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The Life of Howard G. “Prof” Hendricks

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Our beloved Dr. Howard G. Hendricks went to be with the Lord early Wednesday morning. His funeral will be Saturday, March 2nd at 11:00 a.m. at Stonebriar Community Church. Howard G. Hendricks, known affectionately as “Prof” to more than 10,000 graduates of Dallas Theological Seminary, leaves behind an incalculable legacy which he would call “the work of Christ in me.” [The DTS website is hosting a Tribute to the life and ministry of Dr. Hendricks.](#)

A Lasting Legacy

“You’re looking at a completely fulfilled human being. If I died today having produced some of the people God has given me the privilege of shaping, it will have been worth showing up on the planet.” - Prof Hendricks to the *Dallas Morning News*, 2003

Dr. Howard G. Hendricks, known simply as “Prof,” directly or indirectly touched millions of lives in the evangelical community and beyond. For more than sixty years Prof served on the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), where he taught more than ten thousand students.

He also ministered in person in more than eighty countries. Through speaking engagements, radio, tapes, films, the sixteen books he authored and coauthored, countless journal and popular-market articles, his service on numerous boards, and his work as a chaplain to the Dallas Cowboys (1976–1984), his reach was and is worldwide. His legacy, in partnership with Jeanne, his wife of more than sixty-six years, includes four children, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Holding large audiences enthralled at venues such as Billy Graham’s conference center or Promise Keepers’ stadium rallies, Prof would confide, “It’s wonderful to be here with you, but I have a group of delicious students waiting for me back at the seminary.”

“I don’t believe a word of it”

Howard Hendricks was raised in a broken home. He recalled, “My parents separated when I came along. I split the family.” His father’s mother reared him, and he described himself as a “troublemaker” during his elementary school years, “probably just ‘acting out’ a lot of insecurities.”

“Most likely to end up in prison” was the assessment of his fifth-grade teacher in Philadelphia. Once she even tied him to his seat with a rope and taped his mouth shut. Yet everything changed for that boy when he met his sixth-grade teacher. He introduced himself to Miss Noe, and she told him, “I’ve heard a lot about you. But I don’t believe a word of it.”

Those words would change his life. She made him realize for the first time that someone cared. “People are always looking for someone to say, ‘Hey, I believe in you,’” he said. And in his more than sixty years as a professor, he believed in his students.

Hundreds of Christian organizations were created as a result of Prof’s ministry to his protégés. In the words of one DTS graduate, “He impacted more lives personally than anyone I’ve ever known.” Prof once said, “I think the reason God has used me is that, by His grace, the Holy Spirit has developed in me an incurable confidence in His ability to transform people.” Prof went beyond communicating what students should do to convincing them that they could. According to a 2003 *Dallas Morning News* article about him, the combined ministries of just eight of his former students, a veritable Who’s Who of Evangelical Christians, reach close to thirty thousand people in the pews every week. Add radio programs and books to the number, and the audience expands to millions.

“If you don’t have a wife, get one!”

What greater tribute to Jeanne Hendricks than her husband’s adamant entreaty, “If you don’t have a wife, get one!” The two met in Philadelphia after Prof became a Christian, and they attended Wheaton College near Chicago as undergraduates. After receiving his bachelor’s degree in 1946, Hendricks and his wife moved to Texas, where he enrolled in classes at DTS. After earning a Master of Theology degree in 1950, he planted a church in Fort Worth.

Though he was a pastor at Calvary Presbyterian, the words in 2 Timothy 2:2 stuck in his mind: “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.” So when Dr. John Walvoord, at that time the theology department chairman, asked Hendricks to join the seminary faculty part-time, he agreed. His reasoning: instead of pastoring only one church, he could train ten students to pastor ten churches.

A year after Hendricks joined the faculty, president Lewis Sperry Chafer died suddenly, and the newly appointed president Walvoord implored Hendricks to fill the full-time teaching vacancy. Prof accepted—on one condition: a Christian education course had to be included in his teaching load. He was twenty-eight years old with a passion for teaching and mentoring students. And in the years that followed, that passion never changed.

“You never graduate from the school of discipleship.”

Even more than his wonderful teaching, the time Prof took to mentor students is what most emphasize when they talk about his influence on their lives.

In the days before air-conditioning, a certain campus bench between Stearns Hall and Mosher Library was known as “Prof’s bench.” He kept “office hours” there; students could stop by. Their questions drew on Prof’s wisdom. What students remember more than his answers was his availability.

Eventually bench time gave way to early-morning discipleship time. Tuesdays and Thursdays at six a.m. brought two groups of twelve men and women each semester. And whether one-on-one or in a classroom, Prof taught. He was known to stand on a chair while teaching if that’s what it took to captivate a bored-looking student. Before those in his classes, he served as “stand-up comic, cheerleader, personal trainer, encourager, and super teacher,” observed a student who cringed at the recollection of her professor’s favorite gesture, wiping his sleeve across his nose. Hendricks often mimicked the nearsighted cartoon character Mr. Magoo, by scrunching his face, squinting his eyes, and sniffing. Students too young to remember Magoo considered the gestures “pure Hendricks.” But Prof’s creativity had a purpose—that students might center their lives in Jesus Christ and live according to His Word. Prof was known to say that if he had his way, every student would memorize one thousand Bible verses before graduating.

While teaching, Prof went back to school and earned a D.D. from Wheaton College Graduate School in 1967. He did additional graduate studies at Biblical Seminary in New York.

In 1986, at the request of then seminary president Dr. Donald Campbell, Prof founded the Center for Christian Leadership. Its first program, Spiritual Formation, continues to build Christian identity, community, integrity, and diversity in DTS students through weekly small-group meetings. The program presents a model of discipleship intended for replication.

DTS chancellor Dr. Charles Swindoll, a 1963 graduate, whose Insight for Living radio program reaches across the world, recalls that Prof “is the one man who has had the greatest impact on my entire life. And there is no doubt in my mind that since the late 1950s to the present day, no other

teacher at DTS has been more influential to more of our graduates, or more magnetic to more potential students than Dr. Hendricks.”

“Few have marked as many lives or have multiplied ministry passions like our beloved Prof,” said DTS president Dr. Mark L. Bailey. “Prof was a friend and a colleague who has marked us deeply for the cause of Christ.”

When Don Regier as a student told Prof, “I can’t preach. I don’t know what I am going to do,” Prof Hendricks convinced him that he had creative gifts. Regier has now invested those gifts for more than four decades of service as a professor at DTS.

Retired professor Dr. Eddie Lane remembers when he and now Dr. Tony Evans were the first African-American students on campus. “Dr. Hendricks made it clear that he was glad to have us in his classroom. As a student, I majored in Howard Hendricks.” DTS’s first women students echo the same sentiments.

“How big is your God? The size of your God determines the size of everything.”

The sixty years spent mentoring students held their share of pain. Seventeen years ago, Prof reported to the doctor’s office for removal of a small skin cancer. Eight hours later, more cancer cells remained. Eventually invasive surgery into his skull endangered Prof’s ears, eyes, and brain. Holding Jeanne’s hand, he said, “Either God is sovereign or He is not. And, if He’s not, we’re in deep trouble. But I’m coming down on the side that He is.” The mail brought a stack of cards six feet high from people around the world whose lives he had touched.

After the operation, the doctor reported, “It’s obvious that God is at work in your life. This cancer went as far as it could go toward your ear without affecting your hearing, as far as it could go toward your eye without affecting your eyesight, and as far as it could go toward your brain without affecting your mind.”

“If God had said to me, ‘I’ll give you another course [in trusting],’” Prof quipped, “I would have said, ‘Let’s make it an elective.’”

“Spend the rest of your life doing what God prepared you to do.”

During his years of service Prof received numerous honors including the 2003 Tom Landry Excellence of Character Award from the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. In 2010 Prof added to his long list of honors the National Religious Broadcasters’ (NRB) Board of Directors Award, given to a Christian who “demonstrates integrity, displays creativity, and makes a significant impact on society.” While he appreciated such accolades, for Prof the greatest reward came in mentoring. At that time, he repeated what he had told the *Dallas Morning News* ten years earlier: “For me, [mentoring is] very important because I think it’s really my fulfillment,” he said. “I tell people, ‘You’re looking at a completely fulfilled human being.’ If I died today having produced

some of the people God has given me the privilege of shaping, it will have been worth showing up on the planet.”

Drawing on wisdom gained through experience, Prof wrote a journal series on aging for *Bibliotheca Sacra*. In it he argued that there is no such thing as retirement from service in the body of Christ. Consequently, he continued teaching for as long as he was able. But he did believe in making room for the next generation. So in the spring of 2011, in his sixtieth year at DTS, he retired from faculty responsibilities and formal classroom ministry. At the time of his retirement he was distinguished professor emeritus of Christian Education and Leadership.

About that time Prof described aging as a “quiet, ill-defined blur that steals up on one with little advance warning.” He said, “My body refuses to cooperate with my mind, as if it were a stranger. Mysterious little aches and odd moments of forgetfulness pop up. Birthdays become irrelevant. The surprise is that I no longer seem to be quite the ‘me’ I have always known.”

Even after he no longer had teaching responsibilities, Prof could be found on the Stearns bench. And though his presence was not required, he would make it a priority to attend the annual faculty retreat, to be present and available as long as he was able.

In Prof’s last chapel message, titled *The Ultimate Final Exam*, he drew on the text of 2 Timothy 2:15 to emphasize three passions every believer should have: The Lord well pleased, the work well done, and the Word well used.



He alluded to a constant argument over whether Michelangelo was greater or the teacher who trained him. At one point the teacher perceived that his student was resting on his talents rather than dedicating himself to excellence. So he batted Michelangelo’s sculpture, breaking it into a thousand pieces. The teacher insisted, “Talent is cheap. But dedication is costly.” Prof’s conclusion: “If you and I are going to serve and be approved, our service is going to cost us. If

you want success and significance, both will cost you. But it will cost you more not to have made the investment.”

From the earthly perspective of those who mourn his loss—and the DTS family feels this pain acutely—Prof made that costly investment. He was content to be the teacher behind many great communicators of our day, modeling a passion for his Lord, a passion for the Word well used, and a work well done of investing in lives for the glory of Christ.

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