

# The Harvester

## Preparing Souls

## To Serve The Lord



Volume 37

February 2017

Number 7

## Jackie M. Stearsman

April 4, 1938 - December 24, 2016

On December 24, 2016, Jackie, or “JMS,” as he was affectionately known to many associated with the Florida School of Preaching, was “carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom” (cf. Lk. 16:22). Jackie began serving as the Florida School of Preaching’s second director in 1992, following the retirement of B. C. Carr, who was the founding director from 1969. Jackie served as director until his “semi” retirement in 2009. He continued teaching part-time until he and Joyce moved to Livingston, Tennessee, in 2013, where he also taught an FSOP extension class.

Jackie began teaching part-time at the school in the late 1970’s and became a full-time instructor in 1986. There is a more detailed biography of Jackie in the school’s 2010 lectureship book, *Do You Understand Expediency?*, which was dedicated to him. We are remembering Jackie in this issue of the *Harvester*. Pages 3-4 contain reflections by some current instructors and/or board members who had Jackie as a teacher at the Florida School of Preaching.

As I remember Jackie, there were two major things he did soon after he became director that showed he was in touch with contemporary needs in training effective students and preachers of the Word. First, he changed the Fall semester so that it ended at the Winter Break, instead of ending at lectureship week. Ending at lectureship meant students were busy during the holidays studying for finals and writing term papers instead of spending time with families and refreshing their minds. He was a hard worker, but he also recognized the need to take a break! In fact, he was very careful to protect students from area

congregations who would use them every Saturday if they could in doing the work that local church members should be doing. He did not appreciate brethren considering students as cheap labor to do their “dirty work” in the name of giving them “experience.”

Second, Jackie put in the curriculum computer classes and even raised (i.e., begged) money for a fully equipped, ten computer lab. Very early, he saw the value of computers in the preacher’s local work. The first summer I began working with the school (1996), he and I spent days setting up computers and printers so the lab would be ready for the Fall semester. Initially, we had two semesters of computer class, the first on basic word processing, the second on Bible programs and computer research.

When I became associate director in 2003, I paid closer attention to how Jackie worked as director. “Integrity” is the word that best summarizes my impression of how he operated. He always made sure everything was “above board.” He was also very careful not to get embroiled in brotherhood politics or controversies over matters of judgment. In one



instance, he ignored barrages of emails from brethren (with whom he was once very close) that criticized his and the school's lack of "jumping on their bandwagon" in opposing a matter of judgment hundreds of miles away. I would have answered right away had I gotten the emails. However, every time Jackie and I talked and evaluated the developing situation, the wiser his counsel proved to be. About a month into the controversy, he showed me an email. It turns out they had been sending me the same emails, except they left out a digit in my address so I never received the messages! It seems I was "providentially hindered" so I could absorb more of Jackie's wisdom!

There are two sayings of wisdom I remember most from Jackie that have helped me navigate the strait gate and narrow way. First, he would say, "Do not say 'the church of Christ teaches [this or that]' because you can find a church of Christ somewhere that teaches just about anything. Rather, we should say the Bible teaches [this or that]." Religious authority does not reside in men, but in God!

Second, he would say, as does Scripture, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (cf. Jas. 1:18), then make the point that if a person is unstable in one area of life, he cannot be trusted in other areas of life. Jackie was not always treated fairly by brethren, especially during the early 1980's when he faced many family challenges. As a result, he sometimes took a "trust-but-verify" attitude toward brethren. He often expressed gratitude for the eldership in Clearwater who stood by him during those

trying times.

Jackie was a man of compassion. He loved and encouraged my family. From giving \$20 to take my kids out after the last day of lectureship because of their hard work in helping their mom with the book sales to his visits and calls when my wife suffered and died from cancer to welcoming my new wife, the beautiful Jagie, to the FSOP family, he showed himself a tender-hearted Christian, full of love in action.

The last time I spoke with Jackie, after talking about cancer and reminiscing of FSOP days together, he closed the conversation by stating how thankful he was that he lived long enough to see both his sons become Gospel preachers. As I learned of his death and reflected upon that conversation, I was thankful for the other things Jackie saw from the Bible and life that helped shape him, which in turn helped shape me and others who knew and loved him. —*Brian*



Joyce and Jackie (about 2010)

### "In Memory of Jackie" by Mike Elledge

About six months before I became a Christian, I opened the Bible in earnest for the first time in my life. I was determined to read it. I gave up at Genesis 10. I'd never even heard of Philip or the Ethiopian Eunuch and their exchange in Acts 8, "Do you understand what you're reading?" "How can I unless someone guides me?" A half-year later, I was sitting in Jackie's class on the prophet Isaiah. At break time, instead of going into the fellowship hall to chat with the students, I went outside, dropped to my knees and thanked God Almighty for His wonderful providence in placing me in such a privileged position. Jesus promised, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." In my case, Jackie was the main instrument the Lord used to fill me, and to help me indeed understand what I was reading!

Through his guidance, I began to absorb the Old Testament, I then began to fall in love with it. He took me through the History books, the prophets, the wisdom of Solomon, plus the Books of Acts, Romans, Revelation, and he taught me about the work of the Holy Spirit. And when my life as a minister of the Gospel was at its most difficult, there was Jackie, inviting me to speak at the lectureship, and giving me the greatest privilege of all, the role of instructor at the Florida School of Preaching. When I consider what my soul owes to Jackie, I begin to understand the true meaning of the word "priceless."

## The Harvester

Published Monthly  
 Florida School of Preaching  
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**Training Preachers Since 1969**

## Reflections from Daniel Stearsman

From a student-son perspective, some of my best memories of my dad were sitting at his feet in classes. Before Dad stepped into a classroom, first he was a vigorous and tenacious student. Dad's mind was analytical and he'd leave few stones unturned in research and application. Dad was curious by nature and loved to learn.

Dad was a humble teacher. He didn't talk a lot about where he had been or what he had accomplished. He rarely mentioned being at the Warren-Flew debate, moderating the Warren-Barnhart debate, writing for the *Gospel Advocate* or *Spiritual Sword*. He knew deep in his soul that parading his accomplishments would not be helpful to students.

Dad was so comfortable in front of a class. He relaxed and would weave together a vigorous study of the text with practical insight full of real world applications. Dad loved to share anecdotes of David and me.

Dad wanted the best for his students. He didn't want to kill students with work, but he wasn't afraid to challenge students and push them without push-

ing them over. Dad wanted students to think on their feet, not just memorize.

Dad hated mediocrity in preaching. He hated when people treated the church like a back yard dog. For those who loved truth, dad would spend countless hours helping them on pivotal doctrinal issues.

Dad's perspective on weakness was interesting. When a student was struggling and trying, Dad would go to the moon and back for him. However, if a student was lazy or taking advantage of the system, watch out! His pride was in the Lord and His cause. He knew how much Satan loved lazy preachers and what this would do to the body of Christ.

In Dad's last days the hunger for the depths and riches of God's word was well and alive (Rom. 11:33). He was reading Job, Biblically exploring the depths of human identity (who/what/how is "I"), and commenting how abortionists cannot touch the spirit that God gives us (Psa. 139:13).

We will miss Dad for many reasons, but students who loved him found a faithful friend who feared God more than many (Neh. 7:2).

### "Jackie Stearsman: The Teacher" by Ulysses Richardson

I recognized during my first semester that Jackie was one who spent time with all the students. He was opened to the questions we had, in spite of his busy schedule and other tasks assigned to him. He took pride in leading the school and was a very wise man, in many ways ahead of his time. I was amazed at the many things he knew and his unique ways of applying those truths to life. No example nor illustration was the same. Deeper than the mere facts and their application was what he believed Biblically and doctrinally. His active knowledge and faith were the driving force for the deep passion and dedication he displayed regarding the Lord's cause. I was greatly impressed by him, a man of noble character and gentle demeanor. He was open to attain all the knowledge of God's word he could.

Perceiving all of this, I asked Jackie what sources he recommended a preacher should have in his personal library. The sets of commentaries and other resource material I possess today are the result of those recommendations, and they are the strength of my library. I want to express thanks and give gratitude to him for providing the opportunity to sit at his feet to learn, to be encouraged, and to be amazed at the insight and wisdom he possessed and shared. His understanding of Biblical knowledge has been a great inspiration to me and has given me the tools needed to help others. I am very fond of Jackie and have made it known in a public way.

Interaction with Jackie Stearsman as a student grew into a unique bond and friendship, not only at the school but at other gatherings and in various settings. Upon greeting one another, he always acknowledged me as "The Old Solider." The disposition students saw in the classroom was the same he displayed at meetings, other congregations, and lectureships. It is a blessing in this life for me to have crossed his path. This has allowed me to receive tools which can help and benefit the lives and well-being of others.



Teaching in Ghana, Africa (2003)

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### **Reflections**

**from Ben Radford, Sr.**

Brother Stearsman was a man of knowledge, wisdom and foresight. He was a serious student of the Bible. He encouraged us to be serious as well. He would always tell us to set forth our evidence and draw our conclusions as Paul did. He challenged us to be honest and consistent in all areas of study and life. Through the years after graduation, I have often heard his voice saying, "If you find yourself being inconsistent in one area, you are bound to be inconsistent in others, so be careful." I will forever cherish the memories of sitting at the feet of this "soldier of the cross."

### **Reflections from Bob Bauer**

I had been preaching part-time at the Midway Boulevard church of Christ in Port Charlotte for about a year when I walked away from my business and began preaching full-time. I began driving up to Lakeland one day a week to take classes. I didn't know Jackie very well. I had met him a few times but nothing much more than that. I always had the impression of him that he was guarded and somewhat stern until one day in class. The current secretary for the school was leaving. I believe it was Rachel Capps. All the students and instructors had chipped in to buy a parting gift for her. I happened to be in class that day. Jackie called her in and presented her with the gift. All of us students were congratulating her and wishing her well and I happened to glance over at Jackie and he had tears in his eyes. My whole impression of Jackie changed that moment. Over the years, I saw time and time again Jackie's soft heart for his students and those associated with the school.

Another time, I do not remember whether it was in class or during an elders' meeting at Orange Street, Jackie made a statement along the lines that he constantly prayed that he would always love the truth. He never wanted to stop loving the truth and be sent a strong delusion that he might believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:10-11). Here was a man who spent most of his life preaching and defending the word of God and he prayed that he might always love the truth. I still pray that same prayer.