

# The Harvester

## Preparing Souls

## To Serve The Lord



Volume 33

July 2013

Number 12

## JACKIE M. STEARSMAN CONTINUING THE LEGACY OUTSIDE FLORIDA

Jackie M. Stearsman (affectionately known by many of his former students as “JMS”) has been a direct part of the Florida School of Preaching for forty years. As mentioned in June’s Harvester, in our May board meeting, Jackie announced that he and Joyce decided to “leave the State of Florida.” In his letter to the board, he also stated,

I owe a debt of gratitude to the Florida School of Preaching. You permitted me to raise my two boys while serving under brother Carr, and under the Board for several years...I have tried to step aside directing the school and give Brian and the Board my full support. That support you still have even though I will not be a part of those making decisions for the direction of the school or a part of the teaching program.

I am more convinced now than ever of the need for preachers to have a part in training preachers. Schools do well in providing an environment for religious instruction in a Biblical environment. However, a “scholar” may explain a text but there is a need for someone to help congregations know how a given truth or fact applies to them in their situation. Who better than a preacher who loves the people and lives among the people is better able to identify what is profitable for them. I love preaching, and encouraging preaching. If I have encouraged a few to preach, and congregations to support preaching I am not far from the heart of our Lord in this manner.

Jackie began teaching part-time with the school in the mid-1970s and became a full-time instructor in 1986. He served as director of the school from 1992 until 2009, when he stepped down from his full-time position. He may have left Florida then had it not been for the weak real estate market. Be that as it may, those of us connected with the school were *elated* that he and Joyce stayed in our area. When Jackie made the announcement, I was not surprised, though, like any loss, there was an initial sense of emptiness.

We are honoring brother Jackie Stearsman in this issue of the Harvester. Make no mistake, though, Jackie is alive and well—*this is no obituary!* Jackie has meant so much to so many people! Included in this issue are articles from his two sons, David and Daniel. They offer insight to the kind of man Jackie was as a single dad in the home and continues to be in the classroom and pulpit. This influence helped shape their lives to be involved in preaching and teaching the Gospel. We hope this *Harvester* will help you not only to better appreciate Jackie M. Stearsman, but also to better appreciate the kind of influence to which our students have been exposed for the last forty years and to which we continuously seek to expose them! —*Editor*



A farewell fellowship at Orange Street on May 26, 2013.

# A FAMILY DIRECTOR

By David Stearsman

As my father leaves Florida and heads to Tennessee, he leaves behind many students and associates with whom he shares a special bond. He has spent much of his life in and around the Florida School of Preaching and has formed unique friendships that have brought innumerable blessings. In this time when others are showing their appreciation with dedications and tributes, I would like to express my thanks to him for being so dedicated himself. As his son, I believe the qualities you saw in the classroom are the same ones that make him a great dad.

If you have heard my dad teach, you'll recall that he often reflects on working in the coal mines in Western Kentucky, while at the same time having a great desire to preach. He decided to change his life course and enroll at Freed-Hardeman University. He was admitted, but quickly found himself under an exacting professor named William Woodson trying to learn Koine Greek. Because he hadn't made studying English a priority, he struggled with learning two languages at once. Yet he would not give up. In fact, through perseverance and dedication, he would go on to teach Greek himself for decades. He would always conclude this story by telling his students, "If I can do it, anybody can."

My dad didn't use these details to persuade others that he was a hero. If he had, the impact wouldn't have lasted much further than the classroom door. Instead, these reflections were reserved for beginning Greek students in

an effort to encourage them. He remembered the struggles, and took great joy in seeing students apply themselves and succeed. In my youth, I knew that my dad took pride in introducing me to students who gave their all. It made an impression on me because his enthusiasm was such that I would have been embarrassed

to have been embarrassed.

I have known people who can thrive in a classroom setting, yet fail to make application in the more difficult every day setting. Not my dad. I remember vividly traveling to visit family in Kentucky on sixteen hour road trips, straight through the night. My dad was armed with a thermos of coffee, my brother with an arsenal of questions. I remember that every topic was up for discussion, Biblical or otherwise. This type of forum not only made my brother and I realize what my father knew, but how much he believed in what he knew. Nobody would have made serious application like he did without truly believing (2 Tim. 2:15).

My dad has always been open to questions. I could go to him at night and wake him up mid-snore and he wouldn't be bothered. When he was busy working at home under a deadline for work, he would pause to listen and answer my queries. I would often joke (complain) about my dad waking up at 3:30 a.m. to fire up the daisy wheel printer attached to the Kaypro, jarring the foundations of the house. It wasn't until much later in life that I realized he probably did so because he had been dealing with a family issue during the day.

As a single parent, he also had to fill the void and provide emotional care that we needed. He practiced his gentle demeanor in our home, and approached my spiritual development with tenderness. Now that I am a parent, I understand that even when my dad had to be firm, he was fair. If he didn't feel like we were making the effort, he explained that he was forced into disciplining us for our benefit. He wouldn't be doing his job as our dad, he would tell my brother and me, if he didn't discipline us. The few times I did see my dad have to take disciplinary action in the classroom, it was respectful and aimed at getting the student to meet his potential.

One might think that a house with a dad and two boys would function somewhat loosely, but it never felt like we lived in a bachelor pad. My dad was organized and knew where he kept everything. His sense of humor often carried us through the difficult times. Perhaps you've heard his joke about the family meal tradition of "burnt raw"—burnt on the outside, raw on the inside. In reality, my father learned to hold his own in the kitchen. Our laundry was always nicely folded and distributed to us via "air mail" in a Publix bag thrown upstairs in front of our bedroom doors. "Clothes!" he would call. (We still had to be guys.)

## The Harvester

Published Monthly  
Florida School of Preaching  
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During all my years, I have never heard my dad complain about serving God. No matter the difficulties of raising two sons by himself, and despite the financial responsibility and doctrinal issues that fall upon the director of the school, he emphasized that we as a family needed to be thankful. I often wondered about his remarks and how easily he could have used single parenthood to throw up his hands and say that life wasn't fair. Instead, he was grateful. "God has brought us this far," he would say. "We can't give up on Him now."

As he leaves the school for Tennessee, my dad is still working for the Lord. He intends to write and thereby will continue teaching and influencing me and my brother, our children, and all of the past and future students of the school.

These days, I hear myself repeating a lot of the statements of my "family director," the one you know as the director at Florida School of Preaching. I'm not embarrassed now like I thought I might be when I was younger. I'm thankful that God blessed me richly with such a father.

## MY FATHER'S INFLUENCE

By Daniel Stearsman

What has Jackie Stearsman meant to me over the years? Without a doubt, there is no human who has influenced me more than my dad. Dad was always a great provider. He made sure we had so many of the necessities of life and so many wants too. As kids, Dad loved being with David and I. Whether we were at the Family Fun Center, where I played endless games of Frogger, or taking us for pizza or ice cream, dad loved being with us. Dad would let us have hamsters (that got loose), a fish tank with an Oscar, and a dog named Skipper. Dad's love for us ran deep. Dad would stand up for us. He would get in the trenches, push back at times and protect us. Meanwhile he was teaching us how to be men and to stand up for what is right.

Dad's childhood roots remained with him throughout the years. In some respects, Dad never left the hills of Kentucky, the arduous labors of farm life, or the deep crevices of the coal mines. While geographically Dad traveled from Michigan to Florida, his work ethic of his youth traveled with him to Florida where he has resided for the last 40 years. Dad was driven, always pushing,

and always passionate for deeper study. With the needs of brethren on his heart, he would stir in the wee hours of the morning to write or respond or to think of some method to help those in need. It was no different when he became an elder; the flock was on his heart and mind. As a child I remember brethren calling him looking for wisdom, an empathetic ear, and sometimes a godly shoulder to lean on through some struggle or trial. In those conversations I remember dad doing a lot of listening (James 1:19).

One bit of wisdom that Dad was fond of telling was that you could tell a lot about people by what upsets or bothers them. There were few things that bothered him more than laziness or indifference. But, at the same time, Dad had a way of taking people where they were in life. For any seeking soul, he was there to lean on. He was always quick to greet visitors and wanted them to feel welcome.

Dad loved the Florida School of Preaching and my experiences in life are so intertwined with FSOP from childhood up until now. I can remember sitting with B. C. and Sybil Carr, and Sybil reflecting on individuals who thought

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\*Our final deposit for the month is usually made on the last Wednesday of the month. All contributions received after that time are reported on the next month's financial statement.

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a preacher's dog ought to behave a certain way. In my teens, I can remember getting dropped off at the YMCA on a Tuesday or Thursday night so he could go teach another class for the evening students. FSOP began in 1969 and a few years later in the mid-1970s Dad began to teach. Teaching and study was his passion. In many ways, the students at FSOP were like sons. He loved watching them grow, and he always expected students to give their very best no matter what their abilities were. He was not afraid to challenge students. But, neither was he a relentless taskmaster. He could push without pushing people over. Further, he wanted students to think and use their minds

in reasoning through various tests that he would put their way. He looked for more than just regurgitating memory work. He wanted to see application. For roughly four decades he instilled in preacher students that preaching is more than academic, but also involves the heart and the will of man.

Dad's influence on the kingdom will be far felt. Dad now turns a new chapter in his labor in the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58) as he goes to retire and write in the hills of Tennessee. We will miss him for sure! In fact, we miss him already! May God grant him knowledge, wisdom, joy, and more years in His service!

### **“Let thine eyes observe my ways”**

As a former student of Jackie's, it is easy to see why he remains to rise to the top in teaching “the way of God more accurately.” When it comes to preacher work ethic, Jackie still *writes the book* for his sphere of influence in this generation! Jackie is also one who values genuine character as does God. Three kinds of people will drop in respect as quickly as a “nine pound hammer”: (1) those who lie; (2) those who are lazy; and (3) those who act one way among one group of people or setting and then another way among a different group or setting (i.e., hypocrites), including preachers who take on a totally different persona when they “mount the pulpit” (such as strutting around like a rooster or so drastically changing their voice that one would think they are playing a different role!). One of the most memorable lines of wisdom from Jackie that I practice and often repeat to my students is, “Don't say the church of Christ teaches...[a certain doctrine]. You can find a church of Christ that teaches almost anything. Rather, we should say the Bible teaches...[a certain doctrine].” Though Jackie is just a man, we will be better people by imitating his example (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1).—*Brian Kenyon*