

King James Bible Study Correspondence Course

An Outreach of Highway Evangelistic Ministries
5311 Windridge lane ~ Lockhart, Florida 32810 ~ USA

Heroes of the Faith - Men
Lesson 2A - Lester Roloff

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Born: June 28, 1914, Dawson, Texas
Died: November 2, 1938
Life Span: 68 years, 4 Month, 4 days

Lester Roloff was a perfect example of a modern-day prophet. In all his years of serving God, he set the standard for all believers – man ought to obey God rather than men.

Roloff was born to Christian parents on a farm ten miles south of Dawson, Texas. His family was so poor, that only the oldest brother ever received new clothes. The younger ones had to wear the “hand-me-downs”. One time, while driving back from Dawson, a tire on their car blew out. Melvin, Lester’s older brother, got out of the car, and before repairing the tire, he removed his pants and placed them, neatly folded, on the seat.

Blonde-haired, blue-eyed Lester attended school in a one room schoolhouse called The Headquarters. He is quoted as having said he liked three subjects – running, wrestling, and recess. His teacher predicted he would have a great career as a comedian.

When he was about twelve years old, he attended a revival under the ministry of John T. Taylor, at a little country church called Shiloh Baptist. It was during this revival, in July of 1926, that he got saved.

At the age of seventeen, Lester was a timid and frail teenager who was plagued by recurring bouts of illness that would continue giving him trouble well into his mid-thirties. One night when he was especially ill, his mother was about to call the doctor, but he said to her, “It is not the doctor that I need.” That night he promised God that if He would let him live, he would become a preacher. Melvin doubted his little brother would ever become a preacher because he was so timid and shy. Little did he know that one day Lester would not only become a preacher and teacher, but he would also be heard on one hundred sixty radio stations across the United States, the Virgin Islands, and the West Indies.

At this point, Lester only had one year of high school left, and he knew that after he finished, he would have to go somewhere to learn the Bible; but where could he go, and how was he going to afford an education? He quickly learned a life lesson – if he was willing to serve God, God would make a way. (Psalm 37:5)

Lester made the decision to get his education at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He had earned enough money for the entrance fees by

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hauling hay for his neighbors and picking cotton. However, there was still the matter of room and board at the university. He came up with an idea - he would sell the milk from his cow, Marie. But even better than that, he found a couple who said if Lester could guarantee them four gallons of milk per day, they would provide for his room and board. Marie had the distinction of being the only cow in history to go to college.

Throughout all the trials and tribulations of college life, Lester stayed committed to serving Christ with all his heart, mind, and soul. On the weekends, he preached in local churches. The summers of his second and third year at the university were especially full with work at the farm, at churches, and at revival meetings.

During his junior year, he had three roommates who would play an important role in Lester's future – Joe Underwood, George Stewart, and Harold Fickett. It was Harold who decided that Lester was too busy and needed to meet a friend of his named Marie. (This Marie was not four-legged.) They did meet; and even though they came from very different backgrounds, and Marie had said she would never marry a preacher, they were married on August 10, 1936.

After Lester graduated from Baylor, he and Marie moved to Fort Worth, where Lester attended Southwestern Seminary and was asked to become the pastor of First Baptist Church of Trinidad Texas. Lester's messages were always laced with scripture. Every time he stood in a pulpit, the congregation would hear a message of love and grace from the word of God. (1 Corinthians 15:11) Whether he took messages from the Old Testament or the New Testament, he always pointed his listeners to the cross. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

At the same time the "war to end all wars" occurred, Lester moved his family to Houston, Texas, where he became the pastor at Magnolia Park Baptist Church. It was a time when many young men were being shipped overseas. Churches united together, holding special prayer meetings for peace and for the families who displayed the gold star in their front windows, signifying the loss of a loved one in battle. Lester's church grew by leaps and bounds; there was great revival, and hundreds of souls were born again. During this revival, the pulpit committee at Park Avenue Baptist Church in Corpus Christi asked Lester to consider becoming their pastor. He was torn about this decision, as he considered the past three years he had worked in his current position; however, he believed all believers need to be open for the leading of the Holy Spirit and what God wants. Thus, the decision was made. He accepted the offer and became the pastor in Corpus Christi (which means "Body of Christ").

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These were trying times for Lester. The first six months of his pastorate brought both happiness and pain. He learned that certain people were making trouble in the church (which is something the Lord hates Proverbs 6:19). This “war in the camp” was something he had been warned about in seminary. He often said, “I was sent here to preach the gospel, not to be run off by a few discontents.” Nevertheless, the church grew, and Lester started a couple of visitation programs, one on Thursday mornings for the ladies and the other on Thursday nights for the men. He instituted all night prayer meetings on Saturday nights to make petitions to God for the services the next day. Believers were built up in faith, watching God’s hand move through the church services with power.

On Sunday, October 15, 1944, Lester’s sermon was from 1 Kings 18:38 and was entitled “Let the Fire Fall”. While he was preaching, he thought he smelled smoke in the building but was convinced that it was just his mind playing tricks on him. After the service, while he was having lunch at home, the phone rang. The caller told him the church was on fire. The building was completely destroyed. That evening, the congregation held their service beside the smoldering ashes. A dear saint said to Lester, “Pastor, wrap yourself in Psalm 91.”

On May 8, 1944, Lester started a fifteen minute daily preaching broadcast on a 250-watt radio station. This was a tremendous step considering his meager pastor’s income. He did not hold back from preaching against the evils of alcohol, even though the radio station was advertising liquor at other times during the day. Those in charge of the radio station told him he either had to stop preaching against alcohol or get off their station. Of course, Lester held to his convictions, knowing that if God wanted him on radio, He would provide the way. The next day, he found himself on KWBU, a 50,000-watt station funded by Baylor University. Lester’s radio ministry continued to be a faith ministry as it grew throughout the US, including Hawaii, and also into foreign countries. As the radio bills mounted because more and more stations were added, God always provided the necessary funds.

Lester was becoming known all over the country for his unwavering stand on the truth of God’s word. One of his favorite scriptures was Isaiah 40:31, “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” His messages included the topics of Calvary, the virgin birth, the sinless life of Christ, the wonderful atonement, the bodily resurrection, and the glorious return of our Saviour. He held nothing back as he declared the whole counsel of God.

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Eventually another event took place that again changed Lester's direction. Baylor University decided to give Harry Truman an honorary degree. At this time, Lester was chairman of Baylor's Civil Rights Platform Committee, and he felt it was inappropriate for a Baptist college to honor a man who had failed to practice God's principles. Lester began receiving anonymous phone calls and unsigned hate mail. Some of the Baptist brethren became unfriendly as well. Throughout his radio ministry, he had held a firm stand on his beliefs; the result - he was removed from KWBU. This was a crushing blow for him, but he stood on the promises of God. (2 Samuel 22:7, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 29-31) Shortly after removing Lester from the radio, the station owners lost \$70,000 and put the station up for sale. The purchase price was \$300,000. Lester remarked, "With the help of God and His people, we will buy it." And they did! Today the station is operating under the call letters KCTA (Know Christ the Answer)

There came a time when Lester believed his church needed a new building, and he also wanted to have a Christian day school. He met with the church board, and they decided to move ahead with these plans. They purchased some property, and construction began. The church was to be called, Second Baptist Church. On the first Sunday in the new auditorium, the church was packed, even the choir loft was full. Later that same year, the Christian day school was opened. Two godly women taught the little ones in the morning and worked as Lester's secretaries in the afternoons. Around this same time, Lester happened to be preaching at a meeting in Rio Grande Valley. Here he was approached by a farmer who asked him to pray for rain. When rain did come, and abundantly at that, the grateful farmer gave Lester \$20,000, which paid for the Christian day school.

After some time, Lester resigned from pastoring and became a circuit preacher (1 Samuel 7:16), traveling through Texas, Georgia, Tennessee, and Florida. As he traveled from one place to another, he spent much time flying. There were many times when he experienced emergency situations. It's no surprise then that he had a passionate dislike for flying. He would often say that when he would get to heaven one day, after seeing Jesus, he would want to thank his guardian angel who protected him during all of those near-death flights. Because of his dislike for flying, his family was shocked when Lester decided he wanted to learn to fly. He did learn; yet, even with himself at the controls, he still had a few close calls. Lester declared, "If I am to fly, I need a flying scripture." That scripture became Isaiah 40:28-31.

While the radio ministry and tent revival meetings grew, more and more people requested to hear him preach God's word. Though he knew the importance of his circuit preaching ministry, Lester felt the need for having a church home as a base from which to operate, and where his church family

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could be in prayer for him as he traveled. As a result, the Alameda Baptist Church in Corpus Christi was started on October 24, 1956. The original meeting place was under a tent, and the first day, one hundred twenty-six people came for church membership. Within six months, they had three hundred seventy-four members. Lester told his radio listeners that the members of his new church had a sweet spirit, with a great vision for missions and service to God. It wasn't too long before the new church took a big step and purchased the Good Samaritan Rescue Mission in Corpus Christi. Lester had found a place where his heart was overjoyed as he ministered to lost sheep, feeding them and furnishing them with a place to sleep.

The health problems Lester had had as a teenager lingered into his thirties, at which time he finally made a revolutionizing discovery. He best explained his discovery using three "f's". The first "f" was for "faith". Over the years, in his radio ministry, he stated that the just shall live by faith, and he practiced what he preached. He believed that anxiety and worry stemmed from the absence of faith in God and wisdom from God. The second "f" was for "fasting". (Luke 5:35) Although fasting is not a church ordinance, our Lord admonished His disciples that great results occur for those who pray and fast. (Mark 9:29; Acts 13:2,3) The third "f" was for "food". He believed that Americans ate too much food, and he even wondered why three meals a day was the norm. Overall, Lester felt that four things were causing Americans many health problems and even killing some – too much food, bad food, wrong combinations of food, and anxiety. The Bible says we are to care for our bodies and not to abuse them, for they are the temple of the living God. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Lester began each day with verses from the word of God, then a natural food breakfast. As he continued to follow this pattern of eating and not over-eating, his health began to improve. (3 John 2) He is quoted as having said, "What a blessing to have good health. It will give me more opportunities to serve my wonderful Lord and Saviour."

Lester had a burden to do something about the outcasts of society. He wanted to start a home for these outcasts. In 1957, a couple gave Roloff Evangelistic Enterprises eighty acres of land, six miles west of Lexington, Texas. With his deep conviction to rescue the perishing and snatch a soul from sin and the grave, he purchased seven house trailers, built a barn, erected fences, and cleared and harvested one acre of land. He was then ready to open the City of Refuge. After announcing its opening, Lester received thousands of letters from alcoholics, family members, and penitentiaries who said they needed this kind of help. He frequently referred to Genesis 18:14, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

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Lester spent many nights away from home as his work as an evangelist continued. Every time he returned home, his van was packed with gifts to support the City of Refuge. His work at Park Avenue Christian Day School, the two rescue missions, the City of Refuge, the Family Altar Radio Broadcast, and Faith Publication was a great deal of work and responsibility for one man. He spent much time on his knees in prayer. He often said, "The world has psychology; we should have kneelology." It was a rule that every day at noon, the workers would spend time in prayer. The same ought to be true for us. With the Bible in our hands and with prayer, we have the promise of God's provision, which is sufficient.

The Intercoastal Canal in front of Corpus Christi is a lonely place. There might be an occasional barge or sport fisherman boat, but that is about it. This gave Lester an idea to build a houseboat, "lighthouse", to house young, misguided boys, isolating them from liquor and drugs. The work began in the summer of 1958 and was finished shortly thereafter. It housed boys from nine to seventeen, boys that society did not want. They came in all shapes and sizes. Some could not read nor write; some were filled with sadness; some spoke with a twang and some could hardly speak at all; some were affluent. The Lighthouse consisted of a bunkhouse, a mess hall, little outlying shanties, and the houseboat itself. The boys all received love, creature comforts, and plentiful amounts of food. They built friendships through a blend of horse play, work, and fun. They learned to obey the rules. Prior to coming to the Lighthouse, many had been rule-breakers and had suffered the difficult consequences. (Proverbs 13:15) Fortunately for those boys, the Lighthouse offered an opportunity for them to start a new life. Lester remembered the joy on the faces of many boys when they finally became born again.

Upon graduation from the Lighthouse and City of Refuge, many young people had a desire to go into full-time Christian service and live a life without tobacco, drugs, alcohol, dancing, mixed swimming and anything that was even remotely associated with sin. (2 Corinthians 5:17) Lives were changed, and there are hundreds of testimonies to support this. In addition to this, Roloff ministries had developed such a reputation, that judges from all over the US allowed offenders of minor crimes to serve their time at one of the Roloff facilities.

One day while reading in Exodus, a verse seemed to reach out and grab Lester's heart. Exodus 2:9, "And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it." Just like Moses came forth out of Pharaoh's daughter's provision of a nursemaid, a boys' ranch came forth out of the radio ministry. It came about after one of the broadcasts in which

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Lester spoke of the Lighthouse and the City of Refuge. A friend in Rio Grande Valley responded by offering sufficient funds to purchase 327 acres of fertile ranchland. Thus in 1961, the Roloff Enterprises Boys Ranch was opened. It was conveniently located right across from the airport and just twenty-five minutes by air from the Lighthouse. Both the Lighthouse and the Boys Ranch continued to rescue the lives of lost, confused, and discarded boys from all walks of life, all because of God's rich blessings and Lester's desire to serve.

On the fifth anniversary of the City of Refuge, a man by the name of Al Gaines contacted Lester. (Al's father-in-law had been delivered from alcohol under Roloff's ministry.) Al took Lester for a plane ride to a beautiful 273-acre estate. It had a 150 year old house, a cabin, and a twenty-acre lake stocked with fish. He asked Lester if they had any use for this estate. He offered to sell it to Lester for \$185,000. Lester had to turn him down, saying it was beyond their reach financially. The property was located in Culloden, Georgia, four miles away from the nearest neighbor. There were no roads running by the property, and it had two runways. The setting was perfect for the City of Refuge, but the price was just too much for their budget. However, Lester could not get his mind off of all the ways that property could be used for God. It was while he wrestled with these thoughts in prayer that a still small voice spoke to him, saying, "Lester, you will get the property for \$108,000, and you will purchase it with cash, no debt." The money came in just as God had told him. How? A couple came to Lester and handed him a blank check, telling him to use it however he felt necessary. Lester said he would never forget what the man and his wife said to him as they handed him the check, "Debt free to set men free." The task of moving the City of Refuge began.

(Make sure you read Lesson 2B for the rest of the story)

Notes

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Heroes of the Faith - Men
Lesson 2A - Lester Roloff

Name _____

(*) if asterisk is shown in question, scripture is required along with answer in your own words.

1. List four Bible verses that represent Lester Roloff's character? *
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
2. What were Roloff's themes of life to live by?*
3. Why did Lester Roloff want to help young people*?
4. What character traits are duplicated from lesson 1 in the life of Lester Roloff?
5. What was the basis for Lester's improvement in health?
6. What happened when Lester did not back down on his convictions to preaching the truth at the 250-watt radio station?

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7. Explain Lester's wardrobe when he was growing up.
8. How did Lester afford his room and board when he went to college?
9. How much of the Bible did Roloff preach?
10. The final portion of this Bible Lesson, is an essay.

We would like you to explain what you have learned in this testimony about Lester Roloff. We would like you to get inside his head and his heart and feel what he felt. Tell us his challenges and his victories. We want to see it as if you were that spider on the wall of Lester Roloff's life watching everything, or as if you were standing with him each time he faced an overwhelming trial. What were his thoughts and prayers as he soared through the clouds traveling all over the country to preach and teach God's word. Throughout your essay, if a scripture comes to mind, write it down. * (use the back of page 8 & 9)

True/false

- Lester's wife and his cow had the same name.
- Roloff was an example of 2 Timothy 2:2.
- Corpus Christ means body of Christ
- Kids today are confused and need the love of Christ.



Scripture memorization, write out these verses on the back on this page:
Isaiah 40:31; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (Must be in KJV)

Any questions?