

TIM LAHAYE: MAN OF GOD

Tom's Perspectives

by Thomas Ice

"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does."

—James 1:22–25

Tim LaHaye was an amazing servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. Tim went home to be with his Lord via death (he had always hoped to go via the rapture) on July 25, 2016, two days after suffering a massive stroke from which he never regained consciousness. Tim and his extended family had celebrated his 90th birthday in late April of this year and had just returned from attending the opening of the Noah's Ark exhibit in Northern Kentucky. Tim's pastor, David Jeremiah of Shadow Mountain Community Church, which Tim founded and first pastored, during the memorial service¹ (Aug. 12, 2016) described and labeled Tim as a "man of God." And so he was! As a man of God I have always thought of Tim as "a doer of the word" (James 1:22), because of the many accomplishments he did on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ.

EARLY LIFE

Tim was born in Detroit, Michigan to Frank and Margaret LaHaye on April 27, 1926. Tim's father worked on the assembly line at Ford and his mother was active in Child Evangelism Fellowship. Tim's father died of a heart attack when he was nine years old. This was a great blow to Tim. Speaking of the impact his father's death had on him, Tim said, "My love for second-coming teachings, particularly the Rapture of the church, was sparked as I stood at my father's grave at the age of nine. His sudden death of a heart attack left me devastated. My pastor, who also was my uncle, pointed his finger toward heaven and proclaimed, 'This is not the last of Frank LaHaye. Because of his personal faith in Christ, one day he will be resurrected by the shout of our Lord; we will be translated to meet him and our other loved ones in the clouds and be with them and our Lord forever.' That promise from Scripture was the only hope for my broken heart that day."² I have heard him speak of that moment from his childhood many times over the past twenty-five years that I worked with Tim.

The death of his father left the family without much money. Tim often spoke of what a model his mother was as she had to work many long hours to support the family. Yet, Tim also spoke about what a faithful believer and example his mother was as she always had time for the Lord and her children. Tim once told me about the time he had worked for many months to save up, I believe it was \$7.00, to buy his mom a Scofield Bible for Christmas. This story has always stayed with me since my father who was about the same age as Tim spoke of my grandfather, a poor sharecropper farmer in North Texas, who had surrendered to preach. The community pitched in and bought my grandfather (Boss Ice) a Scofield Bible, also for \$7.00. My grandfather died of cancer two years later when my dad was thirteen. Tim dedicated a commentary on Revelation

to his mother and said the following: “Her consistent Christian life and earnest prayers helped guide me during my rebellious years and ultimately led me into the ministry. It was her keen interest in Bible prophecy that sparked my own. I could wish for every young man such a dedicated Christian mother.”³

Tim surrendered to the Lord’s call to the ministry as a teenager and finished high school by attending night school. He attended Moody Bible Institute for a while before serving in the military as a machine gunner aboard a bomber. I remember Tim speaking often of the impact Wilbur Smith had on him during the short time he was at Moody. After the war, Tim attended and graduated from Bob Jones University with a B.A. in 1950. It was at Bob Jones where he met the love of his life Beverly Jean Ratcliffe, also a student at Bob Jones and also from Detroit. After dating for a year, they were married in 1947 and on July 2016 celebrated their 69th wedding anniversary. Tim served as a pastor of a small church while in college in nearby Pumpkintown, South Carolina.

FULLTIME MINISTRY

Tim’s first church after college was a Baptist congregation in Minneapolis, Minnesota where he pastored until 1956 when he was called to San Diego, California. His visionary leadership manifested itself when he was influential in helping organize some of the first Sunday School Association conventions to help educate and train Sunday School teaches for conservative churches.

When Tim moved to San Diego in 1956 to pastor Scott Memorial Baptist Church, it grew from 275 to over 3,000 members. While in San Diego he planted what is today Shadow Mountain Community Church as a branch of Scott Memorial in El Cajon and moved to that area when it became his main congregation and remained its pastor until 1981. While in San Diego, Tim founded America’s first Christian school system made up of ten schools including two high schools. In the early 1970s he also founded Christian Heritage College, now San Diego Christian University and Seminary, while serving as its first president until 1976. It was during this time that Tim convinced Henry Morris to come to the College and begin the now famous Institute for Creation Research in 1972, which played a leading role in establishing six-day creation as a dominate view among conservative evangelicals. As a result of Francis Schaeffer’s influence Tim founded in 1979 Californians for Biblical Morality to register Christians to vote and become more engaged in culture and society. Later, Californians for Biblical Morality became the California branch of the Moral Majority.

The Moral Majority was Tim LaHaye’s idea after about two dozen evangelical leaders met with Jimmy Carter in the White House in 1979 while their wives met with Rosalynn Carter who was an advocate for the Equal Rights Amendment. After this meeting the men huddled together and Tim suggested the idea for the Moral Majority and convinced Jerry Falwell to undertake the founding of that organization. It was not long afterward, that Tim helped influence his wife Beverly to found what became the largest women’s political organization in America known as Concerned Women for America, which is still a strong and active lobbying influence in Washington, D.C.

In 1981 Tim and Beverly moved to the Washington, D.C. area in order for Beverly to oversee the operation of CWA. It was also in 1981 that Tim founded the Council for National Policy, a conservative think tank for religious right leaders. As I have gotten to know Tim over the last twenty-five years, one thing is clear: Tim LaHaye is a person who does something when he perceives a problem. He is a doer of the word like no one else in his generation of conservative, Bible-believing Christians. Tim is an amazing servant of God! In fact, the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton

College recognized this about Tim and gave him an award citing him as the most influential evangelical of the last quarter of the 20th century. He finished ahead of such luminaries as Billy Graham, James Dobson, and Bill Bright. Tim has been used by God to start or come up with the idea to start about 30 institutions and organizations over the years. And one of his last ideas was to start the Pre-Trib Research Center in 1994, which I helped co-found and have been its only executive director for almost 25 years. The Center was the outgrowth of the Pre-Trib Study Group that Tim started in December 1992, which has met annually in early December in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, except for one year in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

TIM'S WRITING MINISTRY

Tim's writing career began an outgrowth of his teachings during the Sunday night services at his church where he would deal with various biblical and theological issues. On Sunday nights he would do more in-depth teaching and often used an overhead projector in his presentations. His first book grew out of a series he did on the filling of the Holy Spirit, which Tim believed was a turning point in his ministry. He wanted to find a way to illustrate to his congregation the impact that the filling of the Holy Spirit could make in their lives. He came up with the idea of using the temperaments to make his point. By illustrating the natural tendencies of one's temperament characteristics of a fallen, sinful individual, he was then able to show the difference that the Holy Spirit could make in the life of a yielded believer as the fruit of the Spirit became evident. Tim made mimeographed copies and his children collated the homemade book in the garage. Tim took them to the Campus Crusade for Christ bookstore at Arrowhead Springs in San Bernardino and they sold like hotcakes. Bob Hawkins, Sr., who later founded Harvest House Publishers, was at Tyndale Publishing and picked up Tim book and published it in 1966 as *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*.

Tim's second book was *How to Be Happy Though Married* (1968), which my wife Janice and I read together before we got married in 1972. (We have been married 44 years as of this writing and we are happy.) Tim's first Bible prophecy book was *The Beginning of the End* (1972), followed closely by *Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain* (1973). In fact, I used an overhead graphic from Tim's Revelation commentary during my senior sermon at Dallas Seminary in 1980. Other books that followed included: *How to Study the Bible for Yourself* (1976), his first book with Harvest House; *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* (1976) with Beverly and it has sold around four million; *No Fear of the Storm* (1977), his first book on the rapture; *The Battle for the Mind* (1980), a book against encroaching secular humanism in America. I received a copy of that book as an attendee at the National Affairs Briefing in Dallas in the summer of 1980. Tim about a dozen more books in addition to the ones already noted above. Tim's books had sold about thirteen million copies before the *Left Behind* series hit stores in 1995. Tim's total book sales have reached over 100 million copies to date.

THE PRE-TRIB RESEARCH CENTER

In the spring of 1992 I received a phone call from Tim LaHaye. We met for the first time on the phone and had a great conversation about the rapture and Bible prophecy in general. Tim had read the first book I had written dealing with dominion theology and defending dispensationalism.⁴ He was noticing a decline in belief in the pre-trib rapture among evangelicals and wanted to do something about it. We agreed to meet later that summer at the National Religious Book Sellers Convention in Dallas, and so

we did. Our meeting in the summer of '92 resulted in Tim's idea to host the first Pre-Trib Study Group which met December 14–16, 1992 in a hotel inside the DFW airport.

The first meeting was by invitation only because Tim's idea for the first Pre-Trib Study Group was inspired by the prophetic meetings in Great Britain around 1830. The Albury Conference (1826–30) sponsored by wealthy banker Henry Drummond who invited learned evangelical clergy and Bible scholars to his estate where they met privately and discussed the prophetic issues of the day. The Powerscourt Conference (1831–33) was a similar meeting held by Lady Powerscourt that meet at her castle south of Dublin. J. N. Darby and many of the brethren attended this conference. Therefore, about 35 scholars, pastors and prophecy teachers met to discuss issues relating to pretribulationism. Various individuals presented papers on pressing issues followed by discussion from the entire group. Some of those attending the first Study Group include: John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, Ed Hindson, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Kay Arthur, Randall Price, Mal Couch, Gerald Stanton, Charles Dyer, John Master, Stanley Ellisen, David Allen Lewis, Stanley Toussaint, Chuck Missler, Paul and John Feinberg, Jim Combs, Joseph Chambers, and a few others.

During 1993, Tim and I met together a couple of times and began to plan for the establishment of the Pre-Trib Research Center. Also, during that year, Tim began work on an important book defending the pre-trib rapture called *No Fear of the Storm*.⁵ At our second annual meeting, Tim proposed, and it was accepted by the Study Group, that I become Executive Director with a full-time position of an organization we still call The Pre-Trib Research Center. In February 1994 our family moved to the Washington, D. C. area and the Center was launched in the offices of Tim's Family Life Seminars, which were housed in the offices of Concerned Women for America. The stated purpose of the Center is for encouraging the research, teaching, propagation, and defense of the pretribulation rapture and related Bible prophecy doctrines. We believe the Center and Study Group has had a great impact in furthering these stated goals, especially through Tim's novel series.

LEFT BEHIND

Tim had become a highly successful author as a non-fiction writer, yet he came to believe he could reach a wider audience if he could put his prophecy beliefs into a believable fiction book. Tim knew writing fiction required skills he did not think he possessed. Before *Left Behind* he had worked with a couple of fiction writers in an attempt to produce a quality rapture novel. He once told me he had paid someone a lot of money to throw one of those attempts into the trash. It was a short time later when Tim had gotten a new book agent that he linked Tim up with Jerry Jenkins. Jenkins tells of their getting together to write the novel series as follows: "I'll never forget when our mutual literary agent Rick Christian introduced him and me in the early 1990s. Rick had called me and asked if 'I'd ever meet Dr. LaHaye.' Of course I was aware of him but I had never meet him. I said, 'I'd love to!' He said, "We need to get you two together because Tim is a best selling non-fiction author with a great fiction idea and you're a fiction writer with no ideas, so let's get you together."⁶

In January 1995, Tim first told me about the *Left Behind* project (initially it was to have been a single book, then it grew to three and eventually to a series of sixteen books). He had just talked on the phone with Jenkins and told me that he was excited about prospects for the novel and thought it might sell as many as a quarter million copies. Of course, Tim was wrong! It only sold about 83,000 copies its first year, but then it began to take off through word-of-mouth recommendations. The latest sales

figures indicate that the *Left Behind* series has sold over 90 million copies. Tim hoped *Left Behind* would have an impact but had no idea it would accomplish what it has, both in terms of sales and spiritual results. Preterist and anti-pretribulationist Gary DeMar said on a radio show that he thought dispensationalism was in steep decline and then came the *Left Behind* series which DeMar said has given new life to pretribulationism.

No doubt Tim has been used by God to spread this important last days message of His imminent return, in spite of mounting opposition. This idea by Tim has succeeded beyond his wildest imagination. In fact, in January 1995 Tim and I were speaking at a prophecy conference in Springfield, Missouri. We were snowed in on the day we were to have flown out of Springfield and spent an extra day together there. Tim had made a phone call to the publisher who told him about the progress that Jerry Jenkins was making on the rapture novel. Tim told me he was very excited about the novel and thought it might sell a quarter million copies. Boy was he wrong! It has sold over 10 million copies. He was also excited that the publisher thought they would be able to do a three novel series. As many of you know, it turned out to be a sixteen book series.

The *Left Behind* series not only helped to revive interest in the pre-trib rapture doctrine within the American Evangelical Church, but has also aided the teaching of Bible prophecy and led to tens of thousands of lost people becoming believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins wrote a book about the stories of many who came to faith in Christ through reading the *Left Behind* books. The book is *These Will Not Be Left Behind: True Stories of Changed Lives*.⁷ Tim had prayed that a million people would come to faith in Christ through the novel series. God has used the series in a mighty way since to speak about the pre-trib rapture that almost requires one to also proclaim the gospel to the lost.

CONCLUSION

Tim LaHaye was indeed a man of God and a doer of the Word of God. He lived a long life of 90 years, all of his adult life in service of the Lord. At the beginning of this article, I noted that David Jeremiah labeled Tim a “man of God” at his memorial service. “In his message honoring LaHaye, Jeremiah began by saying that there is a term that appears in the Old Testament 75 times in 70 passages: Man of God. Five people are given that title in the Old Testament: Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, and Elisha. But in the New Testament, only one reference is found, and interestingly enough, it refers to a man named Tim. 1 Timothy 6:11 reads: ‘But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness’—an apt description of LaHaye’s life, said Jeremiah.”⁸ Even up to the very end Tim was thinking about what he could do to further the spread of the gospel. Tim told me over 20 years ago that he believed the best way to reach the world with the gospel was through Bible prophecy. This was his main goal up to the end: to preach the gospel through Bible prophecy, especially the doctrine of the rapture. This is why he decided to focus on Bible prophecy during the last two decades of his life. God used Tim to reach tens of thousands with the gospel through the *Left Behind* novel series.

David Jeremiah spoke at Tim’s memorial service about the last message he ever received from Tim shortly before his death. He said, “I’d come to the hospital the day before he went to heaven. I went over to the side of his bed so I could look him in the face and I took his hand. And with a somewhat loud voice (I don’t know why I did that. I guess if I talked loud enough he would hear me.). But I leaned into his face and said, ‘Tim thirty-five years ago you handed the baton of this church off to me. And for all of these years I have been working as hard as I know how to carry on the ministry

that God gave to you. I want you to know that I'm going to continue doing that in the future as long as God gives me breath.' And I'm not making this up. His wife and children can attest to it. Tim squeezed my hand real hard! And held onto it. It was not a twitch. It wasn't a nervous movement. He squeezed my hand, as if to say there is still much work to be done. Jesus Christ is coming back soon. We're all passing the baton off to others. And whatever is going to be done for God is going to have to be done with urgency. There is no time to waste. The work that God gave to Tim LaHaye is work He has given to us. Let us flee, follow, fight, and be faithful all the way to the finish line. I feel him squeezing you hand and mine in this service today."⁹

Tim has left behind a godly legacy for believers to follow. We can remain faithful to our Lord in these last days and also speak out boldly to those who know not the Lord. I will always view Tim LaHaye as a doer of the word and not just a hearer only. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ You can watch a video of Tim's memorial service at the following web address:

<http://www.shadowmountain.org/default.aspx?page=5127>.

² Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture: Who Will Face the Tribulation?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), p. 69.

³ Tim LaHaye, *Revelation: Illustrated & Made Plain* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, [1973], 1975), dedication page.

⁴ H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse? An Analysis of Christian Reconstructionism* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1988).

⁵ Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm: Why Christians will Escape All the Tribulation* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1994).

⁶ Jerry Jenkins, "Dr. Tim LaHaye Memorial Service," Shadow Mountain Community Church, August 12, 2016.

⁷ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins with Norman B. Rohrer, *These Will Not Be Left Behind: True Stories of Changed Lives* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003).

⁸ Brandon Showalter, "Tim LaHaye's Memorial Service: 'Left Behind' Author Was Foremost a Man of God, Soul Winner," *The Christian Post*, August 13, 2016, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/tim-lahayes-memorial-service-left-behind-david-jeremiah-jerry-jenkins-god-soul-winner-167898/>.

⁹ Transcribed from David Jeremiah, message at Tim LaHaye's Memorial Service, Shadow Mountain Community Church, El Cajon, CA, Aug. 12, 2016, <http://www.shadowmountain.org/default.aspx?page=5127>.