

# A TRIBUTE TO DR. GARY COOK

President of Dallas Baptist University



Those who know Dr. Gary Cook inevitably can attest to the fact that he is consistently hard-working and diligently committed to excellence, dedicated to service, and faithful in prayer. These characteristics have, over the course of his tenure, proven to be the outstanding traits that have guided his life. Certainly, the growth and success of Dallas Baptist University can be attributed to the dedication and commitment of Dr. Cook to the call God placed on him more than 25 years ago.

But to understand the lasting significance of Dr. Gary Cook's 25th anniversary as president of DBU, it is important to first understand the faith and perseverance of the 37-year-old man who trusted the Lord for what many deemed impossible. In April of 1988 when Dr. Cook accepted the presidency, DBU faced heavy debt, failing facilities, a declining enrollment, and an uncertain future. Many thought the financially troubled school was too far gone to be saved, but Dr. Cook felt the Lord's calling to DBU and believed with great faith

that He would grant a miracle.

Although the first few years were difficult as the University sought stabilization, the unwavering faith of the young president became the foundational backbone of the evolving campus. In his first chapel address, Dr. Cook felt led by the Lord to address students on the topic "Being Servants," a message that would set the tone for the rest of his administration. Setting the example, Dr. Cook persevered through every trial and circumstance in the early years, fully convinced that DBU's future was in the Lord's faithful hands.

Undoubtedly, Dr. Cook has become the visionary leader of DBU and the incredible success it has seen. Throughout his tenure, however, his perspective has remained that he is not the reason for the accomplishments, but merely an instrument in the Lord's hands. Shortly after arriving at DBU, Dr. Cook hung a

scripture plaque in his office with the words of Psalm 127:1, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Over the years, this verse has continued to remind him of the One who could overcome every challenge the University faced.

"When I think of Gary Cook's leadership, I think of visionary," states Dr. Blair Blackburn, DBU

Executive Vice President. "There is no doubt that God has given him a vision for guiding the institution. He has an incredible ability to see the needs of others and to reach out in love to support those needs and help people. It has been a wonderful example to me to see a man who gives of his time, his heart, and his resources to help other people. That is what he has modeled for me and what he is modeling for our students: to deny self and to put others first."

In his commitment to the service of students, denomination, and community, Dr. Cook has been actively involved as a board member for numerous area organizations. He has served as a leader for the Baptist World Alliance as well as the BGCT. Additionally, he has been named a Distinguished Alumnus from Baylor University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Cook also serves as a deacon at Park Cities Baptist Church, where his family has attended since moving to Dallas.

In a 1992 edition of the *DBU Report*, Dr. Cook wrote, "As I have grown older, I have come to realize that the Lord does not call us to be successful; He calls us to be faithful." One of the ways Dr. Cook has repeatedly demonstrated his faithfulness in leading a college campus



“Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he shall direct your paths.”

-Proverbs 3:5-6

is through his dedication and concern for the lives of individual students. He is well-known across campus for befriending students on the walking trails or in the Fitness Center, always seeking opportunities to encourage, advise, or bless those whom he meets.

As he would attest, Dr. Cook’s greatest asset in ministering to students has always been his wife, Sheila, who has made DBU more than just a day-job but a place that fosters community, fellowship, and friendship. One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Cooks has been their willingness to open their home and their lives to make people feel welcome and included at DBU.

Their sons, David (30) and Mark (26), literally grew up on University Hill, being exposed to all facets of college life. They both attended the DBU Lab School, were babysat by DBU students, and were baptized in the Crowley Complex pool. “Growing up at DBU, I got to see how Christianity was lived out from every part of life: from my home life to going to school to seeing people work,” Mark explains. “I really had a sense that Christianity was more than just a private faith; there is a sense here that God really impacts every part of life.”

However, the greatest model of the Christian faith for David and Mark has been their parents. “Prayer has been the number one thing I have taken away from watching both Mom and Dad as parents,” Mark continues. “Dad has been very candid about the role of prayer and how it helped DBU to get to where it is today. He embodied that every day at home. Prayer is such a foundational part of who he is. When he’s making a decision, he prays about it. I’ve learned most from Mom and Dad how to have

an active prayer life.”

As faithful as Dr. Cook has been in investing himself to the University, he has been equally committed to his family. “He has always been so encouraging to me,” says David. “I don’t know that every dad tells their children they love them as much as he does. He’s always been intentional to tell us he loves us and is proud of us. He always told me the Lord has plans for me and loves me; he has always been there with advice and love and has always cared.”

In a tribute concerning the life and work of Dr. Gary Cook, endless lists could be compiled of his civic involvement, denominational work, university leadership, and family commitment. Ultimately, however, the greatest attribute of Dr. Cook that needs to be mentioned, as his primary motivation in all of his life, is his dedication to the Lord and the furthering of His Kingdom.

Throughout his tenure at Dallas Baptist University, Dr. Cook has commonly quoted Albert Schweitzer’s adage that states: “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will

have sought and found how to serve.” Of all the words that have been and will be said about DBU President Dr. Gary Cook, the most important will always be that he has served the Lord and DBU, seeking the greatest integrity, dedication, and faithfulness.

