

How Firm a Foundation: A Tribute to the Seniors of Cofer's Chapel

For the past three years, it has been our privilege – and a real joy – to work with the senior adults at Cofer's Chapel. From the days when there was the "50+" group, until more recent times when all the seniors became one fellowship, we have observed this special group of people. When we first joined Cofer's in 1999, Bro. Eugene Waddell, a former senior pastor of the church, as well as Foreign Missions Director, worked with them. For as long as we have known this congregation, many senior adults have labored in the church, into their 70s, 80s, and even 90s. One of our seniors, now inactive, will celebrate her 100th birthday this month. Many have gone home to Heaven over the years.

As I thought about this group who love their Lord, their church, and each other, I'm reminded of the old hymn "How Firm a Foundation." How its truths comfort and assure us, taken as they are from Scripture. While one senior might walk every day, and seemingly have an inexhaustible supply of energy, another may be bent by age, chronic back pain, and have to walk with a cane or a walker. One may have a mind and memory as sharp as when he or she was 50, while another is retreating inexorably into the darkness of dementia. It's hard to understand. Yet, the Lord cares for each one and is at work in the life of every one of His children.

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said—
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

The foundation of the believer is the Word of God. He has

spoken, and His word is true, His promises are sure. We who have fled to Him for refuge (trusted Him for salvation) are resting on a sure foundation.

*Fear not, I am with thee, oh, be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.*

Based on Isaiah 41:10, we are admonished not to fear nor be dismayed. He is our God, and He will do all for us. We are held securely in His mighty hand.

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee thy trouble to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

Isaiah 43 says when we pass through deep waters, they will not overflow us, and when we go through the fire we will not be burned. Sustaining grace through all of life. Cofer's seniors exemplify that every day.

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not harm thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.*

This stanza pairs well with the previous one, with its reference to fiery trials. I love the line "my grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;"

*E'en down to old age all my people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love.
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn
Like lambs shall the still in my bosom be borne.*

This is the stanza that my heart bequeaths to our Cofer's seniors: Even in old age we prove His "sovereign, eternal,

unchangeable love." Even though the hairs of our head turn white, He will still carry us like lambs in his bosom! Wow! (Isaiah 46:1-4) Psalms 71 and 92 both reference the strength and presence of a God who will not forsake us in old age, and can still make us fruitful. Seniors can serve! Do not make the mistake of writing them off. I have noticed, as one who's recently entered that group, that retirees tend to not be included or invited to minister as before, and that's a mistake, in my opinion. Knowledge, wisdom, sound judgment, and discernment generally characterize my age group better than younger groups. Obviously, we have to make adjustments, and can't do as much as we used to, but we can still contribute!

*The soul that on Jesus doth lean for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.*

The hope and mighty assurance for all of us, regardless of age.

REO Pays Tribute: F. Leroy Forlines

I have lost count of the great Free Will Baptist leaders and individuals I have heard say Leroy Forlines had a profound impact on their Christian life. Teacher, writer, speaker, thinker, and short-term missionary, all of these were chapters in one of the greatest books in Free Will Baptist history. God continues to use his spiritual legacy in all of these roles, educating and inspiring many generations of Christians. His passage through the brief span of time given to all men and

women has left a lasting and extremely significant footprint for many generations of disciples who have followed and are following his lead.

Forlines had felt a call to the ministry as a teenager. He was born in 1926 in Greenville, North Carolina, the eldest son of John and Leta Forlines. Early in his life, he worked as a mechanic at Elbert Smith's Esso Station. In October 1944 at the age of 17, he converted to Christianity. Two years later he decided God was calling him to preach. So, in 1948 he moved to Nashville to begin his education for the ministry at Free Will Baptist Bible College. During his time as a student, he preached his very first sermon on a downtown Nashville street corner. It was also during his early years that he was deeply impacted by L.C. Johnson's class on Arminian Theology. Throughout these college years, he had a strong role in student body leadership, serving as the president of his 1952 graduating class.

After graduation, he immediately entered the ministry, serving as pastor of First Free Will Baptist Church in Newport News, Virginia from June 1952 to August 1953. He resigned this role and returned to Free Will Baptist Bible College to join the teaching faculty, a role which he would continue to hold full-time for almost 40 years. In 1957 he met and fell in love with Carolyn Le Fay Gilbert. They married and had two sons, Jon and James.

During those early years in the professorship, he was continuing his own education. In 1959 he attained his M.A. from the Winona Lake School of Theology. In 1962 he earned his B.D. from the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1970 he earned a Th.M from the Chicago Graduate School of Theology.

In 1963, he began working with the Commission for Theological Integrity and was made its chairman. He would remain highly involved in its leadership for the next 50 years. He officially and publicly stepped down as its chairman at the

2012 National Convention.

Although Forlines retired from a full-time position from FWBBC in 1992, he has remained involved in its work, being granted the honorary title, Professor Emeritus. In this capacity, he continued to teach at the college until five years ago. But he kept fairly regular hours in his Welch office until the college campus moved to Gallatin. He has also taught overseas throughout his retirement. Beginning in 1996, with the assistance of Free Will Baptist International Missions he made numerous trips to lecture in Ukraine and Russia to Baptist pastors.

Forlines's ministry has spanned six decades. He has written multitudes of great Christian articles and books during his long ministry. Among his best and most influential may be Biblical Ethics, Biblical Systematics, Morals and Orthodoxy, The Doctrine of Perseverance, The Romans Commentary, Classical Arminianism, and The Quest for Truth. His entire career has been characterized by writing book after book. He just finished another one for which he is now seeking publication. For his hours of writing and study, he uses an office which Sylvan Park Free Will Baptist Church graciously provided after the school's relocation. Welch has an office waiting for him in its Gallatin facilities into which he will soon relocate once again.

Today, Leroy Forlines is a healthy 91-year-old, having celebrated his most recent birthday in November. He and Fay continue to reside in the house they have lived in for almost 55 years.

REO Pays Tribute: Roy Beem

Our previous tribute articles have been about family members, preachers, teachers, missionaries, and mentors. Most of them were professional ministers for a good portion of their adult lives. We do well to pay tribute to those people that have served in ministry full-time. We would be remiss though if we only focused on those that pastored churches, planted new works around the globe, or taught in college classrooms. Most of us have not done those things. The majority of us are laypeople – serving and working in our local church body while also maintaining full-time employment in the secular world. With that in mind, I could think of no one I wanted to write about more than Roy Beem.

Roy Beem graduated from high school in 1960. After that he served in the military for two years. He was saved after his military service and enrolled at Welch College (FWBBC back then) in 1965. He graduated from Belmont University in 1970 with a teaching degree.

In what was one of the most foundational moments of his life, he visited Cofer's Chapel Free Will Baptist Church in 1967. He found his church home and his future wife on that visit. He married Laura later that year and September 1st would have been their 50th wedding anniversary. (Laura went home to be with the Lord a few years ago.)

Roy was never on staff at the church and he was never a preacher or minister. That did not stop him from serving the Lord in any capacity he could. He was an usher – probably for his entire time at Cofer's. He was a trustee. An assistant Sunday school superintendent. A Sunday school teacher. A nursery worker. He mowed the grass and cleaned the building for some time as well. Roy was a servant. He worked hard and he worked with joy in all his time at Cofer's.

During those 50 years at Cofer's Chapel, Roy was an inner-city elementary school teacher for 25 of them. After he retired from teaching, he started working at Welch College – where he worked full-time for 11 years and 3 years part-time after that.

My story overlapped with Roy's at Welch, where we worked together for six years. We were both in the Physical Operations Department. (That is a fancy term for the cleaning department. We were janitors.) I started working at Welch immediately after graduating in 2000. For part of that time, we were co-workers. For part of that time, I was his supervisor. (He had no interest in being the supervisor of our department.) During my time as his supervisor, I never once had to worry about Roy getting his work done. I could assign him certain tasks and I would have full confidence he would complete them in exemplary fashion.

But my history with Roy goes back further than that. He was working at Welch when I was a student there. In all my time at the college, I do not believe there was anyone friendlier than Roy Beem. He would make time to talk to anyone and everyone. He would smile, wave, and yell "Howdy!" from across the campus. I would see him with his teenage daughter, after she got out of school for the day, and they would take walks around the campus neighborhood. I saw his love for his kids, spoken visibly and without words.

Our time at Cofer's Chapel intersected for nearly 20 years. In all that time, Roy always stayed busy and active. Recently, he decided to quietly start attending a church closer to where he lives. The drive to Cofer's is too long for him to make every week. He did not want any fuss or anything to be done when he left. While this might not constitute as a "fuss" I hope that my words here will show him that he is greatly appreciated for his life-long service and example. I loved my time working with Roy, even while I did not love the actual work. I had many great conversations with Roy about any number of topics –

books and church music among them. He was a loving husband for nearly 50 years. He is a doting and caring father and a faithful servant of God. He is my friend and I miss seeing him every Sunday where I can hear him say, "Howdy Phill!" I know he is enjoying spending time with his two grandsons and his daughter. I know he will still find ways to stay useful and productive. But the one thing I know more than anything – every church needs their pews to be filled with laypeople like Roy Beem.

REO Pays Tribute: Tom McCullough

I majored in Youth Ministry in college. Yet the head of the Missions department at Welch College was a man that impacted me deeply. I only had one class where he was the actual professor, but he was so influential on campus that through a hundred big teaching moments and a thousand small gestures, he altered the trajectory of my life and ministry.

This is not an exaggeration.

Upon my graduation, I decided to do youth ministry in an international city for a home missions church plant. While never in my title, I have felt like a missionary from day one of living here. I find no pride in this. I owe it to the passion Welch College had for biblical missions. The Global Mission Fellowship was extremely active on campus, leading prayer times, community events and spiritual life retreats. Their students were among the brightest and most spiritually mature. Their department was thriving. And Mr. Tom McCullough,

who served from 1979 to 1994 as a missionary in France, was the heart of it all.

I could not be at that school and escape the fact that my life should be about God's grace in making Jesus's name great among the nations. I could not know Mr. McCullough and not be disciplined by him.

Additionally, take the following quote from a sermon he preached in Grand Rapids, MI at the National Association of Free Will Baptists in July 2015:

"God is not American or Mexican or Bulgarian or Korean. God is not a Republican. God isn't even a capitalist. God does not salute the American flag (that doesn't mean we shouldn't). God's first language is not English or Spanish. God is not white, brown, or black. God does not play favorites. God is God and he has no political agenda. He cares not about the color of a man's skin, but the condition of his heart. And when by our speech, by our tweets, and by our Facebook entries we show more concern about a political agenda, or we contribute to the racialization of our culture, we are, in effect, limiting access to the Gospel! We do it by alienating those who don't share our political, economical, or social views. And this happens because we've traded the "Pearl of Great Price" – The Kingdom of God – for a scaled down and deformed view of whom and what we think God should value and favor and what the church should look like politically, socially, or racially... The world is too small for us to stay in our insular, parochial, homogeneous communities."

I am sincere when I say that Mr. McCullough wasn't just a huge reason that I moved to Chicago after graduation. He was instrumental in why eight years after moving here I transitioned from doing youth ministry in my church to being the point person to helping the church become a bilingual church. Even though I was never "his" student in school, my mind was absolutely transformed by his influence. After I

preached the sermon at my church nine years ago to cast the vision for bringing English and Spanish speakers together in worship and community, I emailed him to thank him because he was the first person I thought of when God first put the idea in my head.

That was just one of the many times Mr. McCullough and I corresponded after I graduated. A few years ago I was reading *Intentional Integrity* by Dr. Garnett Reid and came across a Mr. McCullough quote from a time of grieving over his late wife: *"God help me not to forget in the dark what I know to be true in the light."* I shared that with my Spanish Sunday School class the next week and it sparked a significant time of teaching, discipleship and sharing in that class. It was emotional and poignant as many of the people were at that time overwhelmed by the darkness. They were so thankful for this quote and expressed it to me through tears where you could see sorrow and joy collide. I emailed Mr. McCullough to let him know. By impacting me, he impacted a church community hundreds of miles away.

Then there was the time I emailed him before I got married two years ago to ask for advice. I had asked about 30-40 couples or individuals about this and he was someone I strongly wanted to hear back from. And he said something that that no one else did that I will never forget. He said, *"When you marry you MUST realize it's not about YOU anymore. It's about the both of you, under God's direction. Love her sacrificially, unconditionally. Let her be herself, under God's authority, not what you want to make her into."* The first part of that I had heard many times but still needed it. But the last sentence struck me like a sledgehammer. Wanting my wife to be what I want her to be in the picture perfect world in my head has been an issue I have had to work through the last two years. Thank God for Mr. McCullough's wisdom in helping me see it ahead of time. I love him for that.

But beyond the quotes, the advice and the sermons, Mr.

McCullough was just a walking evidence for how the Kingdom of God is for the "poor in spirit". He was truly a humble, God-dependent person who considered others more important than himself. When he taught and preached he exuded meekness and did not give off one ounce of arrogance. I never felt he used knowledge as a platform as many educated Christians do. I remember a time he preached about nationalism vs. patriotism and was deeply concerned that he said what he said in a balanced and fair way and expressed this to me and other students afterward. You could see in it his face how much he cared about doing what was right God's Word and by us.

There are thousands of other things that can and have been and will be said about Mr. McCullough and I am thankful for them. There are many who knew him much better than I do, many of whom were his students during his time at Welch. And many have spoken profoundly on his Facebook wall over the years. If you are on that site I encourage you to read them if you can. His imprint has been so strong in my life, I felt it appropriate to add one more. He touched people outside of the normal spheres of influence, including me. And he is worthy of honor in our words, but also in actions that make Jesus's name great among the nations.



REO Pays Tribute: Marie Lytle

On September 18, 2007 my mother, Marie Eula Buchanan Lytle was called home to Heaven at the age of 87. We had watched Alzheimer ravage her mind and body for eight years, and it was a sweet release to see her go.

Coming up on another Mother's Day, this tribute is in memory of her, and in her honor. I owe much of the man I am today to her influence, teaching, and prayers.

I saw her kneel at the altar of the Swannanoa Free Will Baptist Church in the fall of 1961 during a powerful revival meeting that swept our church, where she wept as she repented and rededicated her life to Christ. From that day forward,

she was a changed woman. We were in church every time the door was opened, and we were not permitted to miss. She prayed, she talked about the Lord to us kids, she walked with God. I saw her more than once on her knees in her room praying for her family.

I remember in January 1967 when the first Super Bowl was being played. I begged to stay home and watch it that Sunday evening, but she was adamant in her refusal. Never mind that it was the biggest game in history in the mind of a 16 year old boy. We were going to church. You didn't miss church for anything.

Much of Mother's life and special influence revolves around music. In my mind I can still see her standing at the kitchen sink and singing. You have to understand this; she was not a good singer. She never sang a special in church; didn't even sing in the choir. But her music and her heart, above all, touched the heart of God – and it touch me deeply.

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The first song I can distinctly remember Mother singing was "You Are My Sunshine," a very popular tune in the 1950s. The first Christian song I recall was the lovely "How Beautiful Heaven Must Be." I suppose that was around 1956 or 1957.

*We read of a place that's called Heaven
It's made for the pure and the free
These truths in God's word we are given
How beautiful Heaven must be.*

*How beautiful Heaven must be
Sweet home of the happy and free
Fair haven of rest for the weary
How beautiful Heaven must be*

Mother loved to sing "Is Not This The Land of Beulah?" Number 27 in the old Baptist Hymnal. She would sing it with strong

emotion, especially the second verse. It might have been her testimony:

*I can see far down the mountain where I wandered weary years
Often hindered on my journey by the ghosts of doubts and fears
Broken vows and disappointments, thickly sprinkled on my way
But the Spirit led unerring to the land I hold today.*

I have to believe that it was, at least in part, her love for that song that birthed the same love in me; it has been a favorite my whole life, nearly 60 years now. In fact, I don't doubt for a moment that my love for music and song stems from my earliest recollections of how certain songs impacted her.

There was a time when I was about 10, and we had just moved to our new home in Swannanoa. I had been saved that summer in Vacation Bible School, and after we moved – probably around October or November, I crossed the little branch by our house, walked out to the woods, and sat down on a fallen tree. I started singing:

*He never said I'd have silver or gold
Yet He has promised me riches untold
He never suffered a life without care
Yet He relieves every burden I bear.*

*Sin stained the cross with the blood of my Lord
Yet He permitted it without a word
Why, tell me why, He redeemed you and me?
Love is why you and I are free.*

Life wasn't easy for Mother. She worked very hard at a local factory. My dad did not follow Christ for many years; for ten years he did not darken the door of a church, and was very bitter and angry. My parents argued frequently and there were attitudes and undercurrents in the home I never understood. Yet for the most part, we had a happy childhood.

Mother didn't drive, and so for several years until I got my driver's license, we were dependent on folks in our church for

rides to church on Sundays and Wednesdays, revival meetings, and special activities. Several families, including a couple of Mom's best friends, were so good to come and pick us up, and there were four of us! Through the years, we rarely missed a service. Mother was determined that we be at God's house, hearing the Word preached and taught, and singing His praises. She loved the old hymns and she loved gospel music, and as a result, so did I.

My dad came to the Lord in 1971, and for the last decade of his life – he died in 1981 – he, too, was faithful to church.

By then, I had finished Bible College, gotten married, and began preparing for the mission field. Judy and I, along with baby Michael, said goodbye to my parents in Asheville, North Carolina as we boarded a plane to fly to Costa Rica to begin Spanish language school in August 1976. Standing there as the flight was announced, and seeing Mother's tears flow as she kept hugging Michael, Judy, and me is a powerful memory. Also powerful is the memory of my parents and sister coming to Panama to visit us, and our pride and joy in introducing them to the country that had become our home.

After my dad passed away in 1981, Mother lived for 26 more years. Church attendance, ministry (especially to nursery age kids), and caring for family remained her heartbeat. As her mind began to deteriorate in the late 1990s, followed by full-blown Alzheimer's in the early 2000s, life changed for her.

She always enjoyed music, though, up until the final couple of years. My brother would go see her in the nursing home every day, and took a CD of praise and worship music for her to hear. We gave her a Gaither Homecoming CD.

The final two years of her life, Mother was totally unresponsive. She didn't know us, she couldn't speak, and her body was twisted and drawn up as she simply lay there on the nursing home bed. We had prayed many times that the Lord would take her home, yet we didn't know it was imminent on September 15, 2007, the last time we saw her. I was alone with her,

speaking softly, and just watching her, when the idea occurred to me that I would sing to her.

Undoubtedly her favorite song, at least for the last 25 years of her life, was Squire Parson's classic "Sweet Beulah Land." Now I'm not a singer at all, and my best singing is done in the shower or in the car with no one else around. But I began to sing:

*I'm kind of homesick for a country
To which I've never been before
No sad goodbyes will there be spoken
And time won't matter any more.*

*Beulah land, I'm longing for you
And some sweet day on thee I'll stand
There my home will be eternal
Beulah land, sweet Beulah land*

Would you believe it? My mother, totally unresponsive for two years, lying in bed like a vegetable, began to respond to the song! While I couldn't understand the words she spoke – it was more like mumbling – it was evident it had touched her and that she was trying to sing along. That was a precious moment.

Two days later my brother called to say that she was gone.

Happy Mother's Day to my precious mother. Thank you for your godly influence.



REO Pays Tribute: Bert Tippet

"When you come to the point where Jesus is all you have, you'll find he's all you need." [Bert Tippet]

If men were measured by their titles, Bert Tippet would barely register on my personal radar. But since men are measured by their influence, I still think about him often 15 years after graduating from the college where he impacted me, and even years after his death.

What was his official position at Welch College back when I was a student? I honestly cannot recall. I think it was something PR related. Even though I cannot tell you that, I can tell you story after story of the ways he disciplined me and countless others. It wasn't his title (to my knowledge), but he was definitely a campus pastor. He encouraged like few others. He was sought for advice like few others. When Dr. Matthew Pinson took over as president of the college my senior year, he met with the Student Council and asked us our advice and suggestions for changes the school needed. Mine was simple: Let Mr. Tippet preach more. The agreement from my fellow students was audible and enthusiastic.

I don't know if there is anything I can tell you about his preaching other than I never took a single note during one of his sermons, but 20 years later I can recall many, many of his quotes: "The most godlike thing you can do is forgive," "We need to get to the point where we say 'I will not sin.' But you say, 'Mr. Tippet that's impossible.' Look how easy we give up!" And, even though cancer took his life on January 5, 2011 he was able to say, "Everything that is good comes from God. Even cancer." This man understood Truth, excelled at

communicating it, and the things he preached have stayed with me and my heart has been stirred by them in crucial moments of spiritual battles in my faith.

Anyone who attended services that Mr. Tippett directed, most notably the beginning of the semester services and campus church on Wednesday nights, will tell you that he was a master at giving an invitation after the sermon. We could have listened to the most dry, boring 40-minute talk and Mr. Tippett could speak for five minutes and you would feel like you had heard a great sermon that night. He was so genuine and so skilled at making a profound point quickly and he connected so well with college-aged students (despite being decades older during my time), that the altar would be filled with people wanting to repent.

Mr. Tippett had a truly unique ability to connect to people from opposite ends of the spectrum. Christianity is, sadly, divided by doctrine and conviction. Even within Free Will Baptists. Yet from a distance I would watch him have lunch with a person from one extreme side of an issue one day and coffee with someone from the other side the next day. I have no doubt he believed in Christian unity and reconciliation and did his part until his last breath to live them out.

Roger Kint said, "The Devil's greatest trick was convincing the world he didn't exist." It wasn't a trick, but I think the most amazing thing Mr. Tippett did on the campus of Welch College was causing us to believe he wasn't great. He was the kind of man where I feel like I could poll the students and ask them "Who is the best speaker on campus?" or "Which faculty or administrative staff has the most impact here?" And they would think of three or four people, none of them Mr. Tippett. And then I could say, "What about Mr. Tippett?" And their eyes would light up in agreement, "Yes!" How could we forget about him?

Because that is the kind of man he was. He was humble, willing

to be overlooked, like an incredibly well-kept secret that everyone knows but no one tells. He was Christian virtue hidden in plain sight. If he were alive today to read any of this, he'd credit to God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ and grace before I finished half a sentence. One of my clearest memories of him was a story he told of a personal failure he had that I won't repeat because it is not my place to do so. But I remember it because he was transparent about it and by telling it he communicated to the Welch student body that he was biblically self-aware; he didn't think more highly of himself than he ought. Yet those who knew him thought as highly of him as possible. Precisely because he didn't.

People often make hyperbolic statements like this when people die, but I'd have said this before his death and I'll say it 40 years from now if I'm still alive: I hope my life has 1/10th the impact on the kingdom of God that his had. I'd give anything for one more sermon, one more conversation or one more chance to see him impart his wisdom meekly to a willing learner. But since I will not, I am thankful for the memories. I have hundreds of Bert Tippett, who didn't even allow cancer to keep him from discipling people to understand the glory of our God.



REO Pays Tribute: Dr. Robert Picirilli

There are probably very few in the Free Will Baptist denomination who have never heard about Robert Eugene Picirilli. And if you haven't, well, why haven't you? Have you been paying attention at all? You need to get to know about this living legend pronto. In my mind, he and Leroy Forlines are the very epitome of today's Free Will Baptist theology. One of my great regrets is only managing to have Picirilli for one class in college (and Forlines not at all). The one Dr. Pic course I had was Fundamentals of Philosophy and unfortunately, my immature college self didn't fully appreciate this great man and did not pay enough attention in that one course. But since then, I have grown to truly recognize his theological genius and denominational significance.

Picirilli was born in North Carolina in 1932. In 1949 he left his home state to become a student at Free Will Baptist Bible College where he received his B.A. in 1953. But he was only getting started. During those first years at FWBBC, he had made a commitment to God to dedicate his life to the school. So in order to be qualified for a college professorship position, he determined to pursue his higher education. To this end, he earned an M.A. in theology from [Bob Jones University](#) in 1955 and a Ph.D. in New Testament Text from the same institution in 1963. In 1967, Bob Jones University awarded him the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree.

While still at Bob Jones, he made his move to return to FWBBC as a member of its faculty. As he recalled it in an interview by [The Helwys Society Forum](#), after attaining his M.A. he felt

a pressure to apply for teacher status a little sooner than expected in order to support his growing family. (At the time he and his wife had three daughters and would later have two more.) So just after attaining his M.A. in 1955, he approached Dr. L.C. Johnson about it. It is very fortunate for the entire denomination that this other great Free Will Baptist man wisely decided to give Picirilli the position in 1955.

He has been involved with the workings of FWBBC (now [Welch College](#)) ever since. Before retiring, he had various roles including professor, registrar, academic dean, and many other crucial school-related positions. But the college is not Picirilli's only area of impact. He has also had a profound influence on the denomination and the Christian world as a whole. He is today considered one of the most respected and influential writers, teachers, and thinkers in Free Will Baptist history. Among his best literary works are Book of Galatians; Romans; Paul the Apostle; Grace, Faith, Free Will; and Discipleship. He has also been involved with the Southeastern Section [formerly Southern Section] of the Evangelical Theological Society to which he has presented numerous papers and serving twice as the society's chairman. He has been a fellow of the Institute for Biblical Research and a member of the Research Commission of the American Association of Bible Colleges. He also frequently contributes to denominational works of discipleship, biblical instruction, and scholarship.

Picirilli retired a number of years ago and continues to reside in Nashville. In his retirement he continues to be extremely active in various ministries. He attends [Cofer's Chapel Free Will Baptist church](#) where he frequently teaches classes on various topics and regularly teaches a Sunday school class. He also remains involved with Welch, frequently engages in various scholarly studies, is a much sought after revival preacher at churches all over the country, and currently serves as chairman and treasurer of the Free Will

Baptist Historical Commission.[1. He even contributed to an article for [Rambling Ever On.](#)]



RE0 Pays Tribute: Leeman

Underwood

Editor's Note: We believe it is good and right to honor the men and women who have inspired, encouraged, and challenged us throughout our lives. REO Pays Tribute will be our ongoing attempt to do just that. We hope that our meager words will honor those to whom honor is due.

Leeman Underwood by Steve Lytle

It was probably 1972, the year Judy and I married, when I met Leeman Underwood, but I had heard about him before then. His daughter Gail was his oldest child and she was Judy's cousin and best friend growing up. She was a senior at Free Will Baptist Bible College (Welch) when we were freshmen.

Leeman was born in Flat River (Park Hills), Missouri, but grew up in Fredericktown, Missouri, the son of Vester and Edith Underwood. He came to know Christ as a young man, and grew up in Copper Mines Free Will Baptist Church. Born in 1923, he joined the army and fought in World War II. His sister Lillian, two years younger, finished his 12th grade work in 1942 so that he could graduate from high school with his class.

When he returned from the war, Leeman married Laura Bayless, from Knob Lick, MO. They settled down in Fredericktown, where Leeman was employed in the lead mines and where they had four children: Gail, Greg, Sue, and Pam. He was ordained as a deacon at the Copper Mines Church. He and Judy's mom frequently sang specials at church; he had a beautiful tenor voice, and she sang a strong alto.

When the mines began to close in the late 1950s, Leeman moved his family to East St. Louis, Illinois for a year and worked there. When he heard of jobs in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, he and

Laura decided to move the family there, though it was a long way from southeast Missouri. They went to Oak Ridge in 1959, and began working at one of the nuclear energy plants in Oak Ridge, and worked there until his retirement. They moved into their house on Lancaster in 1965, and he has lived there ever since.

Leeman, Laura, and the children attended the First Free Will Baptist Church in Oak Ridge, where he was elected as a deacon. They faithfully served there for over 50 years.

Leeman loved to travel. They frequently went back "home" to Missouri to visit his old home church, and his family and friends. He always enjoyed returning for his high school reunion. Some of his family went with him in 2016. He was one of two attending from the class of 1942. Even closer to home in Oak Ridge, he goes out on Saturdays with his daughter Sue for long drives to enjoy the beauty of the mountains. Cades Cove is still a favorite destination of his, to see the mountain vistas, and the wildlife there. On more than one occasion, Leeman and Laura would travel to be with Judy and me for special missions services, and were faithful to support and pray for our ministry through the years.

Leeman was an extraordinary ordinary man. Quiet, mild mannered, kind, he loved his Lord and his church. He loved his family; I don't know if I've seen anyone else who loved his kids and grandchildren any more than Leeman did. There were pictures of them all over the house, and it seemed like every time we went to visit, some of the grandkids were always there. They loved hanging out with Grandma and Grandpa.

Judy and I visited the Underwoods numerous times over the years. We stayed in their home frequently when traveling for International Missions to visit churches in Missouri, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

The oldest daughter, Gail, married a preacher and became a

pastor's wife. She died of cancer in 1995 while just in her forties. We were in Panama and couldn't come back for the funeral. Shortly afterwards, we came home for our stateside assignment and went to see Leeman and Laura. I remember spending time with them, talking about Gail, and watching some of the early Gaither Homecoming Videos, hearing songs about Heaven and our hope in Christ. We shed quite a few tears on those occasions, but they were tears of hope and joy. Gail's death was very hard on Leeman and Laura, but God gave grace and life went on.

In recent years, time has brought many changes to Leeman and the Underwood family. We were privileged to attend their 50th wedding anniversary in 1996. Aunt Laura passed away in 2011. Leeman still lives in his own house, but his youngest daughter, Pam and her husband Butch, live with him, and provide care and companionship. He has chronic beryllium disease, caused by exposure to beryllium while working as a machinist in the Oak Ridge factory for so many years, and taking the small particles into his lungs. More recently, he began to experience kidney failure, and was actually on dialysis for eight months some years back, but miraculously was able to come off of this treatment for several years. Now it seems to have come back.

On his good days, he sits in the living room watching old westerns on TV and enjoying his company – family, friends, and people from his church.

It is a blessing, and an honor for me to pay tribute to Leeman Underwood. A true man of God, and one of the kindest, most hospitable men I have ever known.

I have said that Leeman was a good singer. Perhaps his best known song was "I Thirst," by Beverly Lowry. I only know he sang it from the heart, as a testimony, and he sang it well.

One day I came to Him, I was so thirsty

*I asked for water, my throat was so dry
He gave me water that I have never dreamed of
But for this water, my Lord had to die*

*He said, "I thirst, " yet He made the rivers
He said, "I thirst, " yet He made the sea
"I thirst, " said the King of the Ages
In His great thirst, He brought water to me
Now there's a river that flows as clear as crystal
It comes from God's throne above
And like a river, it wells up inside me
Bringing mercy, and life-giving love*

*He said, "I thirst, " yet He made the rivers
He said, "I thirst, " yet He made the sea
"I thirst," said the King of the Ages
In His great thirst, He brought water to me.[1. I Thirst, by
Bev Lowry, copyright 1993.]*



Leeman Underwood holding his great-granddaughter.