

## I REMEMBER DAD

Roy H. Lanier Jr.

“Son, remember that a man may preach nothing but the truth all his life, but still lose his soul because he did not preach the whole truth.”

Now, that was very typical of my father, Roy H. Lanier Sr. He cared whether men would have the courage to preach to problems that needed correction. He saw too many men who avoided reproof and rebuking. He often said such men were “Baseball preachers,” winding up and throwing a curve ball around all the sinful folks in the crowd.

Dad was born in Forestburg, Texas August 31, 1899, one of eleven children, the fifth from the eldest child. At age six, my granddad moved the family in a railway freight car to a farm in western Oklahoma, near Sentinel. The community was Retrop (“Porter” spelled backwards since there was already one town nearby with that name). He was reared on a cotton and wheat farm. His parents were Christians, and he was baptized by J. W. Crumley at age 17. He had already been leading the singing at church, but quickly he was called on to teach lessons and ultimately he preached for the church for several months. He had been part of the “Lanier Trio” when he was a pre-teen that often sang at the nearby country churches. Two of his older sisters would stand him on the front row bench, he would sing the soprano melody, and his sisters would stand behind him and add alto and tenor. He also attended many of the famous singing schools of the day held in western Oklahoma.

Dad was reared in tough times. He worked hard on the farm, a wheat and cotton farm. He was known to be one of the best “threshers” around in the wheat harvest. He recounted to me that he was setting a record of pounds picked in the cotton patch one day, but he made the mistake of going to the well for a drink. One of the older men had dropped his “chaw,” and the drink made him nauseous, so he missed the record. He also told me, “Son, the only use I ever had for a Prince Albert tobacco can was to carry my New Testament to the field.”

He attended ACC in Abilene, Texas though several of the older brothers and sisters attended Cordell or Thorp Springs colleges. He intended to join an army ROTC group that allowed college attendance, but was persuaded by J. P. Sewell and H. E. Speck to delay. By the time his draft notice for WW I came, incidentally lost in the mail for six months (!), the war was over. Dad had regular preaching appointments at Haskell, Throckmorton, and Robert Lee that allowed him to work his way through school. He was graduated in 1922 and moved to Waxahachie, Texas as the local preacher. He met Curtyce Mitchell there and in December of 1923 they were married. Two daughters and one son were born to this union.

My father’s parents lived in later life on a farm in Post, Texas, but after granddad had a stroke, Dad moved them to Fort Worth to care for them. I remember both Mother and Dad as very careful and dedicated in their care for both of them. However, my grandmother died first of heart failure. Since my mother’s younger brother was in the funeral home business in Waxahachie, my uncle, Clovis Mitchell, handled the funeral. The funeral was in Sentinel,

Oklahoma and burial was in the Retrop Cemetery west of town. I remember that Dad helped drive the hearse to Oklahoma.

Dad did local work in numerous places: Waxahachie, Brownwood, San Antonio, Abilene, Fort Worth, all in Texas, along with Roswell, New Mexico, Denver, Colorado, and Phoenix, Arizona. He did eighteen years of revival meeting work, traveling across forty-four states. Dad and Mother often bought houses as we moved from place to place, and they always did some repairs and remodeling. He was a pretty good carpenter, a good painter, and a master at paper hanging. My job was always to tear off and throw away the old paper and gauze underneath, clean up after his sawing, and be sure the tops were always on the paint cans.

In WW II days, preachers could get half-fare "Clergy passes" on the trains, so he took advantage of them. His baggage consisted of a Samsonite 3-suiter and a Smith Corona portable typewriter that he used daily for his heavy load of writing. He related to me that he ended up more often turning the suitcase on its edge in the aisle to sit on, since he usually gave his seat to military wives traveling with children.

For a revival meeting in a country church near Fort Worth during the 30's, he was paid by being given the privilege for the family to pick all day in a black-eye pea patch. So, he loaded us up and we picked all day in the pea patch. For the next three days, we shelled peas and canned them. My main job in canning was to turn the sealer machine, take the cans out of the pressure cooker, rush them to the wash tub to cool them down, and then dry them off and stack them in

the pantry. Another time Dad was paid with 50 half-gallon jars of peach pickles, and they were scrumptious. However, Mother never let us open a jar unless Dad was home from his meetings. At another time, he was paid in 5-gallon cans of sorghum syrup. I never remember either Mother or Dad complaining about the pay in those depression days, and evidently they were good managers, for we kids never did without much. I did have feed sack underwear and summer shirts.

Dad often pioneered works in difficult places, such as Salt Lake City even in the early 30's. He did many meetings in the 30's and 40's in the northwestern states. Typical of his early works was a tent meeting held in Sayre, Oklahoma in 1928, resulting in sixteen baptisms and the beginning of that local congregation. In the famous Nolanville Camp Meeting on the Brazos River in Texas in 1937, he had some trouble with teenagers sitting at the back of the tabernacle. They were talking and disturbing, and twice Dad stopped his sermon and asked them to be quiet. When they continued talking, he came down off the pulpit, walked to the back row, picked up one of the boys *by his ear* and walked him out of the tabernacle. All the while he continued preaching the sermon, never missing a beat, and walked back up into the pulpit. That surely helped his sometime unruly son to be quiet in church!

I had the fortune of going with Dad on a few meetings, but I never sat in any of his school classes. That I missed. I do have most of his writings and some tapes of his classes, and I find them invaluable.

He helped begin two colleges after receiving his M. A. degree from Hardin-Simmons U. in 1950, Central Christian in Bartlesville, Oklahoma (now

Oklahoma Christian University of Arts and Science), and York College in York Nebraska. The last fifteen years of his life he directed and taught at the Bear Valley School of Preaching in Denver, Colorado, a school he helped begin in 1965. He had a great soft spot (though not shown to me as a boy growing up!) for young preachers, and hundreds of preachers still tell me of their times with him.

Dad was a master teacher. I always thought him stronger in the classroom than in the pulpit. As a grade school boy I remember him filling in for several months at the Northside church in Fort Worth, Texas. On Wednesday nights, he would stand before the group and offer to answer questions on any scripture in the Bible. As they would cite a scripture, he would quote verses before and after that scripture to give the context, then he would offer an answer to their question. I never remember him being stumped. On one occasion, in a class in the Denver school, one man was having trouble with a rather deep point. Dad realized this, went to the man, put his hands on the student's head, rubbed gently, and said, "Sometimes you have to massage it in."

As a debater, Dad had few who could match him. His quick repartee, plus his unusually broad and deep knowledge of the Bible stood him well in over fifteen jousts. Several oral debates with D. J. Whitten, a non-class brother, resulted in their written debate, the *Whitten-Lanier Debate*, and it is titled as "The debate that converted the man in error." Brother Whitten left the non-class churches and continued to preach. At my father's passing, he wrote a sweet note to my mother and the family.

He was also a prolific and scholarly writer. He wrote over thirty-five hundred articles for religious papers from his earliest years to the very last year of his life. He was on staff at the *Gospel Advocate* for sixteen years, and among his prodigious writings are eleven volumes of the *Annual Lesson Commentaries*. From 1957 till his passing in 1980 he wrote for the *Firm Foundation*, producing weekly articles in the *Problem Page*. His books were numerous, but the one that brought him the most satisfaction was *The Timeless Trinity*, the largest study of the Godhead available in the brotherhood. He also published 40 tracts that are still widely distributed today.

I remember that Dad wanted to be fair. He was never known to take undue advantage in nearly any situation. In a college lectureship discussion forum in 1949 where I was present, several preachers berated song leaders who they thought abused the worship assemblies and did not cooperate with the preacher. Dad arose and said, "For every one singer that has mistreated a preacher I will name a dozen singers who have been very good and kind to a preacher." In his debates he was never accused of resorting to less than gentlemanly speeches. He was attacked unfairly and viciously on one occasion when there was general problem in the brotherhood, Dad wrote some very definitive studies. Several prominent brethren began to spread untrue rumors rather than deal with his biblical arguments. I became quite upset. I did a bit of investigating and found some revealing facts. I took them to Dad, but he declined to use them. He simply said, "Son, let them say all they want; my friends will not believe them, my enemies would never believe otherwise."

I remember Dad as quite an athlete. He never said much about it, but we played "burnout" when I was 10 years old, throwing the baseball back and forth, and I found out he was a star pitcher in college. He also coached the ladies basketball team at A.C.C. In my teen years, we rented rooms to dozens of boys who attended ACC during WW II since we lived only one block from the campus. One day in 1944 (Dad was 45 years old at the time), when he brought my lunch to me on a farm where I was working, one of the boys who was on the football team, also working on the farm, began wrestling around with Dad. He was a big strapping fellow, who weighed in around two hundred pounds, and I wondered how Dad would handle him. Well, it was easy: Dad picked him up in his arms and pitched him over the hood of our old 1941 Dodge! What a shock to that boy! He never challenged Dad again.

Another time Dad was trying to teach me at about age 8 how to use a slingshot he had fashioned out of some heavy twine and a tongue out of one of my old shoes. We were down at the hay barn, so he put one of the milk buckets on a fence post, then he backed off about twenty yards. He said, "Now, son, this is what you are supposed to do." He twirled the slingshot around his head a few times, let the rock go, and he knocked that old milk bucket off the fence. In later years I teased him about being lucky, but he would chortle and say it was pure skill.

In the early 30's Dad preached for a year and a half in Roswell, New Mexico. He worked in an apple packing shed to make ends meet, and was usually gone most of the nights. So, we had a big German Shepherd dog named

Ranger. This fine dog was legendary in his protection of the family. One window on the front porch was left open at night, and Mother told us that Ranger would make his rounds a time or two each night, in and out of the house and around the yard. Once, while chained to a tree in the front yard, he took out the seat of a man's pants, a visiting preacher. But, he became a chicken killer, and we sorely needed our chickens for eggs and for fryers. So, Dad caught him chasing the chickens one day, took out his old Smith and Wesson 38 caliber revolver, took careful aim, and shot him. He hit Ranger only in the ear! Ranger never chased chickens again; Dad claimed the rest of his life that he aimed for Ranger's ear!

Dad really enjoyed fishing. He would load the boat on a day's outing at Eagle Lake west of Fort Worth, come in after dark, and we would have to help clean his catch. Mother always made sure we had fried fish for breakfast. While in Dauphin, Manitoba with us on a campaign in the 70's, he caught a huge Pike measuring about 30 inches. I took his picture, had an 8x10 blown up and framed, and the men at the preachers school hung it in the school hall. He was quite proud of that fish.

In the Problem Page article "Sixty Years of Preaching," *Firm Foundation*, 1976, he gave several warnings to older preachers: "going to seed on a hobby," stopping their study of the Bible, preaching sermons that are too long, being too critical of young preachers, and making only a few scripture references. He also spoke of being tedious and slow in delivery.

His parting words were: “Be plain, forceful in delivery, scriptural in content, kind and loving in attitude; preach what the people need, not necessarily what they want; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

Some things he said through the years have stuck with me:

“Son, the front gate only swings one way.”

“A gospel preacher is not the Lord’s policeman.”

“There is no need to be sophomoric in your preaching.”

“Pride will be the preacher’s battle all his life.”

“A good situation is where good things outnumber the bad, not where everything is good and nothing bad.”

Now, that was my Dad, the gospel preacher and teacher. I count myself most fortunate to remember having such a Dad.