

Neal Jeffrey is pretty well known in the Baylor community. Not only is he a Baylor University Regent, but he was the starting quarterback under Grant Teaff from 1972-1974.

In fact, he was at the helm for one of the most famous football games in Baylor's history, the so-called "Miracle on the Brazos" game against the University of Texas in 1974. (The Bears came back from a deficit to win 34-24.) After graduation in 1975, he was drafted to play professional football in the National Football League (NFL) by the San Diego Chargers.

"I was always an athlete," Jeffrey said. "I loved sports. I dreamed of playing football. I wanted to play at Baylor. My dad played at Baylor. I always dreamed of being a quarterback [at Baylor], and I dreamed of being one in the NFL."

But he was meant to be doing something else. God was calling him to preach... despite the stuttering impediment he'd struggled with since childhood.

"I had accepted Christ as a boy, and the Lord worked in my heart that He wanted to call me to preach," Jeffrey said. "But I stuttered. I couldn't talk, so I dismissed it. Anyway, I was playing sports."

In fact, because of his stutter, he barely spoke.

"The greatest fear a stutterer has is to have someone see you stutter," Jeffrey said. "I had spent most of my life trying to hide it."

Jeffrey questioned how he could preach with his stuttering impediment, but as he started to gain success in football at Baylor, he was asked to be a guest speaker more and more at Waco area events. Soon, area churches wanted the quarterback to share his testimony with their congregations.

"The more visible I was, the more they wanted me to speak," Jeffrey said. "To me, it just tells me of the grace of God and how He can even use a struggling, stuttering guy like me in His work."

So after two years with the Chargers, he decided it was time to pursue the calling to preach.

"In one sense I had lived that dream of being a pro football player, but it wasn't what God made me for—He made me to be in the ministry," he said. "I started seminary the next spring after playing one more season in San Diego. Then, I decided to go full speed into ministry."

Jeffrey and his wife Sheila, a Baylor speech therapy major, moved back to Texas. Jeffrey received his master's of divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1981. He worked at the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas before joining Prestonwood Baptist Church in 1984 as student minister. At Prestonwood, he served as minister to married adults and associate pastor of pastoral care until being named lead pastor of the church's new Dallas campus in February 2014.

"I still stutter," Jeffrey said. "But somewhere back there, Sheila said, 'Just tell them upfront you're a good stutterer. You stutter well.' It gets everybody relaxed, and then you just go on. In one sense, it makes people listen even more attentively. It's just facing it and admitting it, and realizing it's the way the Lord made me. He can use even me. I've been speaking for 40 plus years now."

In addition to being a pastor, Jeffrey is a motivational speaker, and in 2009, he added "author" to his resume. He published *If I Can, Y-Y-You Can!*, a motivational book about his life and the lessons he's learned.

Jeffrey's motivational speeches reflect pep talks, "pep talks for life," as he calls them. He uses the illustration of being a football player: a pep talk gets you ready to play a great game. But in life, the pep talks "get you fired up and inspired to make your life count."

"I love everything I do," he said. "The common denominator is people. I love people. I love speaking to people in a way that helps, inspires, teaches or motivates. I get to speak to all types of groups. I love just being involved in the lives of people and, hopefully, making a positive difference in their lives."

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