

12-2-2018

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Recommended Citation

Weinstein, Mark D., "Personal Library of One of America's Foremost Bible Teachers Coming to Cedarville" (2018). *News Releases*. 818.
https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/news_releases/818

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 3, 2018

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Personal Library of One of America's Foremost Bible Teachers Coming to Cedarville

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Dr. Warren Wiersbe, one of the foremost Bible teachers, professors and authors of the 20th century, a man known as the pastor's pastor, has gifted his vast personal library to Cedarville University. Cedarville President Dr. Thomas White made the announcement during chapel December 3.

Wiersbe, 89, began his ministry in 1951 at Central Baptist Church in East Chicago, Indiana, where he served till 1957. Next, he spent four years at Youth for Christ as director of the literature division. He then pastored Calvary Baptist Church of Covington, Kentucky, from 1961 to 1971, which grew from 800 to several thousand members and where his messages were broadcast on radio for the first time. After this, he was called to pastor Moody Church, located in the heart of Chicago and named for 19th-century American evangelist Dwight L. Moody, until 1978. Wiersbe has ministered over the radio through his "Songs in the Night" program while at Moody, and with Back to the Bible radio network from 1980 to 1993. He had an active conference speaking ministry till 2004.

Wiersbe is a prolific author, having written more than 170 books, with his most recent title, "Delights & Disciplines of Bible Study: A Guidebook for Studying God's Word," released earlier this year by David C. Cook. Wiersbe was a regular contributor to Christianity Today magazine from 1979 to 1982. He taught practical theology classes at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, from 1978 to 1982 and is a former distinguished professor of preaching at Grand Rapids (Michigan) Theological Seminary. Cedarville University will become the repository for Wiersbe's immense personal library of books, estimated somewhere between 13,000 and 14,000 titles. This impressive collection of commentaries, nonfiction publications and works of literature will be housed in the Warren and Betty Wiersbe Library and Reading Room, to be located in Cedarville's Center for Biblical and Theological Studies.

"I'm a bookworm, and I used to live at the public library," Wiersbe shared. "I got saved at a Youth for Christ rally where Billy Graham was preaching when I was just a few days short of my 16th birthday. I went down to the library to see if they had any books to help me grow and, lo and behold, I found a Scofield Bible on the shelf that had never been taken out, so I took it out. I was amazed at what there was to learn from the Bible and, ever since then, I've been a student of the Bible."

The sizable and priceless contribution of Wiersbe's personal library has been eight years in the making. Nancy Voorhies, Cedarville senior regional director of development, first saw the collection in 2010 during a visit to the Wiersbes' home in Lincoln, Nebraska.

But, the Wiersbes had been connected with Cedarville long before Voorhies made her first visit. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, became familiar with Cedarville shortly after its merger with the Baptist Bible Institute in 1953 and supported the school with their gifts and prayers.

"I owe a lot to Cedarville," Wiersbe noted. "I used to preach in Cedarville chapel occasionally and when I was preaching away from Calvary Baptist, your president, Dr. Jeremiah, would graciously come and preach in my pulpit. Now I turn on the TV and see David (Jeremiah) preaching. I remember David when he was playing basketball."

Wiersbe also enjoyed a close relationship with former president Dr. Paul Dixon. To honor his long-term friendship with Cedarville and his commitment to the cause of Christ, Wiersbe was awarded an honorary doctor of letters degree on January 26, 1987 as part of the university's Centennial Celebration.

While the Wiersbes were reluctant to transfer ownership of the books to a university in 2010, Voorhies took time to understand their concerns and earlier this year, offered a solution, with the full support of the university. She first suggested the plan to the Wiersbes' son Dave, a classmate of hers from Moody Bible Institute and now the power of attorney for his parents.

"I called Dave two days before I met with Warren and Betty," Voorhies recalled. "I told him I'd like to have a serious conversation about the library, and here's what we'd like to do. Dave heard me out and then said, 'A lot of organizations would like to have dad's library, but as far as I'm concerned, this is the best solution I've heard; you have my support.'"

With that word of encouragement, Voorhies set the proposal before Warren and Betty Wiersbe: Cedarville would house all of the books in one location, not to be commingled with the university's existing collection. Students could come read through his books, see his notes in the margins, and follow his cross-referencing, but the books would remain in the space, like a reference library. However, people could sit and read them and return to use them as needed.

Voorhies suggested the plan while they all were together in Betty Wiersbe's assisted living apartment. "I told them, 'I present this opportunity for your prayerful consideration,'" she said. "Fifteen minutes later, Betty took my arm and said, 'I like your idea for the library.'"

White and Dr. Jason Lee, dean of the school of biblical and theological studies, visited with the Wiersbes on September 11 to thank them for the gift and spend time with one of the most respected teachers and Bible scholars in the last 50 years.

"I've appreciated his teaching ministry for years," noted Lee, "but to meet him and hear his character and his heart for the Scriptures and for the church, it was just so encouraging. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting him. He's such a tender-hearted man and humble. He kept asking Dr. White and me about our ministry students – people preparing to preach the Word. He wanted to know how they were doing."

Because of this gift, which may also include some of Wiersbe's personal notebooks, including sermon outlines, his influence will now extend to future generations of preachers.

"Dr. Wiersbe loves the Word," Lee said. "He takes a strong stand on the authority of Scripture. And now our students can be shaped by the same resources that shaped him. He has spent decades investing in the church through his teaching of the Word, and now he'll be able to continue that through students picking up the same resources for the same purposes."

"When we were with him, he said to Dr. White and me, 'Preaching is loving people through the Word.' We hope our students catch that spirit."

“Dr. Wiersbe’s life and ministry has been committed to the right handling of the Scriptures, and pouring into others who would do likewise,” White said. “Cedarville has been blessed to steward this considerable collection, which is more than books on shelves, but because of the marginal notes and observations, is the accumulated wisdom and insight of one of the great servants of the church in the 20th century. We thank God for this amazing privilege.”

“When I thought about the students at Cedarville, and they perhaps would not be able to get some of these books, the Lord convinced me this was the thing to do,” Wiersbe said. “I pray God will continue to use Cedarville to turn out balanced, evangelical preachers and missionaries. Just keep up what you’re doing because you’re turning out some wonderful people.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,193 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and leading student satisfaction ratings. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.