

Stephen By Andrew

A Second Look at the Gospel

Proclaimed By Dr. Stephen Cook
at Second Baptist Church, Memphis,
2010 to 2015

ANDREW SMITH

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Published in the United States by Nurturing Faith, Inc., Macon, GA,
www.nurturingfaith.net.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN 978-1-938514-98-2

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*Unless otherwise indicated, scripture quotations are taken
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Interior and cover design by Amy C. Cook
Cover photo as well as “Challenge” photo courtesy of Carol P. Mathis

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Amy Cook, *Graphic Designer*
John Avis, *Proofreader*

The Pastor Search Committee:

Joe Livesay
Karen Smith
Amanda Gowen
Amy Moffatt
Tanya Mabry
Frank Huffman (deceased)
Andrew Smith

Foreword



The search committee knew that the candidate was young, but he came highly recommended. We were looking for either a young pastor who could relate to older people or an older pastor who could relate to young people.

When I first met Stephen Cook, I could not help but say to myself, “He really is young.” At that time, I was 77 and he was 34 years old. I could have been his grandfather! I knew that I was on the committee to represent the interest of the older members of the church. When it came my turn to ask questions, I wanted to know which theologians had influenced his life. I was relieved to hear names like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Carlyle Marney.

The notes from my journal read, “We began to discuss subjects such as the mission of the church, the responsibilities of the pastor, the involvement of members in the kingdom of God,

inclusion or exclusion of people with diverse backgrounds and beliefs, and ways to relate to different ages. His responses were thoughtful and well-reasoned. We then knew why his mentors had told us, ‘He is mature beyond his age.’”

Soon after he came to Second Baptist Church, I felt a stirring in my pen. I have never wanted to outline or summarize the pastor’s sermons, but many times something he said started my pen to writing. Later, after some reflection and thought, sometimes weeks or even months later, the scribbling was sorted out and organized and became what I call “Reflections.”

Sometimes Stephen will say, “You said in nine lines what it took me 22 minutes to say.” This little book contains “Reflections” from the first five years of Stephen Cook’s ministry at Second Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee.

Andrew Smith

Preface



Shortly after I arrived in Memphis, I began to receive e-mails from an older man who had already endeared himself to my family during the pastoral search process. For quite a number of years—long before I began preaching—Andrew Smith has been listening intently from the back row of the choir loft. He listens with both his head and his heart. Then, as an act that can only be described as a rich spiritual discipline, he distills the preacher’s message into concise reflections that capture the essence of the sermon. Many times I have said, “You put in a few lines what it took me 22 minutes to say.”

Over almost five years I have been able to count on opening my inbox on Monday morning to receive these gifts he so graciously gives. As a preaching minister, I recognize that there are no other vocations that exist where people will, with every-seven-day-consistency, voluntarily give their time to listen to a single voice speaking for the time it takes to preach a

sermon. That people are so deeply committed to that element of worship is a gift I do not take for granted.

But then to have a listener who takes the words that have been aimed at elucidating the Word and molds them into poetic reflections is a gift and an honor that is deeply humbling to me.

The reflections gathered here are rich and powerful expressions of a person who loves God with heart, soul, and mind. Andrew has put all three of those to work in assembling these writings. He has drawn the words in these pages from what has emerged after listening patiently, persistently for the Word of God proclaimed in my preaching.

Admittedly, when I began to receive Andrew's e-mails, I found them to be heartening. I have always been glad to receive them. It is nice to know that someone is listening. But when I read these lines now, assembled together in one collection, I am all the more honored. The collection sheds a light on my passion and ministry that no single sermon can provide.

I hope that, like me, you will find that Andrew's reflections will bring you closer to the One who is ever and always longing to be close to us. At the end of the day, our God is the one who is due all our expressions of worship.

Stephen Cook