

THE LIFE STORY OF

# LESTER SUMRALL



THE MAN, THE MINISTRY, THE VISION

## LESTER SUMRALL

AS TOLD TO  
TIM DUDLEY



**New Leaf Press**

A Division of New Leaf Publishing Group

[www.newleafpress.net](http://www.newleafpress.net)

First printing: 1993

Paperback edition: March 2003

Copyright © 1993, 2003 by LeSea, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations in articles and reviews. For information write: New Leaf Press, Inc., P.O. Box 726, Green Forest, AR 72638.

ISBN: 0-89221-532-1

Library of Congress Catalog No. 2002116489

Cover by Bryan Miller

Edited and written by Rob Kerby and Val Cindric

**Printed in the United States of America**

Please visit our website for other great titles:

[www.newleafpress.net](http://www.newleafpress.net)

For information regarding author interviews, please contact the publicity department at (870) 438-5288.

# Dedication

To Cliff Dudley, founder and CEO of New Leaf Press.

God spoke to him, and after personally visiting with me, he was accumulating the material for this book at the time of his death. This book was his personal project.

Tim Dudley, president of New Leaf Press, accepted the challenge of his father's labor, and saw this book through its completion after his father's passing.

To the entire Dudley family, thank you for your labor of love, and God bless you.

Lester Sumrall

# Contents

Publisher's Preface .....	9
1. The Battle for My Young Heart.....	11
2. The First Time I Heard God's Voice.....	17
3. Out of the Belly of the Whale .....	27
4. Teenage Pulpiteer .....	37
5. Blood on My Hands.....	49
6. Ordained by God.....	55
7. Shotgun Revival .....	63
8. Where in the World Is Howard Carter? .....	71
9. The Tender Englishman .....	85
10. Demons at My Coattails.....	95
11. Bandits and Healing in Tibet.....	103
12. Confronting the Powers of Darkness .....	111
13. Going in Different Directions .....	117
14. Long-Distance Romance .....	123
15. Where Do I Go from Here? .....	133
16. Your Fruit Shall Remain .....	141
17. Filipino Time .....	151
18. Bitten by Devils.....	161
19. The Miracle That Changed a Nation.....	171
20. Running with the Vision .....	179
21. Teamwork .....	189
22. The Jerusalem Vision .....	195
23. In the Middle of Miracles.....	203
24. Will You Obey? .....	209
Epilogue.....	213

# Publisher's Preface

While working on the book with Brother Sumrall, I heard him say he had never been out of the will of God in 63 years. He wasn't boasting; he was stating a fact. His ministry testified to his obedience to the Spirit of God and the call on his life.

In Romans, it says that because of the disobedience of one, we are all sinners, but because of the obedience of One, we are all made righteous.

One man obeying God can still result in thousands coming to Christ. Obedience is a powerful force, and Lester Sumrall's life exemplified its effectiveness. Over the years, thousands, possibly a million, souls were touched one way or another by the obedience of this one man.

We consider it an honor and privilege to publish his life story. My prayer is that while you read this book, you will become even more willing to follow the call on your own life — guided by the example of Lester Sumrall.

Tim Dudley,  
Publisher

# 1

---

## The Battle for My Young Heart

**M**y mother had decided, even before I was born, that I was going to be a preacher. She had prayed for me fervently while I was in her womb — back when I couldn't do anything about it, except kick a little!

Saved as a teenager and later baptized with the Holy Ghost at a tent revival, my mother had her heart set on being a missionary. Circumstances changed the direction of her life when her sister died, leaving behind a husband and three young children. Realizing her niece and nephews had no one to take care of them, my mother selflessly agreed to move in with the family.

However, her widowed brother-in-law immediately set his sights on marrying her — his deceased wife's sister. In an effort to woo her he pretended to become a Christian. My mother, believing that he loved her and Jesus Christ, married him and gave up her dream of going to the mission field.

Conflict soon developed. My mother spent much of her time in Bible study and attending, what they called in those days, the Ladies' Prayer Group. My father, however, scorned Mother's quiet devotion to the Lord.

Oh, he'd go to church. Seventy-five years ago, everybody went to church. But during Sunday dinner, he'd criticize the pastor and complain about his preaching. In spite of all the hell-fire and brimstone sermons he heard week after week, my father continued to smoke, drink, chew, and live a sinner's life.

I was born at home, child number six and completely unplanned. My father, who had decided they should stop at five, always considered me an accident. Once he told me bluntly, “You weren’t supposed to be here.”

My half-brothers Houston and Kerney, my half-sister Anna, my brother Ernest, and my sister Louise were all much older than I. Sister Leona, who was number seven, was born a few years later after we had moved back to Laurel, Mississippi. It was there my father found work in the railroad roundhouse.

All day he made things out of glowing steel, hammering molten metal on his iron anvil beside a raging blacksmith’s forge. For a man who worked with his hands, he always made good wages and, as far back as I can remember, we always had an automobile. In fact, for many years we were the only family on the block that owned one. With enormous muscles and a commanding voice, my father was a giant in my eyes. In fist fights, all he needed was one punch and the other man was finished. I once watched him lift a grown man, and the chair he was sitting in, into the air with one arm.

When he took me to the barber shop for my first haircut, the barber placed me on a small stool on the chair and wrapped a cloth around my neck. He asked, “Well, sonny, how do you want your hair cut?”

I looked up at him and said, in a proud, self-assured voice, “Just like Daddy’s.” The men in the barber shop burst out laughing.

I was embarrassed, but what else could I say? I wanted to be just like my daddy.

When Daddy spanked me, he paddled the daylights out of me, but I only remember that happening two or three times. Mostly he just yelled at me; he wasn’t abusive, but he did seem cold, demanding, and even mean at times.

On the playground, I was a pint-sized version of him. I fought every kid in the neighborhood, even taking on boys four inches taller than myself with little injury. Punching fast and furiously, I would beat the daylights out of them until they were bloody all over.

I also fought God, probably because I knew I had a choice to make.

My mother was a gentle, kind, and godly woman. I loved her and wanted to please her, but I didn't want to be like her because that meant I had to be good.

On the other hand, if I followed in my father's footsteps, I could be my own boss and do whatever I pleased.

While the inner battle raged, I dug in my heels, determined to be like my daddy.

I worshiped him from afar, accepting his indifference toward me and modeling myself in his image. My feelings toward him were mixed, even confused at times. I don't recall him ever bouncing me in the air or holding me close. I don't remember him hugging me or saying, "I love you, Lester."

But my mother did, every day. She was the one who dried my tears and doctored my scrapes. When I rushed home with excited tales that every little boy likes to tell, she was the one who listened. It must have grieved her sometimes to see the trouble I got into. When I wasn't fighting, I was playing marbles, and nobody could beat me. From ten feet away, I could aim at a marble and hit it every time. This skill soon became very profitable since I would win everybody's marbles and then sell them back.

One morning I left home with a box of marbles and wandered around the neighborhood. A kid stopped me and said, "I'll trade you my knife for some marbles." So I traded him.

Another looked at the knife and said, "I'd sure like to have that knife." So I traded it for something else.

Before three o'clock I was back home with a billy goat and a beautiful billy goat wagon.

My father exclaimed, "Where did you get that?"

I said, "Well, I've forgotten the address right now, but I traded it."

For the first time in my life, I saw Daddy nod his head in approval. For a brief moment, I felt he was proud of me.

Making money came naturally. On my way home from school, I would buy a hundred-pound sack of peanuts, roast 20 or 30 pounds, shaking them every minute or two so they were cooked all the way around. Then I'd fill little bags with roasted



peanuts and go to the nearby sawmill where I'd sell them for five cents a bag. I'd often come home with a dollar or two, which was more than some men were making in a day.

Before long, I had more money than anybody at our house. My brothers and sisters always came to me if they needed a loan. I became my family's junior banker and I charged interest, too.

When summer came, instead of selling peanuts, I devised another money-making scheme. After constructing a small wagon, I purchased a hundred pounds of ice and some heavy syrup — grape, strawberry, vanilla, and other flavors. Then I paid a little boy fifty cents a day to pull my wagon while I walked behind ringing a bell and calling out, "Snowballs!" At the end of the day, I would come home with three or four dollars.

Even as a youngster, I soon figured out that if you wanted to spend money, you had to make it first. My father had never given me a dollar in his life, so I knew if I was going to have any money, I had to make it myself. Besides, I sensed Daddy's silent approval of my business ventures. I didn't expect him to praise me outright. That just wasn't his way.

In fact, we seldom knew what Daddy was thinking — except when revival time came at the church.

Mother's pastor would come to her and say, "Sister Sumrall, we have nowhere to put the preacher. Won't you let the evangelist stay with you? He'll just use one room, him and his wife and kids. The kids will sleep on the floor."

I guess everybody figured that since my father made a good living and had a car, our house was the best place for them. Of course, my mother had a hand in it, too. She loved having preachers — and their entire families — board with us.

Sometimes those evangelists and their wives and three or four kids stayed at our house for three months. They had meetings every night, and people would come from everywhere to hear them. Hundreds would find Christ as their Savior, and a whole community would change. It was revival time!

That's when Daddy would go into high gear. "Those preachers are nothing but con-artists and charlatans!" he'd rant, and I'd nod

in agreement when my mother wasn't looking. My daddy thought that if you didn't sweat or pound steel or plow in the fields, then you weren't really working.

In those days evangelists were usually dirt poor and couldn't even afford to stay in hotels. That's why they lived in the homes of the church people. I don't know why I didn't realize that those poor preachers certainly weren't getting rich. But if Daddy said it was so, then I believed it.

My father would come home to find strangers sitting around in the living room, and he'd bellow, "Who is this?"

"It's the evangelist. He's going to bless our home," Mother would reply.

Then my father would start cursing and say, "Why they're nothing but beggars, too lazy to work, traveling around like kings! All they do is meddle in people's lives and get rich passing the hat."

Well, I liked that kind of talk! That sounded good, so I went around spouting out the same verbiage. Like my father, I had nothing but scorn for all those preachers my mother brought into our house. Sometimes I had good reason to complain.

Our table wasn't big enough to seat everyone at the same time, so Mother would serve the evangelist and his family first. If I got anything at all, it was the scraps when that bunch got through eating. No sir, I didn't like that at all.

They always took over my bedroom, so I had to sleep on the floor on blankets. If the preacher hung his trousers on my bedpost, I'd steal money out of the pockets and go off and spend it.

One day a friend and I let the pastor's son tag along when we went swimming. Winter rains had swollen the creek and the high water was dangerous, but, still, we dove into the muddy current, daring each other to follow. I swam about halfway across when, suddenly, the flood waters started to pull me under. I fought, but the water was cold and the current too strong.

As I struggled to keep my head above water, I remember that the preacher's son panicked and was screaming, "Let's get home! We're in trouble! He's gone!" Then he ran off, leaving my friend to feel around in the cold, muddy water until he found me.

Desperately, my buddy dragged my body out onto the bank. I wasn't breathing since my lungs were filled with water. Somehow he punched my back until the mud and water gushed out. I wheezed back into the world of the living.

The preacher's kid got a whipping for running out on us, and I swore I would never befriend another one of those sissies. From that time on, I gave every preacher's kid who had the misfortune to stay with us every reason to resent their father's ministry.

Of course, the poor kids had rough lives with no home — living three months here, three months there, one month over there. Nevertheless, I had no sympathy for any of them.

The preachers and their families didn't have an easy time at our house. But instead of returning my hatred or taking revenge, they would simply look toward heaven and pray, "God, help Lester. God, save Lester."

I just sneered under my breath, "Yeah, well, you get out of my house, and God can do a lot better with me."