

Voices: Reverend Lawson led me to Jesus

May 14, 2024

Reverend Bill Lawson, founder of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston, departed this earthly realm today, May 14, at age 95.

Although I never met him face-to-face, his impact on my life remains profound. Every Oct. 2, I pause to remember him, thank God and praise the Lord for his ministry.

I remember sending him a thank-you note on Oct. 2, 1996, to thank him personally for what he meant in my life. The date may not be significant to everyone, but I keep up with it every year.

Without Reverend Lawson, I may not have become a believer in Jesus Christ.

'A speaker'



Rev. William Lawson and his wife Audrey
(Screen shot, KTRK 13, Houston)

As a lone 16-year-old, non-Baptist student at Baylor University, I was drawn to a group meeting on the second floor of Baylor's Student Union Building to listen to a band and "a speaker." The speaker turned out to be a preacher.

I was at a crossroads. I remember standing in the middle of the literal road, with the Student Union Building on the left and a hippie-looking guy on the right enticing me to attend a "cool, fun and wild party."

Fortunately, I turned to the left and entered the Student Union Building. I sat on the floor in the back of the room listening to the music and then this preacher. I don't remember exactly what he said, but I can guess.

He most likely said: "You are a sinner, and you must place your faith in Jesus Christ, and Jesus will become your Lord and Savior."

There was a "time of invitation," which is when people walk forward to the front of the room to talk to a designated person about a decision or to pray. I never had heard that phrase before. So, I kept sitting on the floor in the back of the Student Union Building.

But sitting on the floor cross-legged, I made the most important decision of my entire life. I accepted Jesus Christ.

I can't say I understood what I had done or what a profound moment had just occurred in my life, but I knew something had changed, and I liked the new me.

Lawson shaped not only my life, but also the lives of countless others. His "speech" at Baylor University on Oct. 2, 1971, was a turning point. Imagine if he hadn't been invited. Countless students—like me—might have missed the opportunity to encounter Christ in that transformative moment.

A pastor

Had Lawson not taken his calling seriously, the ripple effect would have been immense. His powerful sermons and unwavering faith inspired hearts and transformed lives. Without his commitment, countless souls might have missed the opportunity to encounter Christ—including mine.

The decision to start Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church was pivotal. His first 13 members formed a community that grew, thrived and impacted generations. Without this church, countless spiritual journeys—like mine—might have taken different paths. This church now numbers 12,000 in membership.

Reverend Lawson collaborated with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., which led to an invitation to join King's efforts in Atlanta, Ga. Their joint efforts could have influenced civil rights, justice and equality beyond measure. But Lawson stayed committed to the 13 people at his church and decided to remain in Houston, where he first came as a 27-year-old man.

Reverend Lawson's commitment to those 13 individuals mattered. Each soul he shepherded had a unique story. Without his dedication, those lives might have lacked spiritual guidance and community.

Houston owes much to Lawson. His presence shaped the city's spiritual landscape. Without him, Houston might have missed a beacon of faith, compassion and justice.

The Lord can use each of us, whether in formal ministry or everyday interactions, to impact lives. If you haven't yet explored the message of Jesus Christ, consider [seeking answers](#) and discovering the profound love that awaits you. It's a journey you won't regret. I haven't.

My tribute to a man I loved, but never met

Though I never met Reverend Lawson face-to-face, I loved him for leading me to Jesus. I offer Paul's words to the Christians in Thessalonica in tribute to Reverend Lawson:

"For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

"For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.

"For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

"But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thessalonians 2:1-9, NASB).

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