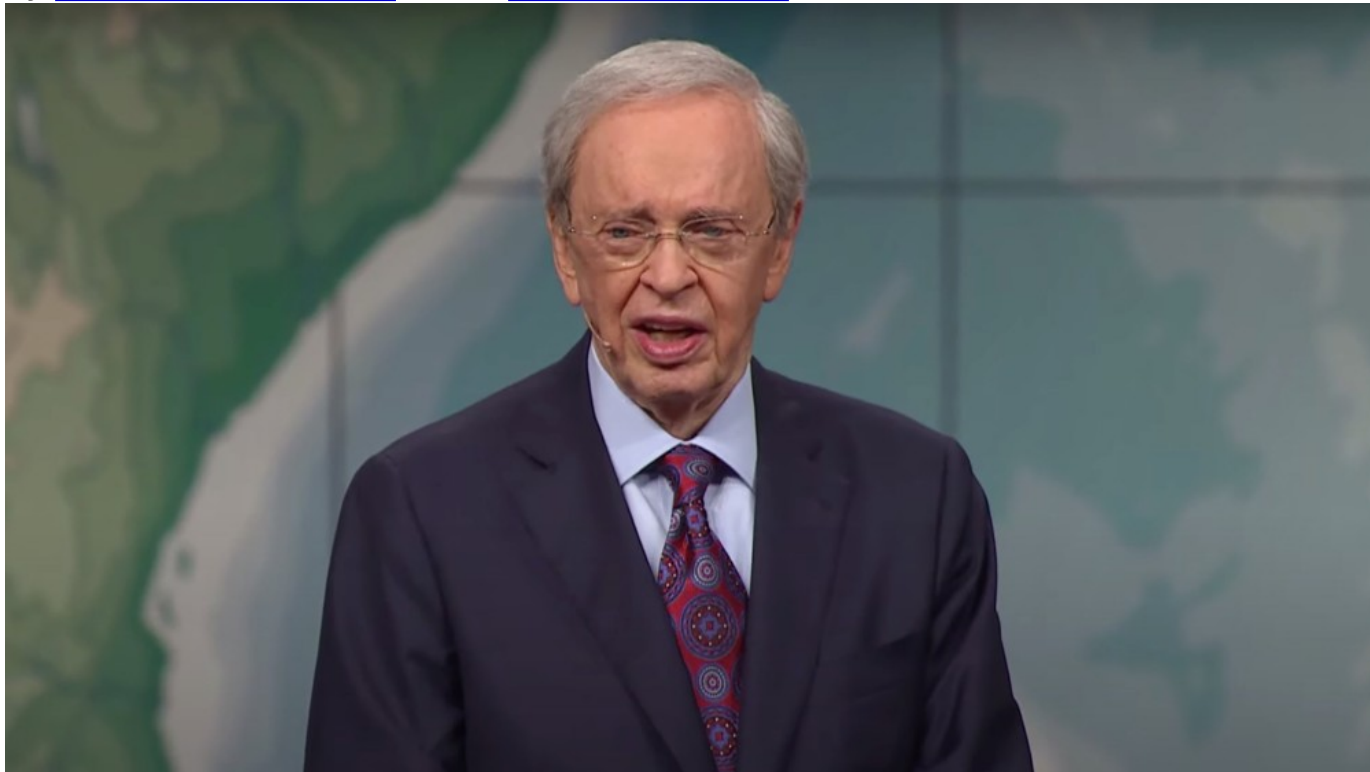


Baptist leader Charles Stanley steps down from Atlanta church

by [Emily McFarlan Miller](#) in the [October 21, 2020](#) issue



(Video screengrab via In Touch Ministries)

Influential pastor Charles Stanley is stepping down from his role at First Baptist Church in Atlanta after more than 50 years.

“As much as I love being your pastor, I know in my heart this season has come to an end,” Stanley told his church in a prerecorded message shown at the end of First Baptist’s online service on September 13.

In the message, he said he had informed the church’s board earlier this month that he planned to step down as senior pastor.

Stanley, who turned 88 last month, won’t be retiring completely, he said. Rather, he will take the title of pastor emeritus and focus on In Touch Ministries, the ministry he founded in 1977 to share his teaching.

Associate pastor Anthony George will become senior pastor of the church, according to the church's 2017 succession plan.

Stanley came to First Baptist in 1969, according to In Touch Ministries. The church now has more than 12,000 members and estimates that millions of people around the world watch its services online, as reported by *Christianity Today*.

In addition to pastoring the Atlanta church, Stanley was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1984 and 1985. He played a pivotal role in the so-called Conservative Resurgence within the denomination, according to *Christianity Today*. —Religion News Service