “they were very enthusiastic about the [corn liquor] stills they had hidden up in the highlands, so bootlegging was a big problem. Likewise, a number of families were embroiled in terrible conflicts, which certainly hindered fellowship in the church.”¹⁶ Although Stanley was steadfast in his commitment to follow God’s leadership, he said he “experienced a terrible spiritual attack.”¹⁷ Despite the doubts and lack of response by the members, Stanley noted, “the Lord has done vastly more on my behalf than I have ever dreamed.”¹⁸

Upon reflection of his two-years ministry at Fruitland, Stanley observed, “that the good far outweighed the bad.” He cited the many “firsts” the couple experienced: “our first ministry assignment, our first house together, and . . . our first child, Charles Andrew “Andy” Stanley was born” (b. 1958).¹⁹

However, it was at Fruitland that Stanley experienced his second life altering event in his spiritual pilgrimage. One day while involved in his daily

extended prayer time Stanley recalled he was talking with God, “frustrated and overwhelmed with this feeling of inadequacy,” because he believed he had not yet “experience[d] the power of the Holy Spirit.”²⁰ For the former practicing Pentecostal, this moment was unlike any he had ever experienced, he later wrote:

Immediately, I was overwhelmed with an amazing sense of confidence and assurance. It was a feeling. But it was in such stark contrast with what I had been feeling [in] the past . . . I didn’t see stars or hear a voice. I didn’t speak in tongues. In fact, that was the point. I didn’t *do* anything – except trust Him. Then it hit me. . . The Spirit-filled life is a life of faith.²¹

**First Baptist Church, Fairborn, Ohio,
1959 – 1962**

Stanley believed he was content with the ministry situations at Fruitland, although, “I recall not feeling as if it was a permanent assignment.”²² One Sunday, in the summer of 1959, following a morning service, he was approached by a pulpit committee from First Baptist Church, Fairborn, Ohio. Within weeks the informal discussion became a formal offer. At the time, Stanley believed,

“their offer couldn’t have been less appealing to me,” in part because of the cold winters and the

town’s location between Cincinnati and Columbus.

However, on the plus side, the church was in a missions’ pioneer area for Southern Baptists, and the church was primarily comprised of military families, both of which he viewed as mission outreach and evangelistic opportunities.²³

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As was his practice Stanley committed himself to a time of extended and consecrated prayer to seek God's will. "And the more I sought God about it, the more convinced I was that my time in Fruitland was over."²⁴ By November, Stanley understood God's leading him to accept the Ohio pastorate. In a short time after arriving on the church field, Stanley soon realized that the Fairborn church was in financial debt and "the spiritual state of some in the congregation was a great deal like its finances." He characterized that "some members were trying to achieve God-sized results on their meager human budget of abilities and appeared not to know how to tap into His treasure of power and wisdom." Stanley also had to contend with deacons "desperate to be in control."²⁵ It was during their ministry at Fairborn, that the couple's daughter Rebecca Louise Stanley was born June 9, 1961.²⁶

Again, this ministry assignment became an opportunity for Stanley to share from his own spiritual pilgrimage to help the congregation to see what God desired of them individually and corporately. Also, it was at Fairborn that Stanley experienced his third life-altering event in his spiritual pilgrimage. It came while studying for a preaching series in the *Book of Galatians*. Stanley recalled that he "struggled with the fact that my life did not always show the outgrowth that a relationship with Christ should be producing: 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.'"²⁷ In a strong desire to merge "the resurrection life and the fruit of the Spirit," Stanley went to his literal prayer closet that resulted in "one of the greatest breakthroughs in my spiritual walk."²⁸

In God's Providence, Stanley was invited to participate in a 1961 evangelistic mission trip to Haiti. As a part of a planned flight layover in Miami, he was invited to preach at the First Baptist Church, Miami.

That pulpit supply soon resulted in an invitation to become pastor of the church.

First Baptist Church, Miami, 1962 – 1968

For the next six years, Charles Stanley served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Miami “and loved it.” [The church had been organized in 1896 as the Lemon City Baptist Church and in 1937 was renamed.] “The church flourished and the ministry grew” particularly with the starting of a Christian school, which Stanley saw as a means to reach children for Christ.²⁹ The church membership grew and held steady under Stanley’s leadership with about 1300 members. The church averaged 53 baptisms per year during those six years.³⁰

During those years Stanley began additional graduate education studies via long-distance – subsequently earning both the Master of Theology (1968) and Doctor of Theology (1971) degrees – through Luther Rice Seminary, then located in Jacksonville, Florida. “Miami was a great place to raise a family,” Stanley recalled.³¹

First Baptist Church, Bartow, 1968 – 1969

In early 1968 Stanley felt the call of the Lord to move again. On a Sunday morning, following a service in Miami, a committee from First Baptist Church (org. 1875), Bartow, Florida, showed up. They wanted to discuss the possibilities of the young and energetic Stanley going to the central Florida community of Bartow. By May of that year, after several months of prayer and responding to God’s leadership, Stanley accepted the call of the church.

“There we had some of the more senior members of the church that were not too thrilled with a pastor who paced back and forth across the platform,” as he preached, recalled member Barbara Johnson who was

a teenager at the time.³² Another longtime member Wilma Martin said of Stanley's preaching, "It was wonderful. You felt the Holy Spirit was there, and the Lord knew that was what First Baptist needed. And that was something that Dr. Stanley could provide."³³

"Sadly, the worst part of Bartow was that many of the church members were dry spiritually," Stanley recalled in his memoirs. "They seemed to have little interest in winning anyone to Jesus," which he said, "was incredibly frustrating."³⁴

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After only 18 months at Bartow, Stanley was invited to go to Atlanta to serve as the associate pastor of the historical First Baptist Church. As with all decisions faced by Stanley,

it became a matter of concentrated prayer. But for many of the Bartow church members losing Stanley was considered a loss. However, Stanley's departure had a positive aspect according to Wilma Martin who observed, "you could just sense that God was going to do special things in his life and he was going to be open to it whatever it was."³⁵

The 51 Years at Atlanta's First Baptist Church, 1969 – 2020

The very idea of God leading Stanley to the historic Atlanta church (org. 1848) was perplexing at first. According to Stanley, "I knew enough about the pastor of First Baptist Atlanta, Dr. Roy McClain, to know that there was a 180-degree difference in our theological views. In my opinion, he was too liberal in his preaching and in his practices – I would never be comfortable serving with him."³⁶ But as a result of his concerted prayers, Stanley realized God was directing him to go to Atlanta, which he did by September 1969.

As associate pastor, Stanley was assigned to preach on Sunday and Wednesday nights. His evangelistic preaching made quite an impact upon the church and community. A member who was present for Stanley's very first sermon to the congregation, Mary Gellerstedt recalled, "He was a fiery little evangelist."³⁷ Another longtime member John Glover said, "Almost every service was like a revival, and a lot of people were coming to know Jesus Christ as their savior."³⁸

Hardly one year had passed since Stanley joined the church staff when an unprecedented event occurred that set into motion events that would thrust Stanley into the senior pastor role of First Baptist. It was September 1970 and the church had just completed a weeklong revival during which no one responded to make a profession of faith. Stanley recalled the events that followed:

At the end of the week, McClain preached a message, and still no one responded to the invitation. He looked out at the congregation in disgust and shouted, 'This is so sickening, I can't stand it! I'm through!' He threw the microphone down on the platform, walked out, and resigned soon thereafter.³⁹

The church leadership soon asked Stanley to fill the pulpit on Sunday mornings while the church began the protracted process of searching for a new pastor. During the interim Stanley set about participating in the church's regular business meetings. At his first business meeting, while the congregation was discussing a particular item, Stanley suggested, "We need to ask God about this." According to Stanley, "One of the men immediately replied, 'This is business. Leave God out of it.' Those men absolutely refused to pray about it."⁴⁰

That event turned out to be the beginning of a power struggle led by a group of seven who served as the church's executive committee, who were in control and were not going to let the acting pastor interfere. To underscore their future control of the church, the leadership group hand-picked a 40-member pulpit committee comprised of the church's most influential and wealthy members who would support the decision of the leadership control group. Then the leadership group identified four candidates – not including Stanley – for the position of senior pastor to be evaluated by the pulpit committee.

The group of seven set about to undermine and disparage Stanley, even suggesting to him, “Just go on vacation and don't come back.” In response to the continuing pressure campaign Stanley told them and others that he came to the church, “because God called me to come here. And I'll be happy to leave the minute God tells me to do so.”⁴¹ During the intervening weeks and months, Stanley continued his daily meeting with God seeking His assurance and guidance.

What followed were three months of a behind-the-scenes negativity campaign and public pronouncements made against Stanley and the subsequent resignation of 300-plus church leaders protesting Stanley's leadership. The details of those events are too extensive to detail within this article, but published sources exist and are cited in the endnotes of this article.⁴²

Finally, during a September 22, 1971, regularly scheduled business meeting, the deacons introduced a motion to remove Stanley as acting pastor. After a protracted discussion by the congregation, a member sidestepped the parliamentary maneuvering and

made a substitute motion “to call Charles Stanley as senior pastor.” The immediate vote resulted in a majority 65 percent of the congregation voted to confirm Charles F. Stanley as the senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta.⁴³

Despite the initial departure of literally hundreds of members from the church, nearly 2,000 members remained. By 1985, under Stanley’s leadership, the church membership grew to over 15,000 members and its ministries expanded into 13 buildings over 17 acres in downtown Atlanta. Contributing to that growth, Stanley’s mission outreach included the expanded use of broadcast media. “In 1972, Stanley launched a half-hour religious television program called *The Chapel Hour*. In 1977, he founded *In Touch Ministries* with the mission to lead people worldwide into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and to strengthen the local church,” according to a published report.⁴⁴

Elected SBC President for 1985

Despite having elected in 1979 Adrian Rogers as their own conservative president of the Southern Baptist Convention, conservative leaders renewed their complaints that seminary and college professors “continue[d] to teach views other than inerrancy.”⁴⁵ Neither the focus of this article, nor space, will permit an in-depth review of the Convention’s controversies over biblical interpretation, the “conservative resurgence” (1979-1993), the battle lines drawn between moderates’ and conservatives’ viewpoints, and the need for a Peace Committee (1985-1988), among other actions. Those topics have been well-documented in various publications cited in the endnotes of this article.⁴⁶

After six years of the growing controversy within the denomination, self-described conservative theologian-

writer Jerry Sutton assessed the situation: “The 1984 Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City marked a distinct turnaround in the struggle between the conservative and moderates for leadership in the Southern Baptist Convention.” Sutton continued by noting, “The other critical decision at the 1984 Southern Baptist Convention was the presidential election of Charles Stanley . . . [who] was considered not only an outsider but a non-cooperating antagonist” towards the moderate leadership.⁴⁷

In the election for president to serve in 1985, three persons were nominated: James Pleitz of Texas nominated T. G. “John” Sullivan of Louisiana; Bo Baker of Texas nominated Grady C. Cothen of Mississippi; and Jerry Vines of Florida nominated Charles Stanley of Georgia.⁴⁸ Subsequently it was reported that of the 14,822 ballots cast (by 91 percent of registered messengers), Charles Stanley received 7,692 or 52 percent of the votes.⁴⁹

According to authors Emir and Ergun Caner, “Stanley’s notoriety among Southern Baptists nationwide offered conservatives a candidate, admired by thousands for his integrity, who could continue the theological resurgence.”⁵⁰

Stanley recalled the circumstances leading up to his 1984 election as the SBC president. A group of his friends had invited him to a meeting and prayer time prior to the opening of the convention meeting. He said, “I was 100 percent convinced in my heart that I would not be chosen as president of the Southern Baptist Convention. It was not something I wanted. I didn’t believe it was God’s plan for my life.” Following the group meeting, Stanley returned to his hotel room for the night. He subsequently “began to pray, and the Lord confirmed to me that I needed to be willing to be nominated, even if I lost and was humiliated in

the process. After more than a little soul-searching and struggle, I finally said, ‘Okay God.’”⁵¹

No sooner had the dust settled from the 1984 SBC annual meeting, than the SBC controversy was characterized as a “Holy War.” During the August 28 Convocation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, President

Roy Honeycutt, Jr., stated, “That I should be either so bold or so presumptuous as to suggest ‘holy war’ as an

‘holy war’ as an analogy for our current struggle

analogy for our current struggle grows out of my conviction that ‘unholy forces’ are now at work – which, if left unchecked, will destroy essential qualities, both of our Convention and seminary.”⁵²

Later that Fall, Amarillo, Texas, Pastor Winfred Moore, president of the 2.3-million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas, told a news conference that Charles Stanley should not be reelected as SBC president in June 1985. He went on to point out that, “Stanley has been too involved in the denominational controversy . . . to be a unifying factor.” Moore repeated the claims that Stanley, “often has been criticized for the low percentage his church gives to the Cooperative Program, the unified giving plan which supports SBC agencies and institutions.”⁵³ Several months later Stanley told *Baptist Press* that his church “has doubled Cooperative Program giving to \$250,000 for 1985, and has ‘made no provision to do anything, whether I win or lose.’”⁵⁴

Reflecting upon his 1984 convention service, Stanley said, “after all the hurt, turmoil, and tribulations that arose from the convention, I may well have asked myself, ‘Was I wrong?’ One thing I know for sure is

that when I face God, I will have done what I really believed with all of my heart was the right thing.”⁵⁵

The 1985 annual meeting of Southern Baptists was convened during June 11-13, in Dallas, Texas. More than 45,000 messengers registered, which some claimed was “the largest religious meeting in history.”⁵⁶ The Tuesday morning session featured President Charles Stanley’s message titled “Healing Hearts in the Family of God.”⁵⁷ In the message, Stanley called upon Southern Baptists, “to put denominational strife behind them and show a watching world that the message of love and forgiveness they proclaim is an authentic one.”⁵⁸

Later that Tuesday afternoon the election for convention president to serve in 1986, featured only two candidates: Morris H. Chapman of Texas nominated Charles Stanley for re-election and Milton Cunningham of Texas nominated Winfred Moore of Texas.⁵⁹ Registration Secretary Lee Porter subsequently announced that Charles Stanley was re-elected as president, having received 24,453 votes or 55.3 percent of the 44,248 total ballots cast.⁶⁰

In a subsequent news conference, Stanley pledged “to follow the letter of the SBC constitution to ‘consult’ with the vice presidents in making choices for the powerful committee on committees.” His pledge was a response to a “pointed criticism” made by outgoing Vice President Donald V. Wideman of Kansas City, Mo., who complained that “all but three of his suggestions” were rejected by Stanley.⁶¹ [The context of this concern was the recognition by conservatives that the SBC president “who appointed the Committee on Committees, which nominated the Committee on Boards (now Nominations) . . . nominated new trustees” who were the controlling factor in the

employment of agency administrators and who set policy.^{62]}

Questioned about the “on-going theological conflict that has helped fuel the six-year war between conservatives and moderates in the denomination, Stanley replied: ‘I think two people can hold very different convictions and still be respectful and accepting . . . I don’t have to agree with a person’s theology,’” Stanley told the news media.⁶³

Also noteworthy, during the Dallas convention, two pastors – Bill G. Hickem of Jacksonville, Florida and H. Franklin Paschall of Nashville, Tennessee – jointly presented what became a historically significant motion. They proposed and messengers subsequently approved the creation of a special committee – “that shall seek to determine the sources of the controversies in our Convention” – that became known as the Peace Committee.⁶⁴

Serving as SBC President for 1986

News accounts of the 1986 annual meeting at which Stanley presided, were characterized as a gathering at which “fundamental-conservatives consolidated their power within the Southern Baptist Convention . . . winning nearly every vote in a show of strength that left many moderate-conservatives demoralized, if not defeated.” Despite that news report assessment, the meeting was considered “relatively calm” when compared to the prior year’s meeting held in Dallas.⁶⁵

As his second year of service as SBC president came to an end, Stanley “used his presidential address to urge messengers against changing their philosophy of leader ‘at a very crucial moment in the life of Southern Baptists.’”⁶⁶ Critics of Stanley complained the sermon was used to “tout the fundamentalist agenda – and indirectly Adrian Rogers’ candidacy” – who was to be

nominated as convention president in the ensuing business.⁶⁷

Perhaps in response to the complaints raised following the 1985 convention that President Stanley had used “parliamentary heavy-handedness” in presiding over the tumultuous business sessions, the Atlanta convention was the first in SBC history to use a certified professional parliamentarian – C. Barry McCarty, an ordained Church of Christ minister – to advise Stanley.⁶⁸

In a hotly debated proposal messengers refused on a ballot vote to consider withdrawing the SBC from the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. Among the 64 motions presented, messengers extended the life of the Peace Committee – to study the controversy within the denomination – for another year.

Three decades after first being elected SBC president, Stanley reflected upon his 1984

election which he wrote in his 2016 memoirs, “infuriated the opposition and ultimately revealed many of the underlying problems that existed in the convention for a long

“All the liberal and moderate political forces of the Southern Baptist Convention were against me”

time but had either been ignored or denied.” He went on to contend that, “All the liberal and moderate political forces of the Southern Baptist Convention were against me, which included seminary presidents and state convention newspapers.”⁶⁹

Returning Attention to the Pastoral Ministry

Returning to giving full-time attention to the pastorate, Stanley devoted his efforts to lead the Atlanta church – responding to unprecedented

growth in membership and worship attendance – to a move out of downtown Atlanta. Having purchased in 1988 a property site in Dunwoody, the church finally began in 1992 a relocation process that was fully realized in April 1997. The church moved into a former warehouse now renovated to provide larger worship and educational space.

Concurrent with the church facilities issue, Stanley also devoted his efforts to expand his extensive broadcast outreach called *In Touch Ministries*, which shared the gospel in more than 100 languages across 150 countries. By the early 1990s, the ministry “received \$35 million in sales and had offices in Brazil, the Philippines, and Russia. By 2013, *In Touch*’s total revenue was over 90 million dollars, a jump of 300 percent. Stanley spent the majority of his time overseeing *In Touch* and rarely spent time at the First Baptist Church, . . . or with his wife,” scholar Graham Weaver noted. “Still, Stanley’s success in broadcasting demonstrated that the broadcasts of a local church could propel a pastor onto national radio and television outlets.”⁷⁰

More than any other SBC president, Stanley’s personal life was on public display, beginning when his wife Anna Johnson Stanley filed for divorce in 1993 claiming their marriage was “irretrievably broken.” After a period of attempted reconciliation with his wife Anna, the Stanley’s divorce was finalized in 2000, after 44 years of marriage.⁷¹ According to a year 2000 *Baptist Press* story, “The Stanleys troubled marriage was made public in the 1990s and caused some struggles in the church because of an unwritten policy that First Baptist did not allow divorced men to serve as ministers or deacons.” In a May 21, 2000, report and recommendation from the deacons to the Atlanta church, the congregation was advised Stanley

would remain as senior pastor. “The congregation rose in applause,” the *Baptist Press* reported.⁷²

Meanwhile Andy Stanley, who was serving on the church staff, went to family counseling with his father. Finally, after two years, Andy could no longer support his father’s perspective on the divorce and vision for the church. Andy resigned August 3, 1995, and went on to establish North Point Community Church which subsequently expanded to six campuses throughout Atlanta. In his memoirs, Stanley confirmed, “I am grateful that throughout the years, Andy and I have experienced reconciliation.”⁷³ Anna Stanley died in 2014 of pneumonia and other health issues at age 83.⁷⁴

The concentrated effort to expand the *In Touch Ministries*, the on-going unresolved divorce, the relocation of the church, and the resignation from the staff by Andy Stanley, created tensions for Charles Stanley which he characterized as a “perfect storm.” The pressure caused Stanley to remark, that even his “fitness as a pastor became a debate in Christian circles, with longtime opponents and national news outlets rehearsing my every failing.”⁷⁵ Upon reflection of those events, Stanley wrote in his memoirs, “I may not comprehend everything that went on during that period. . . . Because God hasn’t called to me understand, but to obey him, forgive others, and seek forgiveness.”⁷⁶

After 51-years serving the Atlanta church since 1969, Stanley transitioned to pastor-emeritus in September 2020 at age 87. Former Winter Park, Florida, Pastor Anthony George, who had served the Atlanta church as senior associate pastor since 2012, succeeded Stanley.⁷⁷

Charles Stanley passed away peacefully at his home on April 18, 2023, at age 90.

30 Life Principles

by Dr. Charles Stanley

God's Word is full of promises and guidance for our everyday lives. The following principles expand upon those Dr. Stanley learned from his grandfather while visiting him as a young man. Grounded in Scripture, but written in his own words, these easy-to-remember sayings help a Christian to apply God's truth to their life as they did for Dr. Stanley. They serve as practical guidelines for spiritual growth, decision-making, and living a life aligned with God's purpose. Applying them consistently can help cultivate faith, resilience, and meaningful relationships.

1. **Intimacy with God is the highest priority** – Your relationship with God determines the impact of your life.
2. **Obey God and leave the consequences to Him** – Trust in God's plan even when it seems unclear.
3. **God's Word is an immovable anchor** – Scripture provides stability in times of trouble.
4. **Awareness of God's presence energizes your work** – Recognize God's guidance in daily tasks.
5. **Obey God even without understanding** – Faithful obedience is more important than comprehension.
6. **You reap what you sow** – Actions have consequences, often greater and later than expected.
7. **Dark moments serve God's purpose** – Trials are temporary and refine character.
8. **Fight battles on your knees** – Prayer is the ultimate source of victory.
9. **Trust God beyond what you see** – Faith requires looking at God's perspective.
10. **God will reveal His will if necessary** – He can move heaven and earth to guide you.
11. **God assumes responsibility when you obey** – Obedience invites divine provision.
12. **Brokenness is required for usefulness** – Humility and surrender enable God's work.
13. **Acquisitions outside God's will turn to ashes** – True success aligns with God's plan.
14. **We are never victims of circumstances** – God's sovereignty ensures purpose in all situations.
15. **Disappointments are inevitable; discouragement is a choice** – Perspective shapes response.

16. **Walking in the Spirit means obeying promptings** – Follow God's guidance in daily life.
17. **Living the Christian life is allowing Jesus to live through you** – Spiritual growth comes from surrender.
18. **Adversity deepens your relationship with God** – Challenges strengthen faith.
19. **Faithfulness in small things leads to greater responsibility** – God rewards diligence.
20. **God's timing is perfect** – Patience is essential in waiting for His plan.
21. **Forgiveness frees the heart** – Letting go of resentment aligns with God's will.
22. **Humility precedes honor** – True greatness comes from serving others.
23. **Generosity reflects God's character** – Giving blesses both giver and receiver.
24. **Integrity is non-negotiable** – Honesty and moral uprightness are foundational.
25. **Faith over fear** – Trust God in uncertainty.
26. **Seek wisdom continually** – Godly insight guides decisions.
27. **Perseverance produces maturity** – Endurance strengthens character.
28. **Gratitude transforms perspective** – Thankfulness fosters contentment.
29. **Love is the greatest commandment** – Prioritize love in all relationships.
30. **Share your faith actively** – Influence others by living and proclaiming God's truth.

[SOURCE: Developed and copyright held by Charles Stanley, *In Touch Ministries*, accessed at <https://www.charlesstanley.com/life-and-ministry/30-life-principles/>]

ENDNOTES:

Editor's Note: This profile of Charles F. Stanley was written by Donald S. Hepburn, managing director, Florida Baptist Historical Society, using the following resources:

¹ Charles F. Stanley, *Courageous Faith: My Story from a Life of Obedience*, (New York: Howard Books/Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2016), 5.

² Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

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- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ⁶ Vinson Synan, “Charles Stanley’s Pentecostal Roots,” *Spiritus Magazine*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2020, 275 – 286.
- ⁷ Charles Stanley, *The Wonderful Spirit Filled Life*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1992), xi.
- ⁸ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 48 – 49.
- ⁹ Charles Stanley, *The Source of My Strength*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994), 129.
- ¹⁰ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 50.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 70.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.
- ²⁰ Stanley, *The Wonderful Spirit Filled Life*, 37.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 38.
- ²² Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 109.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 110.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 120 – 123.
- ³⁰ Miami Baptist Association “Statistical Reports,” *Florida Baptist Annual*, 1962 through 1968.
- ³¹ Video biography titled, “His Way Mine: A Tribute to Dr. Charles Stanley,” accessed April 2026, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8vpLY4R8sw>; [hereinafter referred to as Stanley’s video biography].
- ³² Barbara Johnson of Bartow, interview segment, Stanley’s video biography.
- ³³ Wilma Martin of Bartow, interview segment, Stanley’s video biography.
- ³⁴ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 124.
- ³⁵ Wilma Martin of Bartow, interview segment, Stanley’s video biography.
- ³⁶ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 127.
- ³⁷ Mary Gellerstedt of Atlanta, interview segment, Stanley video biography.
- ³⁸ John Glover of Atlanta, interview segment, Stanley video biography.
- ³⁹ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 155-156.
- Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage, Volume 28, 2026*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴² The details of the conflict over the calling of Charles Stanley as senior pastor, First Baptist Church, Atlanta, are summarized in two primary sources providing opposing viewpoints of the issues: (1) Stanley's perspective is recorded in his autobiography, *Courageous Faith* (previously cited), pp.156 – 173; and (2) a non-titled, 22-page mimeographed document, dated January 23, 1972, developed and issued by the group opposed to Stanley who called themselves, "The Southern Baptist Mission Congregation of Atlanta, Ga.," a copy of which is held in the biographical file of Charles Stanley maintained by the Florida Baptist Historical Society, Graceville, Florida, [hereinafter referred to as resources and/or stories held Stanley's bio file].

⁴³ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 166.

⁴⁴ Emily McFarlan Miller, "Influential pastor Charles Stanley steps down at First Baptist Church Atlanta after 50 years," accessed May 2, 2026, on-line at <https://religionnews.com/2020/09/14/Influential-pastor-Charles-Stanley-steps-down-at-First-Baptist-Church-Atlanta-after-50-years>, Religionnews.com/US, September 14, 2020.

⁴⁵ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 65.

⁴⁶ Four books provide excellent overviews and the detailed history of the conflicts that occurred within the Southern Baptist Convention in the late twentieth century and which are partially cited within this article: Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation* (2000); Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles* (1995); James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence* (1991); and Grady C. Cothen, *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention? A Memoir of the Controversy*.

⁴⁷ Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 137-138.

⁴⁸ Proceedings, item 73, Southern Baptist Convention *Annual* 1984, 34, [hereinafter referred to as *SBC Annual*].

⁴⁹ Proceedings, item 93, *SBC Annual* 1984, 44.

⁵⁰ Emir and Ergun Caner, *The Sacred Trust: Sketches of the Southern Baptist Convention Presidents*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 175.

⁵¹ Charles Stanley, *The Source of My Strength*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994), 122.

⁵² Sutton, 144.

⁵³ Karen Benson, "Moore Says Stanley Should be Replaced," *Baptist Press*, November 1, 1984; [story held in Stanley's bio file].

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- ⁵⁴ Dan Martin, "Cooperative Program Becomes Battleground," *Baptist Press*, April 4, 1985; [story held in Stanley's bio file].
- ⁵⁵ Stanley, *The Source of My Strength*, 124.
- ⁵⁶ Emir and Ergun Caner, 176.
- ⁵⁷ Proceedings, item 99, President Charles Stanley's annual sermon, *SBC Annual*, 1985, 69.
- ⁵⁸ Robert O'Brien, "SBC Presidential Address," *Baptist Press*, June 11, 1985; [story held in Stanley's bio file].
- ⁵⁹ Proceedings, item 108, *SBC Annual*, 1985, 69.
- ⁶⁰ Proceedings, item 151, *SBC Annual*, 1985, 73.
- ⁶¹ Stan Hastey, "Stanley News Conference," *Baptist Press*, June 11, 1985; [story held in Stanley's bio file].
- ⁶² James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (Hannibal, Mo.: Hannibal Books, 1991), 28.
- ⁶³ Hastey, "Stanley News Conference."
- ⁶⁴ Proceedings, items 57, 111, and 197, *SBC Annual*, 1985, 64-65, 69, and 77-78.
- ⁶⁵ Stan Hastey, "Group Consolidates Power Within SBC," *Baptist Press*, June 16, 1986, 1; [story held in Stanley's bio file].
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ⁶⁷ Ammerman, 122.
- ⁶⁸ Hastey, "Group Consolidates Power Within SBC," 1, 4.
- ⁶⁹ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 188.
- ⁷⁰ Graham M. Weaver, "Give me that big time religion: Adrian Rogers as a builder in the Southern Baptist Convention, at Bellevue Baptist Church, and with his radio ministry Love Worth Finding, 1972-2005," (M.A. thesis degree, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, 2017), 79 – 80; accessed May 30, 2026, through <https://krex.k-state.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/854be34e-5d91-43f8-83be-215fd6f5e8cf/content>.
- ⁷¹ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 204.
- ⁷² BP Staff, "Charles Stanley, wife divorce; Atlanta church affirms pastor," *Baptist Press*, May 23, 2000; accessed June 13, 2026, through <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/charles-stanley-wife-divorce-atlanta-church-affirms-pastor/>
- ⁷³ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 208 – 209, 211.
- ⁷⁴ Art Toalston, "Charles Stanley, Pivotal SBC President, TV Preacher, Dies," *SBC News*, April 18, 2023; [story held in Stanley's bio file].
- ⁷⁵ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 204 – 208.
- ⁷⁶ Stanley, *Courageous Faith*, 211.
- ⁷⁷ Jonathan Howe, "Charles Stanley transitions to pastor emeritus at First Baptist Atlanta, Anthony George named senior pastor," *SBC News*, September 13, 2020; [story held in Stanley's bio file].