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## Paul H. Dixon

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Interview with Paul H. Dixon

Spring 2019

Andrew Harris:

Well, Dr. Dixon, thank you so much for coming and doing this with us. So, the first question that we have, just a way of introduction, can you tell us how you came to Cedarville?

Paul Dixon:

Well, I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the Lord and talk about Cedarville and his leading and me being a part of all this. First of all, Dr. Jeremiah would have me come in when I was the evangelist on a regular basis, maybe every two years, and speak to the students. So my evangelistic emphasis carried over to being in chapel and speaking to the students and to the college family. So, that's kind of how it started. And then Pat, my wife, was hired to teach in the language and literature department.

Andrew Harris:

Okay.

Paul Dixon:

So we came in 1971 so she could start teaching.

Andrew Harris:

Oh, okay.

Paul Dixon:

And, of course, she's just a phenomenal teacher and great support to me during my years as an evangelist and then my years as president. I often say she was here before I was, so she got me my job. That's kind of how it all started.

Paul Dixon:

And there was no one who could have been more shocked when that search committee, meeting in Dr. Jeremiah's office one Saturday. I was getting ready to fly to Atlanta, to meet with Phil Niekro, pitcher for the Atlanta Braves, had a ministry for 25 years with all the National League baseball teams. And so he had invited me to come to his house.

Paul Dixon:

So I was getting ready to fly out and the phone rang and it was part of the search committee. And they said, "We're in Dr. Jeremiah's office. Would you come over here?" And I said, "Sure. I got a little time before my plane leaves." And Pat looked at me after I hung up and said, "Who was it?" And I told her, and she said, "What do they want?" I said, "They want names. I'm pretty well networked. I know a lot of people. So they're going to want me to recommend some possible potential presidents since Dr. Jeremiah said he was stepping down." That's what I thought.

Paul Dixon:

I walked in to that office. We chatted a few minutes and they said, "Your name keeps coming up as a potential president following Dr. Jeremiah." And I said, "That is about the dumbest thing I ever heard." I said, "I cannot believe it." And one of the driving forces behind that was Don Tyler. He was pastor of Bethesda Baptist Church, and I'd held numerous campaigns for him. And he was on the search committee and key on the board. And I said, "This just doesn't make any sense." I said, "Look, I've never led anything in my life, except my personal life and my family and my ministry as the evangelist. I've been an evangelist for 14 years." They said, "You may know that, but we just think there's some things about you that could very well work as president."

Paul Dixon:

I said, "Well, I'll tell you what, men, the way I'm wired, I'm wired to write everything down and think about it and pray about it." And I always carry a Seven Star Diary. And I said, "I'll write down some thoughts. And if you get ready and you want to continue to pursue it, I'll come back and share those thoughts with you."

Paul Dixon:

So that was at this time of the year, January. And I got a call from them about two months later and they wanted to meet with me at the Holiday Inn, the whole search committee and talk about it. So I came in with my book and with my thoughts as to what would be priorities for me as president. And after I got through, they didn't have any questions. They just said, "Would you step out? We want to talk." So I stepped out and they came out 20 minutes later and said, "We just voted unanimously to recommend you to the board as president."

Paul Dixon:

I said, "I cannot get over." I said, "I do not need another job. I'm booked out four years in a row." And I said, "I just can't imagine this happening." "Well, we do. And all we ask, number one, that you pray about it. Number two, when you meet with the whole board, bring the book."

Paul Dixon:

So Pat and Scott and I began praying as a family. And part of it was how can we best serve the Lord? And we got Acts 13:36, "David, after he had served his own generation in the will of God, fell on sleep." He died. And so the question was, how do we best serve our generation, continuing as an evangelist, which was a wonderful ministry, or become the president of Cedarville? And we concluded that investing our lives in college students was the best way we could serve our generation. And so, as we said yes, they recommended it to the whole board. And when I walked out of the house, see we lived here, Pat was on the faculty. And I told her, as I walked out the door, I said, "If I get two negative votes, I'm not taking it."

Paul Dixon:

And so it was unanimous. And as I walked out to the car, Bill Brock, who was such a man of God and a key trustee, walked over to the window. I rolled it down. And he said, "You know, we've never raised a million dollars in the history of this school." I said, "Thanks a lot." I got the message. That's what they needed and wanted, but I wasn't a fundraiser. And so I went home and told Pat that they had voted unanimously and called me as president. And I said, "Honey, I'll give it two years. And if I can't do it, I love this place too much to ruin it. And I'll give it back to them and they can get somebody else."

Paul Dixon:

Well, I stayed 25 years as president. I've been 15 as chancellor. So I've been here 40 years. And so that's glory to God. I mean, I still think it was the craziest thing anybody had ever done was call me as the president. So, that's what happened.

Andrew Harris:

You said that there was a list of things in your book. Do you remember what any of those were?

Paul Dixon:

I do. In fact, I still have the list. I've had numerous people ask me about the list and I just remember. Of course, I put down that it would all be about Christ and about the word of God. And of course, early on, I brought the song Christ Is All I Need to campus. And that almost became our alma mater, but I've believed that deeply. It had to be all about Him. And it had to be about evangelism. I've never lost my heart for soul-winning and evangelism and God used that. Dr. Jeremiah was an evangelist, too. He loved to lead people to Christ. And so I was following in his steps, emphasis on evangelism.

Paul Dixon:

I also wrote down that we were going to focus on chapel. See, I argued the heartbeat of every Christian college is chapel and we had good chapels, but I asked the trustees to give me all the money I needed to bring in top notch speakers. I wanted people to have a shirt, coat and tie on when they were in chapel. I wanted the music to be something that... I wanted teachers, preachers, that students could understand and identify with. And I wanted music that would be good for them. And so we just majored on chapel and I said that's what we would do.

Paul Dixon:

I said, "I'm going to take over the missionary conference." Now, there were a lot of good things about this school, but believe it or not, the students ran the missionary conference. And I love students. That's a major thing with me, but I just thought, "Hey, I can't have students running a missionary conference. I got to run it and my team." And so we totally changed the format of the missionary conference and did some things that gave it more oomph and life and the speakers and everything else.

Paul Dixon:

I also said that we're going to do everything well. Early on, I started emphasizing everything done in the name of Christ ought to have quality stamped all over it. If you're going to do it for the Lord, you're going to do it well. So, right out of the shoot, back there in 1978, we decided that we would major on how the campus looked, how the flowers, everything would be top-notch on campus, so that was something I had written down.

Paul Dixon:

We had a student newspaper. And you have to understand, I love students, but I didn't like that newspaper. It was a typical secular university rag sheet where they would criticize the basketball team, or they would criticize this or criticize that. And I said, "I don't put up with it." I said, "We're going to have a newspaper that emphasizes the positive. Everything about this place, we need to keep it positive." Well, when I announced that, I called in the editor, by the way, the editor is the pastor of Grace Baptist Church today.

Andrew Harris:

Wow.

Paul Dixon:

Yeah, Craig Miller was the editor of the paper. He came in with the advisor, a faculty member, and I told them what I wanted. They said, "You just want a PR piece." I said, "You can call it whatever you want, but this is what it's going to be." And they both resigned. And so I didn't have a newspaper for about a year. We came back a year later, put it together. The name of it was Whispering Cedars. I didn't even like the name of it, the Whispering Cedars. So we changed that to just the Cedars and people wouldn't know that today, but was that traumatic on campus.

Paul Dixon:

The fact that I was taking over the missionary conference, that I was taking over the school newspaper, we were making some changes. So those were kind of some things that were on our list and that I was going to do everything I could to help the students to make this a Christ-centered, student-centered school. And I was going to take care of the faculty. I wanted to hire the best faculty, pay the faculty, do it the way they should be paid and emphasize how important they were. Those are just a few of the things that I had on my list.

Andrew Harris:

As you look back at your time at Cedarville, could you tell us about some of the relationships that you built here that really meant a lot to you, and it could be with other staff or faculty members and maybe even students, maybe people just in the community here.

Paul Dixon:

Well, those are separate things. First of all, on campus, again, I would say that Dr. Jeremiah was one of my best friends. We knew each other well before I became president. He said he was glad I was going to be president, but he wasn't glad because he hated to see me lost to the churches in my ministry as an evangelist. But he was just such a supporter. There's one famous picture and that's us walking across campus and we are in step. That wasn't planned. That was prophetic, though. He and I were in step as we moved forward for the institution.

Paul Dixon:

I don't know that he was ever critical of me. I did have feedback. We had a jazz band and a Dixieland band. And he told somebody, "If I'd have been president, they'd never have that." And I thought that was so funny. That didn't offend me. I mean, I understood that. But he hardly ever said a negative word about what was going on when I became president. He was just supportive. He was such a dear, dear person, as you heard in the message. So Dr. Jeremiah was key.

Paul Dixon:

And then I really got close to my vice presidents. Cliff Johnson was the academic vice president. Now see, there's a theory in leadership that when you come in, you get rid of the old guard and you bring in your people. I didn't know anything about running a school. I was green as grass. I needed Cliff for the academic side. I needed Ken St. Clair for the business side. I needed Don Rickard and the whole area of students and Harold Green was the campus pastor. I said, "I'm going to make him a vice president,

because I want to make a statement about how important Christian ministry is." And so he headed up all the Christian ministry stuff, made him a vice president.

Paul Dixon:

Now Dr. Jeremiah said, "Paul, are you sure that's smart? Because students will not go to him for counsel as pastor if he's a vice president." I said, "I think they will." I said, "I just think who he is and so forth, he'll still be able to provide a lot of counsel." So I had a vice president of development who didn't stay very long by the name of Lee Turner. And then we eventually ended up with Martin Clark who was my VP for advancement for about 17 years. And so I had a wonderful team.

Paul Dixon:

People talk about me and my leadership and the success. It was because I had a good team and that team was there for me. And by the grace of God, as a team, we were able to accomplish what happened during those years. So I think it was the administrative team. And then, of course, it was just other people I got close to. And again, we lived here. This wasn't a foreign place to us and Pat and I had certain friends and so forth, and it was just such a tremendous help to have her on the team and a president's wife who knew the place that I could bounce things off of and so forth.

Andrew Harris:

Let's see here, let me see the next question here. I lost it for a second. Are there any particular moments that helped define for you what Cedarville means? And they can certainly be the big events, or maybe they're just a small event. But can you tell us maybe a story of one of those moments that just encapsulates what it means to be at Cedarville?

Paul Dixon:

Well, I think that as the speakers would come in, special men of God throughout the United States, that we would bring in for conferences or even just to do a two or three day chapel series, I think, for instance, of Tony Evans. And when Tony Evans came in, and he's still well-known today, but he was speaking one night and all the power went out. Now you take the average campus and the power's out, they're sneaking out the back door to go back to the dormitory or something like that. None of them left.

Paul Dixon:

And I still remember a statement he made. He said, "You students are concerned about knowing the will of God. Know God, and you will know God's will." I think that is a profound statement because with college students, teenagers, all of us, I mean, I'm 80 years old and I still want to know the will of God. I mean, that doesn't stop. Know God and you will know God's will. And so there were special times like that.

Paul Dixon:

I remember James McDonald was here and at that point, we went through times, when I started preaching here, chapel was in Alford.

Andrew Harris:

Oh, yeah.

Paul Dixon:

And then, yeah, right. And so then we outgrew that and you had to have your chapel, part of it was in the gymnasium. And part of it was in Alford. You had dual chapels.

Andrew Harris:

Right.

Paul Dixon:

And then we ended up after that, we moved into, it was the Jeremiah Chapel at that point, and now it's the Apple Center, but that's where we met. And we outgrew that. But what was interesting is that we outgrew it and we had students meeting in that auditorium and students meeting in two overflow areas. And again, the power went out in a conference one night. You would think, "Okay, power's out. These kids are going to go do something else, make a Young's run or whatever, who knows whether they're there or not."

Paul Dixon:

And we heard a rustling and all of the students from the overflow areas were coming into the main auditorium and sitting on the floor. And there they are, sitting on the floor, the place is packed and James McDonald brought his message in the dark. And I will never forget that. I'll never forget that night and what that said about our student body and about how they valued chapel. I still get notes from students. I got one just the other day. It said, "Dr. Dixon, I was way out in left field with the Lord when I was at Cedarville. But I can't begin to tell you what chapel meant to me."

Paul Dixon:

And many of our alumni will say, "I have an alarm that goes off in my head at 10:00 every morning because of chapel and what that meant." So I think one of our goals of making chapel the heartbeat of Cedarville did work by the grace of God in numerous things. And Dr. Jeremiah, he valued chapel, too, and then I was privileged to build on that.

Paul Dixon:

So those are some of the events that stand in my mind that speak about the institution, that speak about our values. I would also say it's really interesting in my 25 years as president, I only went through two tough times in 25 years that were faculty related. And they were pretty tough times. Any leader would tell you that the biggest problems you face are not financial, it's personnel.

Paul Dixon:

And so I went through these two tough times. One of them lasted for about a year and a half, and I tried to solve the problem in numerous ways, getting faculty involved. And then there came a day when I had to drop the gavel and let some people go. Very, very painful. I remember that.

Paul Dixon:

A related thing, some years later, it was a faculty member who, in my estimation, did some things he could no longer continue as the faculty member at Cedarville and had to do with his stance on homosexuality. I was just telling someone the other day. I was kept well-informed, but I didn't have to deal with it. The academic vice president, the department chair dealt with that long-term faculty

member and solved the problem. I certainly supported them, but that said something about the institution.

Paul Dixon:

It's whenever you have, like we had 200 at the end, 200 full-time faculty. Faculty are a challenge. You are one. My wife was one. My son is on the faculty now. And I often say you've got 200 people out there who think they could be president. There's no question. They can do it better than you can. But I love the faculty. And the interesting relationship was, I was pretty strong and I would drop the gavel and I would make decisions. But at the same time they knew I loved them. And they knew that I valued their expertise and with honor.

Paul Dixon:

If we were going to start an engineering program, and that was pretty challenging, the costs and everything involved, we took it to the entire faculty. We let them think it through. We let them give input. And we came to a day where we took what I would call a straw vote in the faculty. And they would say to me, "Does this mean anything? Or are you going to make this decision?" And I'd say, "Well, what it does, it lets me know what you're thinking. It lets me know whether you're on board for this."

Paul Dixon:

And we took those straw votes on academic programs like engineering, like nursing, you name it, and the faculty always supported it. And so someone would say, "Well, what would you have done if they hadn't supported it?" I probably would've gone back to the drawing board because if I had a faculty who couldn't support what we wanted to do, maybe we shouldn't do it.

Paul Dixon:

So anyway, all of that speaks to the institution, speaks to our culture, and I really believe it speaks to our stakeholders. The important thing in any organization are your stakeholders. And for an academic institution, one of the big groups, that's your faculty, it's your staff, it's your student body.

Paul Dixon:

Overall, I had a great relationship with the students. I was a student's president. I would eat in the dining hall when I didn't have someone in the president's dining room and hang out with students. And one of my favorite stories is on one occasion, early in the freshmen year, and this is pretty typical. I'd look, and I'd say, "Oh, what's your year?" "Oh, I'm a freshman." "Where are you from?" "Oh, I'm from Indiana." "What's your major?" And I got that. "And how did you happen to come to Cedarville?" And about 10 minutes into that, this kid looks at me, this freshman, and says, "Do you work here?" I said, "Yeah, I do work here. Where do you sit in chapel?" And his buddies are just roaring with laughter and told him what was happening.

Paul Dixon:

Now, here's the great part of that story. He graduated and I remembered him. And when he came across the platform and I gave him his diploma, I looked at him and I said, "I'm still working here." And about four years later, he came and knocked on my office door and he said, "I'm just checking to see if you're still working." So I just love the students.

Paul Dixon:

But you have your stakeholders. You have your faculty, you have your staff, you have your students and you have your trustees. One of the most important things a president does is he builds his trustee board. Now you have to understand, this is a paradox. The trustees hire and fire the president. The most important thing they do has to do with the leadership and the president. But the most important thing the president does is he builds that trustee board. And so that's the paradox.

Paul Dixon:

But I had a wonderful relationship with those trustees. A number of trustees are in heaven today. I mentioned Don Tyler, I can go down the list and I loved them and we had a great relationship. We just worked together so well. So you have your stakeholders. Then you move into your alumni. They are so crucial and your relationship with them.

Paul Dixon:

And then your donors. Cedarville had no donor base when I came. The largest gift Cedarville had ever received was \$10,000. Except for Ruby Lamb was a single lady who worked at IBM and saved her stock. And there was a day when she died and in the will \$180,000 went to Cedarville and that's the science building. The original science building came through her generosity and that's how.

Paul Dixon:

You see many people don't realize that part of the success of Cedarville has been the sciences all through the years. So we were able to start with a strong science department and then add the nursing and then add the engineering and the pharmacy. And many people don't know, a third of our student body are in the sciences. That's unusual for any institution, let alone a creationist institution.

Andrew Harris:

Right.

Paul Dixon:

So when we talk about the donor base, I never want to minimize the fact that we did get that money from Ruby Lamb that allowed us to build the building. But going out and finding donors, I do a lot of consulting with college presidents. They call me on the phone. They want meetings with me and I'm always happy to do it.

Paul Dixon:

And the first thing they want, the main thing they want to know is how do you raise money? And there's this mythology around me that somehow I was this successful fundraiser. It was the grace of God. I loved doing it because I love people and number two, I love Cedarville. I'm not raising money for Paul Dixon. I'm raising money for this wonderful institution and all these students in the future. So I love to go out and tell the story.

Paul Dixon:

And I tell guys, most of them will never be successful fundraisers. And there's a couple of reasons for that. If you're not successful by the time you're 30, you will not be successful with anything you're trying to do. Number two, people don't want to hear no. I mean, if you're going to raise money and I'm going

to ask you for money, I have to be prepared. There's a certain percentage of people I'll ask who won't do it. And I'll say, "That's okay. I'm just so grateful that by the grace of God, you're willing to consider it. And maybe someday God will put that on your heart. And I rejoice to tell you the wonderful story of Cedarville." But if you can't take no, you can't raise money. So, anyway those are our stakeholders and that's what's made Cedarville, Cedarville. It's all a God thing and a lot of wonderful people.

Andrew Harris:

One second, I had actually the same question twice there. So I guess just the last thing is if you had to leave us with one story, just one more story that would help us to understand Dr. Dixon and his involvement with Cedarville, what story would you leave us with?

Paul Dixon:

Well, there are lots, but I'll just pick one that just hit me to kind of show the combination, i.e., of leadership, fundraising, and evangelism. When I started out as president, again, green as grass, I had so much to learn. I still do. Dr. White and I were talking after chapel today and I was commending him for his message. And I said, "You know what? You have grown in five years." He's been president for five years. And see, what a lot of people don't understand is leaders make institutions, but institutions make the leader. I mean, sure, I had an impact on Cedarville, but there was a greater impact of Cedarville on Paul Dixon that shaped me and made me who I grew into be and so forth and what happened.

Paul Dixon:

Well, when we talk about the fundraising part and I started out, I had a goal of having five people that I would find every year who could give a six figure gift. And so in my 25 years in my book I left with 150 names. Now I'm not telling you that they all gave a six figure gift. That wasn't the issue. The issue was I was going to find people had the potential to give a six-figure gift. We used to say that we had never had a million dollar gift. And I said, "By the grace of God, before I leave, we're going to have those." And we found two of them who ended up pretty much every year giving us a million dollars. And so there's a lot of things that happened.

Paul Dixon:

So I started out my very first major call was on Bob Stranahan who owned Champion Spark Plug in Toledo, Ohio. I didn't know him. He didn't know me. I just knew he had a lot of money and he was a Christian. So I called him up. I said, "Would you meet with me? I want to tell you about this great place in Southern Ohio." He said, "Sure, I'll meet with you." So I drove to Toledo. I met with Bob Stranahan. I told him the Cedarville story. And I said, "Mr. Stranahan, we're building an athletic center and we really need help. Would you help us?" And I still remember, he stood straight up. He said, "I'll not only help you, I'll get other people to help you." I mean, it was unbelievable. All the key CEOs in Toledo he told about Cedarville and he set me up with some of the meetings so I could tell them the Cedarville story.

Paul Dixon:

One of those men was John Anderson. John Anderson, and his brothers owned the Anderson's. If you go to any major city in this area, the Anderson's is an agro-business. It's the second, I guess, still the second largest agro-business in the United States. So I set up an appointment with him. He was a Roman Catholic and I met with him and I told him the Cedarville story. And he said, "Paul, that is so wonderful." He said, "Could I come and see it?" I said, "Absolutely. I want you to come and see it and I want you to stay on our home." And I said, "I want you to speak in a class."

Paul Dixon:

So John Anderson came, stayed in our home, got there that night before, we had dinner and we had family devotions. And John Anderson sat in on that. And then he was teaching this class, business class, the next day. Now I learned from that experience, people like that curse a lot. It's part of their vocabulary and he didn't know anything or that much about Cedarville. And he stood up in front of that class and I don't remember the lesson, all I remember is he just cussed a lot.

Paul Dixon:

So anyway, but John was a great friend. He sat in chapel and I have found that one of the best things I can do, I had one of my Jewish friends from Florida here last year. And I had him meet with students. I had him meet with some trustees and he came to chapel. He could not get over chapel. See, that's such a different world to most of our people out there. So my Jewish friend came and John Anderson came and we went out to lunch. And when we left, he said, "I want to ask you one question, Paul, before we leave. What does it mean to be born again?"

Paul Dixon:

So John left, we became good friends. He'd come play in our golf tournament. And I have to tell you that the most money John Anderson ever gave to Cedarville before he died was \$50. I didn't care. It's not about their money. It's about the people, their lives and their souls and whatever. John Anderson some years later got cancer, terminal cancer. He lived, the Anderson's have a compound in Toledo. Several of them all live out there, have their homes, have the lake and all. And I said, "John, I want to come talk to you about the Lord." He said, "You come, Paul." And before I left, I had the privilege of leading him to Christ and John Anderson received the Lord and I am so grateful. And I don't care if he only gave us \$50. That's not the main thing. It's always about God and people. It's honoring the Lord with Christian people, the whole stakeholder group, but it's also having a witness to those who need the savior.

Andrew Harris:

Dr. Dixon, thank you so much. It's been a real privilege just to sit and talk with you and learn about your history here. So, thank you.

Paul Dixon:

Well, I'm glad we could kind of compact forty years into 30 minutes. Thanks for asking me.

Andrew Harris:

Oh, no problem.