

27A MORE ON R.G. LETOURNEAU

From LeTourneau University: [1]

R.G. LeTourneau was a world-famous inventor, engineering genius, designer of heavy-duty earth moving equipment, huge off-shore drilling platforms and the electric drive wheel. He was first and foremost a Christian. He acknowledged his responsibility to God by investing millions of dollars in missionary development projects in Liberia, West Africa, and Peru, South America, bringing the Gospel, education, and medical aid to thousands.

For over thirty years he traveled across the US, Canada, and other foreign countries sharing his testimony about the satisfaction and joy of serving Jesus Christ. Each time he spoke he began by saying, "I'm just a mechanic that God has blessed, and it seems He wants me to go around telling you He will bless you, too."

Probably his most significant ministry will prove to be the school he and his wife, Evelyn, established in Longview, Texas. While flying over the area in 1946 to select a manufacturing site, Mrs. LeTourneau saw the sprawling complex of a vacated Army hospital consisting of over two hundred frame buildings. When told it was no longer in use, she asked about establishing a school to serve the many GI's returning from war. The site was secured, and LeTourneau Technical Institute (now LeTourneau University) was established.

R.G.'s Life

(By Bill)

R.G. LeTourneau was born in 1888 to a Plymouth Brethren couple. Part of his childhood was spent in Duluth, Minnesota, a very cold place. He made a decision for Christ and became a deacon in the church when he was 16. However, like many of us, he rebelled in his teens.

Even though he had finally discovered geography, math, and reading sentences instead of word by word, he left school in the 7th grade. His parents, as is true for many of our parents, prayed a lot for him.

R. G. had many scrapes with death. He almost died of the flu. He went through the San Francisco earthquake. He had a wreck in a racecar and broke his neck. Once, as he was pulling out a stump, the chains broke, and he lost most of his teeth. He had a co-worker (by accident) pour gasoline instead of water on a fire in a pit where R. G. was working. He had a head-on collision, which resulted in his being in a full body cast. All of these brushes with death took their toll physically on R. G.

During his life he suffered from multiple financial crises, and he and his wife Evelyn lost their first son. This was devastating to him, and for a while he went into a tailspin.

Speaking of his wife Evelyn, they met when R. G. moved to Portland, Oregon. He lived with the Peterson family and his interest was piqued by a young girl named Evelyn. Even though her parents did not approve, R. G. wanted to marry Evelyn. They eloped when she was 15 and he

was 28. Evelyn's father would not speak to R. G. for seven years. "Pop" and "Mom" LeTourneau, as they were known to the students at LeTourneau, had five sons and one daughter, and lost one of the sons.

So how did Robert or Bob LeTourneau become known as "R. G."? After one move to Peoria, Illinois, R. G.'s boss decided that he should be called "R. G." instead of "Bob". His boss said that "Bob" and his inventions had more in common with a comic strip character named Rube Goldberg. He was known as "R. G." from then on.

A turning point occurred in his life one night when he dedicated his whole life to God. He went to his pastor and told him that he wanted to serve God and become a missionary. This wise pastor replied that "God needs businessmen as well as missionaries." This has been my story too, as I realized the fallacy of the "two-pot system." One can do all to the glory of God.

Along the way, he went to work in the Navy yard and came back \$5,000 in debt, but he always paid back what he owed. At one point, R. G. made the mistake of saying, "I'll give it next year". He lost everything he had that year. It was then that he acted and made some changes. As a businessman he started a foundation and ended up giving 90% of his earnings to the Lord.

R. G. had three mantras that became a way of life for him. "You act as if God is really there, because He really is there". "I'm just a poor mechanic whom God has blessed". "It's not my money, but God's." His life scripture was Matthew 6:33, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you."

R. G. was the first to use "brazing" in working with metal. He also invented a self-propelled scraper. He earned 298 patents, second only to Thomas Edison.

He and his company made machines that were used to clear jungles for travel purposes in South America and Africa, but the most useful, in my thinking, was for the war effort in the Pacific in WWII. My Dad, Robert L. Graff, was a Seabee during the war in Guam. Dad said that R. G.'s machines had cleared jungles there to make airstrips for our U. S. planes to refill and go on to win the war over Japan. These planes would refill and take off. Now, the Japanese were aware of where the landing strips were and would bomb and strafe them. Because of R. G.'s machines, the airfields were repaired quickly and made ready for the returning planes. Without those machines, we probably would have lost the war in the Pacific. It is said that 70% of the machinery used in WWII was invented by R. G. LeTourneau. Recently, his company produced equipment to aid in unearthing valuable resources in Africa.

While most of his inventions were of the earth-moving variety, he and George H. W. Bush, later President Bush, collaborated on making a floating oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. The thought came up, "What if it doesn't work?" However, it did work, and it still produces oil to this day.

If you would like to know more about this incredible man of God, read his autobiography entitled: *Mover of Men and Mountains*.

Quotes by R.G.

In R.G.'s own words, from his autobiography, *Mover of Men and Mountains* [2]:

Serving the Lord

To me, service to the Lord, to which I had just dedicated my life, meant the ministry or missionary work. I couldn't see myself as a minister. I couldn't even speak correct English in private, let alone stand up before a congregation...

With this doubt with me, I went bright and early in the morning to the home of our pastor...He just led me into his study and let me talk...We both knelt, and each one of us asked God what He wanted me to do, and as we arose from our knees, God spoke to me through the words of my pastor. "You know, Brother LeTourneau," he said, "God needs businessmen as well as preachers and missionaries."

Those were the words that have guided my life ever since. I repeat them in public at every opportunity because I have discovered that many men have the same mistaken idea that I had of what it means to serve the Lord. My idea was that if a man was going all out for God, he would have to be a preacher, or an evangelist, or a missionary, or what we call a full-time Christian worker. I didn't realize that a layman could serve the Lord as well as a preacher. (p. 115-116)

Making money

I put my own confidence in the Lord. If He wants you to make money to serve His purposes, you'll make it. If He doesn't want you to have money, He'll take it away, no matter how much you might have. (p. 163)

Faith and giving

To what foolish lengths man will let his pride drive him. God does not do business that way. He keeps His promises. When you ask His help He doesn't answer that He has a lot of pressing things to attend to, so come back next year. His time is now. In the early days true Christians gave God His share from the first fruit of the crops. They had faith. They didn't wait around to see if the later crops were to be destroyed by locusts or drought. Let God's will be done, and the rewards will be so great here won't be room to store them. But start to hedge, and wait to see how the whole crop turns out before giving God His share, and He knows you as a man of little faith. (p. 173)

The future

In terms of the everlasting life that is God's reward for His children, our plans to prepare ourselves for the next ten 50, or 100 years are but an infinitesimal part of the future we should be preparing ourselves for. All too often we are so busy scrambling around to make our worldly future secure that we fight for minutes when we should be preparing ourselves for eternity. Only God holds the future, and when you have found Him, you might not know what your future holds, but you will have the blessed security of knowing Who holds you, now and forever. (p. 267)

God's love

I have learned that God is love, and love wants to be loved. That is why He made us with His attributes, and so gave us the power to love and to hate, the power to choose between good and evil and say "I will" or "I will not." God loves the sinner, but He hates sin. He made the universe, and all living things in it, and pronounced it good, but He wasn't satisfied yet. He said,

“Let Us make man in Our own image and in Our own likeness.” So He breathed into man the breath of life and man became a living soul. I believe with all the living soul that He gave me that God wanted a creature so like Himself that He could always be in fellowship with Him. (p. 275)

References

1. Graduation Program, LeTourneau University, (2015).
2. Le Tourneau, R.G., *Mover of Men and Mountains*, Moody, 1967.