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Interview with Daniel Estes

February 15, 2018

- Joe: All right. Well, I'm going to ask you the first question then, Dr. Estes. Can you tell us about the story of how you came to Cedarville?
- Dr. Dan Estes: Well, actually there are two stories there, Joe. First, how I came here as a student, and then how I came back on the faculty.
- Joe: Okay.
- Dr. Dan Estes: I wasn't planning to come to Cedarville. I was accepted at a couple of other colleges. I knew about Cedarville, but it really wasn't clearly on my radar screen. But then, I was out in Denver at a conference the summer before my senior ... summer before but just after I had graduated from high school. And I've kept running into people going to Cedarville and then got to talking with one of the Cedarville professors while I was there. And through that, I decided, "Well, I think I'll apply to Cedarville," and so it wasn't until the summertime that I made my application, got accepted, and then started.
- Dr. Dan Estes: I look back at that now, and even though it seemed then to be a pretty why did I do that experience, yet it's obvious that God was directing me. I never had a doubt after that, but that this was where God wanted me to be and had a wonderful experience in my four years here. I loved my undergraduate time, but teaching at a college really wasn't anything that I thought about that much, maybe had some passing thoughts. But it really wasn't an aspiration that I had. I had thought I was going into the pastorate, and so I went to seminary and then did go into the pastorate and was there for six years. In a very surprising way, I got a contact from Cedarville, then from Dr. Gromacki, who was the Chairman of the Bible Department at that time, and he said, "Dan, we've just had a new position that's been granted to our department, and the Lord's put you on my mind. I just want to know if you'd be interested in being considered here."
- Dr. Dan Estes: And that was a difficult decision for me because I really loved what I was doing in the church. Been there for six years. Our roots were deep in that congregation, and I said, "Well, I'll come and be a candidate but no promises." And when I came, one of the things I had to do was to teach a class. And as I was teaching that class, I just realized, "This is what I was born to do," and it all came together. It was the right place, the right time, the right calling. It just, once again, even though it wasn't the way that Career Services would have scripted it out, yet it was definitely the direction of the Lord. That was 34 years ago, and I look back, and I say, "Thank you, Lord, for directing me so wisely, for giving me a place that I can use the gifts You've given me and really contribute to Your work here."

Joe: So, you do have two stories of how you came to Cedarville as a student and then as part of the faculty. My next question was going to be: How? What about Cedarville attracted you to it? I'm guessing there'd be different things for both cases. Could you talk about those?

Dr. Dan Estes: Well, it's kind of the mirror image. What attracted me to Cedarville as a student was the faculty that I had heard about, and some of them I had met in talking with some of them. I sensed that this was a place where there would be people that would be able to build into my life and prepare me for ministry. I had some wonderful professors, Dr. Gromacki, Dr. Lawlor, people that really taught me how to study God's Word, how to live it out. Dr. Grier and others that taught me about ministry, about thinking Christianly. There's so many different people who contributed to me.

Dr. Dan Estes: When I came back as a professor, what really attracted me was the possibility of working with the students. I remembered what I had had when I was a student, and the opportunity to be able to do that same kind of ministry with the next generation of students. That has, to this day, that is what really excites me, the opportunity to work with undergraduates in the most strategic years of their lives when everything is on the table. All the big decisions are being made in these four years and being able to guide them through this time and help them to move from the belief system that they've been given from parents, from teachers, from pastors, but it's still external to them to a genuine adult commitment that they really own. That doesn't just happen. They need people who will guide, to mentor people through that, students through that really difficult transition, and I have loved doing that.

Joe: And so, your passion about mentoring people through that transition into adulthood through college, did that happen for you while you were at Cedarville as a student?

Dr. Dan Estes: Yes. Not in a formal mentorship, where I sat down with someone every month or every week or two, but there were people down the path for me. Some of them 10 years and some 20, 30 years, and I said, "That's what I'd like to become. I'd like to be able to study the Bible like that person does. I'd like to be able to interact with people like that person, and I'd like to have pastoral ministry like that person does." And so, it really was a composite of strengths that I saw in people that were further down the path. They probably weren't aware that I was watching them carefully and considering how could that become part of my life, but I was. And the Lord used so many of those people to really build into me.

Dr. Dan Estes: I had the same experience when I went to seminary, where people, godly professors and others, that just were great models for me, and that's one of the things that I hope to do. Just this morning, I had a student come in, and we set up an informal mentoring arrangement where I'll just be able to help him during his years here at school. I've been doing this ever since I started teaching, in fact, these people, I make a commitment to pray for them on a regular basis.

Some of them now I've prayed for over 30 years. I've had some of the children in classes, and that's been a real joy to be able to have that long-term ministry to students.

Joe: I can imagine so. When you were a student, what were some of the most significant relationships that you had? Can you elaborate on a couple that were maybe especially meaningful to you?

Dr. Dan Estes: Well, there are two that came immediately to mind when you asked that question, Joe. One is a relationship that I had with Dr. Dave Matson. When I started, Dave was the Director of the Concert Chorale, and I was in that all four years. When you're touring on Chorale, we would have a 10-day tour over spring break, and then we'd go out a number of weekends. You really get close to people, and so being with him, he was more than just a faculty member. He became a dear friend. And then, when I came back on the faculty, of course, he became a colleague, and for years we continued to minister to one another's lives.

Dr. Dan Estes: Another person that I got to know quite well was Don Rickard, who was the Vice President for Student Services for many years. He just passed away two years ago. I was in student government, and so I used to meet with him regularly and work very closely with him. And so, he became more than just an administrator. He became a real friend.

Dr. Dan Estes: The third person was James Jeremiah, who was the president of the college at that time, and I was the Student Body President. And so, I would meet with him regularly my senior year, and he would just ... It became more than simply talking about students' issues. He was interested in me as a person, and when I got my seminary acceptance, I remember him sitting me down and saying, "Now, before you go to seminary, let me just share some things," and just talk with me like a dad or a pastor.

Dr. Dan Estes: And then, when I came back on faculty, he was retired by then. He was the Chancellor. He reached out to me, and he'd take me out for lunch. We would talk, and he was, at that time, oh, probably in his late 70s, 80? He would just build into my life, and people like that are a real treasure and just ... Two of those three men now are with the Lord, and yet, what they built into my life continues to reverberate. I want to have that kind of ministry with my students where I'm building into them, and it has a long-term benefit for God and for good in their lives.

Joe: I suppose this question is more just for me, but what was Dr. Jeremiah really like?

Dr. Dan Estes: Oh. Even though we knew him as the president, yet everybody knew that he was a pastor at heart. In fact, I think Dr. Murdoch calls him, "The Pastor President," and rightly so.

Dr. Dan Estes: I remember one time when I was meeting with him, I said, "Dr. Jeremiah, you speak occasionally in chapel, but the students would really like to hear you frequently, even every week." I'm not sure if that was the start of the Monday Presidential Chapel tradition or whether Paul Dixon brought that with him when he came in, but that was something with the students. They really loved to hear him speak. He could be gruff on the exterior, but everybody knew he had the softest heart. It was just he was a delight.

Joe: What about as a professor? When you started working as a professor on staff, what were some of the most meaningful relationships to you at that point in time, maybe with students or with other faculty members?

Dr. Dan Estes: Well, one that comes immediately to mind, Joe, is one that happened the summer after my first year of teaching. One of the early ... Well, we didn't call it Global Outreach at that time. We called it something else, but our very first time one of our teams went to England, the Administration wasn't sure whether just to send a group out by themselves or whether we really out to have someone go with them. And so, they finally decided, "Yeah. We need to have a faculty person go with them." And so, I was asked, I think in May, if I'd be willing to go with this team that was going to be going out in August and September, and I said, "Well, sure. That sounds fun." Well, when you travel with a group of students for a month overseas, you really have an unusual experience with them. I was 32 at that time, so I was like 10 years older than some of the students, a lot like their big brother. It was a really neat opportunity for all of us.

Dr. Dan Estes: Ever since that time, I've prayed every Sunday for all those people. There were 11 on the team, and just this semester, I had a student in one of my classes. I looked. I said, "Are you So-and-so's son?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, I've been praying for your dad for the last 33 years," and, of course, the student, it just blew him away. And then, last week, his dad showed up for class one day.

Joe: Really?

Dr. Dan Estes: I hadn't seen him for years, and that was a real rich experience.

Dr. Dan Estes: One of the things that was fascinating and enjoyable coming back was that a number of people who had been my professors were still on the faculty because I was gone for four years of seminary, six years in the pastorate, so 10 years. A lot of them were still here. We tend to have long, faculty's tenure here, and it was great to be able to get to know them as colleagues, really as friends. We'd be in committee meetings together. We'd do different things, but the biggest transition for me, the biggest adjustment was learning to call these people that I had venerated from a distance by their first names. I mean some of them were just kind of, "Dan, the name is ...," and I had to ...

Dr. Dan Estes: That took some doing, and that's why whenever I have one of my former students come on faculty, I always make a point of saying, "Now that we're

colleagues, it's first-name basis here." I'd been calling them by their first name. "Now, you call me by my first name, too." I laugh. I tell them the story about how difficult it was for me to do that at first, but that's a real joy to be able to have those kinds of relationships. Now, some of those people that I've known for decades, and it's just a real joy.

Joe: That must be very cool to see happen. How long have you been serving at Cedarville?

Dr. Dan Estes: 34 years.

Joe: 34 years.

Dr. Dan Estes: Yeah.

Joe: Over 34 years, three decades, what are just a few highlights?

Dr. Dan Estes: That's a hard question to answer.

Joe: I figured it would be.

Dr. Dan Estes: Yeah. That really is a difficult one, Joe. For me, it's not one big event. It's really the combination of lots and lots of little relationships and contacts. It's kind of like a Monet painting, where when you look at it really up close, you don't really see much. But when you step back, you realize the patterns that are there, and the beauty that's there.

Dr. Dan Estes: One of the most moving days of the year for me is graduation day. To watch these students come across the podium and get their degree, and some of them I have just had that semester, some of them, I literally have not seen since their freshmen year because on this campus, you just don't run into people all the time. But just seeing their face, hearing their name called, it's just that a reminder that, yes, that connection. Or when one of those students emails me or calls me or stops in. I have that quite often. It's just a reminder of the little conversations.

Dr. Dan Estes: Somebody posted something on the Cedarville website a few months ago and recalled a conversation that I had had with her after a class. It would have been my first or second year of teaching that she was still remembering all these years later, and you just never know. Some of the things, you remember. Other things, you don't recall the conversation. That one I happen to, but to the joy of being able to be a small but meaningful part in the development of someone's life. I just never get over the significance and the satisfaction of that.

Dr. Dan Estes: Have there been big things? Yeah, that, too. But I think some of the most important things have been the small things, the hidden things, the things that just that student knows about, but they were life changers. And I can remember

myself being touched that way by profs both at college and seminary. Something that was said, a passing comment that someone made or just someone taking the time just to stop me on the sidewalk and saying, "How are you doing today?" Those were lifesavers sometimes, and I have enjoyed being on the giving side of that as well as on the receiving side.

Joe: Do you remember some moments that were particularly personally shaping? Like some moments where maybe you had a big ah-ha moment, or something dramatic happened in your life because of it.

Dr. Dan Estes: I think sometimes it's easier to remember the difficult, big moments than the delightful, big moments. I think probably the biggest moment that I had in a positive way was graduation 2003 because my daughter and one of my sons graduated that year, and it was a real joy seeing them get their degrees. And then, to top it all off, I was sitting there with the faculty, and Dr. Dixon ... It was his last graduation, and he started reading the citation for the President's Trophy, which is given to our top graduating seniors. As he started reading it, he got down three or four items, and I realized that he was introducing my son. I mean the tears just started rolling down my cheeks. It was just one of the things that it's just you don't dare imagine that your own son could receive that, the highest honor from the school that you love so dearly. That just about broke my heart with joy. It was just really special.

Joe: What is he doing now, your son?

Dr. Dan Estes: He works at Princeton Seminary in New Jersey, and he and his wife, who also graduated in that class, they're ... She's a professor at a college there, and they have four children. So, we're very proud of those grandkids and certainly their parents, too.

Joe: You mentioned your daughter as well. How did your family dynamic change just by taking your work at Cedarville? How did that affect your family dynamic?

Dr. Dan Estes: Well, I think it's a challenge to be a faculty kid. You would think about pastor kids and the challenges they have growing up under the microscope. It's a challenge for faculty kids to do that. They, like anyone else, have to go through the process of making the Christian belief system their own commitment, and no one, not even a professor or dad, can make that happen. They have to do that, and one of the challenges as a faculty member is that I have to realize that just as the Lord uses me to help other people's children to hear God when they may not be able to hear it from their own parents as well, I have to trust that God can use other people to be able to help my children to be able to hear Him, His voice.

Dr. Dan Estes: It's not easy either being the child of a faculty member or being a faculty member with children when you want so much to see them really know and love the Lord, and yet you're limited as to what you can do in their lives. You can

teach them. You can model them. You can encourage them. You can warn them, but ultimately, for every person, it's an individual decision. That is one of the big, big challenges for all of our faculty members.

Joe: What about in your church family? How have you made yourself at home in the Cedarville environment through your church community in that family?

Dr. Dan Estes: Yeah. Well, my situation is a little different from typical because we have stayed in the church where I was pastoring over in Columbus area, and we love those people. Many of them still regard me as pastor, even though I haven't been their pastor for 34 years. We love them deeply, and they love us. It really ... I mean, I still have a teaching ministry there. I still work in the music ministry, some of the things that I did when I was pastoring, and so I have that continuing ministry for them. But, they don't view me as a professor, they just view me as Dan. That's how they know me, and that's freeing. That also helped our children because they weren't in a place where they were always Dr. So-and-so's son or daughter. They were just Dan and Carol's kids.

Dr. Dan Estes: I love our church so much. It is just a wonderful place. Our pastor now is actually one of my former students, one of my former advisees, and to sit under his ministry every Sunday, it's a joy. He's doing such a marvelous job, one of our grads, and I just love going there and looking around at some of the people that I pastored. I see widows and widowers there that I knew their mates. I remember the stories, and people that were once young children are now deacons in our church. Some of the students that I had, college students when I was in the pastorate, now are some of the pillars of our church, or some of them have gone out into missions. It's just that is a great place. I love it.

Joe: Well, I've gone through pretty much all of these questions, but I think I have one more that I would like to ask. I feel like I'd be remiss if I didn't ask it about ... We talked so much about relationships and the ones that have meant so much to you in the past. But what about right now? What relationships do you have right now with people on the university either as students or faculty or staff or whoever? What relationships mean the most to you right now?

Dr. Dan Estes: Well, there are circles of relationships we have. There are certainly many people that are acquaintances here in the Cedarville family. There are others that I have a much closer connection to. As the university has gotten bigger, when I first came here, we had right at 1,000 students, and about 80 faculty members, I think, tops. Now, it's so much larger than that that no one can really know everyone.

Dr. Dan Estes: My students that I have, I have about 100 to 125 every term, and those are people that they are I have a lot of hands-on connection with them. I pray for them regularly. I work with them, and these are more than just my students. These are people that I pastor, and I've cared for. And so, in the course of four years of having students on campus, there's probably about close to 1,000 people on campus at any one time that I've had in class, that I've prayed for,

that I care for. That's kind of a subset of people that I have had that kind of connection with.

Dr. Dan Estes: Now, I also have a group of students, some of them, my advisees, some not, but people that I have a more intensive relationship with while they're here, that I meet with on a regular basis, and build into their lives. On the faculty, there are a group of really dear faculty members that most of us have taught for 20 years together or more, and all that time, most of us have taught one another's kids. We have been in and out of one another's offices. The good times, the bad times, really, you share a life with them. I just finished a commentary on Psalms, and in my introduction, I mentioned the names of several of these faculty members that have just really, really, been such a support to me.

Dr. Dan Estes: You can't simply work shoulder to shoulder with people. If you do that, you come to the end of a career, and you really had no connections. You have to be able to connect heart to heart if you're really going to have the kind of relationships that you really can have over time. I've always thought it would be a tragedy to come to the end of a career and just look back and say, "I've had a lot of colleagues, a lot of associates, but no friends, no kindred spirits." God has blessed me with some people that they know the good, the bad, the ugly. We have been with one another. We've carried one another's burdens, and those are a treasure.

Joe: Well, thank you for sharing all this, Dr. Estes.

Dr. Dan Estes: My pleasure.

Joe: This has been a privilege for me to hear and listen to, and I hope it was enjoyable for you to recall all of this and talk about it. So, thank you.

Dr. Dan Estes: Well, there are many, many great stories that could be told. I'm glad you're doing this oral history.

Joe: Yeah. Well, I think that's all I have for you then.

Dr. Dan Estes: Okay.