

James Douglas Tarpley
May 2, 1946–October 4, 2024

Dr. James Douglas Tarpley, longtime journalism professor and respected Christian college educator and administrator, graduated to eternity on Friday, October 4, 2024 after complications from a cardiac medical procedure. He was 78.

Born in Los Angeles on May 2, 1946, Doug was the first child of Clement H. Tarpley, an athletic New Mexico farm boy who became a decorated World War II Navy veteran, and Grace Lorraine Everson Tarpley, a Minnesota-born “Scandinavian lassie” known for her piano, ice skating, and homemaking talents. Doug and his siblings—Reynold, Sherryl, and Greg—were raised in a brand-new Ventura County, California, subdivision named College Park. Growing up in El Rio, they frequented the nearby beaches, state parks, big-city attractions of Los Angeles, and theme parks like Knott’s Berry Farm, Pacific Ocean Park, and Disneyland.

Doug’s upbringing was focused on character, country, community service, and Christianity. Both of his parents held civil service jobs supporting area military operations, and the family was active in the Assemblies of God (AG). Doug came to salvation in Christ at a young age, and each summer, the kids spent a week at the denomination’s Camp Pinecrest, high in the San Bernardino mountains. For most of their time in California, the Tarpley family worshipped at El Rio’s Bethany Chapel. It was at this home church that Doug met the love of his life, the founding pastor’s daughter: Patricia Jean McIntosh. Their families had been friends since Doug’s youth, and by high school, the petite brunette had captured his heart with her Scottish spirit, ready smile and sincere love of life and the Lord.

From an early age, Doug exhibited a bent for the arts and humanities, demonstrating giftings in music, writing, painting, and graphic design. Sidelined with rheumatic fever for much of the seventh grade, he learned to draw while schooled at home and corresponded with leading animation artists of the day. Musically, Doug became an accomplished accordion player, and in the mid 1960s (alongside his brother Rennie) won first place for instrumentalists in the AG’s Southern California District Teen Talent Search. They also were featured on a record of gospel music with other youth as part of Christ Ambassadors.

Perhaps as a sign of things to come, Doug’s first job was as a newspaper delivery boy. Always fascinated by journalism, he excelled in student media throughout his time in both junior high and high school. Since he enjoyed interacting with and interviewing people, he served as a writer and photographer for the weekly campus newspaper and the yearbook staff. Doug and Patricia also created a small newspaper for their church youth group, and he found that he enjoyed the entire production process, from idea meetings and assignments to publication design and distribution.

In his teens, Doug also worked part time after school producing hand-lettered signage and artwork for Disco Fair, an early big-box store chain in the area. At his 1964 graduation from Oxnard High School, he won a coveted fine arts award from the Bank of America.

For college, Doug enrolled at Ventura College (a two-year junior college). In 1965, during his second year, his family relocated to Mountain Grove, Mo., as his father completed his 30-year civil service career. Then on June 18, 1966, a month after his 20th birthday, Doug married his beloved Trisha, just 21, and shortly after left for Springfield, MO, where he continued his studies at Southwest Missouri State University to study English and journalism education.

After earning his B.S. in 1968, Doug officially became a teacher, “his holy calling.” He taught English at Eldon High School for several years, while continuing his academic studies. Doug

completed a M.A. in English at SMSU in 1972, and earned a second M.A. in Mass Communications History and Theory, with an emphasis in Mediated Communication, through the University of Central Missouri. During his graduate school years, he and Trish also welcomed their first two children, daughter Tamara and oldest son David.

In 1976, Doug and his family moved to Springfield, where he was appointed Assistant Professor of Journalism at Evangel College, the Assemblies of God’s flagship university. There for nearly a decade, Doug taught a variety of media classes and advised the growing staff of Evangel’s yearbook, *The Lancer*. He acted as managing editor and a writer for *High Adventure*, the magazine of the denomination’s official boys ministry, Royal Rangers. Doug also served on both Evangel’s Communications and Long-Range Planning Committees, comprised mostly of department heads.

Doug himself was promoted to department head at Evangel after a 14-month sabbatical and completion of his Ph.D. in journalism from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Doug partially chose SIU for the opportunity to study under the venerable Dr. Harry W. Stonecypher, associate professor of journalism. The acclaimed First Amendment educator and other professors nurtured Doug’s interest in journalism scholarship and media law, and in 1983 Doug completed his dissertation, “*Fair Use as a Copyright Doctrine: Judicial and Statutory Interpretation.*” For decades afterwards, Doug hoped to turn his research into a journalism reference book. Instead, his studies became source material for numerous speaking engagements, scholarly articles, and workshops, as did his research on “American Newsmagazine Coverage of the Supreme Court, 1978–81,” a *Journalism Quarterly* article.

In 1987, Doug made the difficult decision to leave Evangel to become Chair of the School of Journalism at Regent University. The opportunity to teach exclusively graduate-level students appealed to him, as did the chance to live near the ocean again, albeit on an opposite coast. He and his family, now including youngest son Jonathan, moved to Virginia Beach, as did the national office for the Society of Collegiate Journalists, of which he was Executive Director.

At Regent, Doug focused on teaching a dual approach to journalism from a Christian worldview, to build bridges between ivory-tower academia’s theoretical and philosophical views of journalism and the practical, ethical, professional exercise of the real-world craft. He strengthened student media, encouraged internships and freelance assignments, and introduced on-campus panel discussions with leading reporters, editors, and publishers in print and electronic media.

For a few years of his tenure, Doug and Patricia relocated to Northern Virginia. Regent planned to seed branches of its journalism and government schools in the nation’s capital, in hopes of increasing access to power players and positioning the university as a formidable force in both fields. The ambitious endeavor met with early success thanks to Doug’s foundational efforts, but was costly, thus short-lived.

As department head, Doug also chaired scores of master’s theses, never compromising on intellectual quality and scholarship. At the same time, he expanded his own published research with entries on pioneering female journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner Anne O’Hare McCormick for “*American Newspaper Journalists, 1925–1950*” in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, and Eugene Isaac Meyer, the Depression-era banker-financier-turned-owner-publisher of *The Washington Post* in the *Biographical Dictionary of American Journalism*. In 2002, with Regent colleagues Dr. John Keeler and Dr. William Brown, he coauthored the widely cited “Ethics” chapter of *American Journalism: History, Principles, Practices* (W.D. Sloan and L. Mullikin Parcell, editors). Over his decades in journalism and academia, Doug’s scholarship also was

featured in leading thought and professional trade publications including *Regent University Law Review*, *Advertising Age*, and *Journalism Quarterly*.

For the last 14 years of his professional career, Doug returned to his beloved California to serve at Biola University, close to his boyhood home. As the Chair of the Journalism department, then shortly thereafter Dean of Fine Arts and Communication, he strengthened the student newspaper, *The Chimes*, and established Biola as the cornerstone film school for programs within the broader Council for Christian Colleges & Universities. He expanded program offerings to include more electronic and entertainment media, and added opportunities for students to hone their craft through professional experience.

Under Doug's leadership, Biola housed the national headquarters for the Association of Christian Collegiate Media and supported an active chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America. Each year, the university hosted respected conferences and workshops such as the World Journalism Institute to focus on timely topics such as journalistic integrity, media law and First Amendment rights, and the implications of infotainment and internet publishing. More important, the workshops opened doors for students to learn from and network with leading professionals.

Among his most important legacy projects was shepherding the transformation of the school's existing journalism, media arts, and filmmaking facilities into the Biola University Production Center. The two-year, \$3 million expansion began with a generous seed donation from the estate of Joanne and Pepito Perez. The couple were well-known for their vaudevillian careers in Hollywood as "the Twisting Marvel" and "the Spanish Clown," respectively, and as longtime friends and collaborators of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. Other gifts, large and small, completed the funding for the upgrade project, which included a full print, video, and audio newsroom, new office spaces and studios, and state-of-the-art equipment to give students the hands-on training they need to enter the workforce.

Throughout his storied career, Doug was honored with accolades: membership in Alpha Phi Omega, the service honors society; service as a Journalism Fellow, double listing as one of the Jaycees' Outstanding Young Men of America, numerous inclusions in a variety of Who's Who acknowledgements, even Great Bridge (Va.) Ruritan of the Year. None was as meaningful to him as being recognized as a champion for thoughtful, well-trained Christians who wanted to influence culture for God's glory through the information and entertainment. "The call to be a Christian journalist or filmmaker is a sacred calling...every bit as sacred as a calling to be a minister or a missionary," he often said.

After suffering a number of heart attacks and health scares over several years, Doug retired at the end of the 2016 school year. Though the schedule change was quite an adjustment, retirement afforded him and Trish more free time to reengage in activities that they'd always enjoyed. The foodies enjoyed trying new area restaurants, as well as trying to master the joy of healthier cooking in their own kitchen. Doug worked on refining his photography and watercolor still-life paintings, and returned to his love of reading English literature (Chaucer, Milton, Blake, and C.S. Lewis being among his favorites). He and Trish attended lectures and book signings at the Nixon and Reagan presidential libraries, pieced together giant jigsaw puzzles, and spent hours coloring, watching sports, and baking brownies with their youngest grandchildren.

Music remained a key hobby, and from time to time Doug broke out his red accordion to play a gospel favorite. Family movie marathons moved beyond classics like "Citizen Kane" and "All the President's Men" to include faith-focused films and wholesome Hallmark TV movie series. And ever brave, in 2022 Doug and Patricia adopted a spunky black Chihuahua mix

puppy, Charlie, who quickly took over their hearts and their home.

Travel had always been part of the Tarpleys' personal and professional lives. Throughout his career, Doug and Trisha had taken teaching trips and vacations to exotic destinations like Peru, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and Hawaii, and the family had engaged in church and mission trips to build a parsonage in Costa Rica and to improve healthcare access in Zimbabwe. Though such adventures proved difficult later in life, Doug and Trish, as health allowed, were able to invest more and more time visiting with family and friends near and far. As members of LifeSpring Assembly of God, they enthusiastically supported evangelistic efforts around their community and around the world.

In retirement, Doug remained devoted to former colleagues and students, most of whom had come to see him as a mentor or friend. He was purposeful in staying in touch over the years, often with an unexpected phone call or email of encouragement. Doug often shared Facebook posts about his former students' successes, and he never hesitated to provide them with a well-timed referral or glowing reference.

More notable still was his devotion to his family. Doug and Patricia joyfully applauded their children's families and accomplishments, both professional and personal. He was delighted that Tamara followed in his footsteps with her own doctorate from Biola and her career as a college journalism and media professor both in the United States and abroad. He spoke proudly of David's heart for providing practical help to the poor and underserved through world missions, and of his success as an accomplished architect in San Diego. Closer to home, Doug and Trish cherished the verdant oasis that Jonathan created for their Riverside backyard, complete with an organic farm-to-table vegetable-herb garden and tranquil waterfall feature. Of course, enjoying more fun and fellowship with his eight amazing grandchildren (and six grandpuppies) was the delight of his retirement.

Doug once was asked how he would like his epitaph to read. Characteristically, he replied that he'd have to think about that for some time before answering. But for all who knew him, Doug left a legacy of learning, of excellence and wisdom, of loyal friendship and dedicated service to others, and of deep, abiding faith and love for His Lord.

He was predeceased by his parents, Clement and Grace Tarpley; Patricia's parents, Rev. "Chuck" and Marjorie McIntosh; and his sisters-in-law, Janine McIntosh and Linda Tarpley.

Doug is survived by "the joy of my life," "soulmate," and "best friend," his bride of 58 years, Patricia; their three beloved children and their spouses, Dr. Tamara Welter (Patrick), David (Carina), and Jonathan (ex. Alysia); and 8 adored grandchildren (children of Tamara and Patrick -- Matthew, Caileigh, Beren, Emma, Riley; and children of David and Carina -- Aparri, Desmond and Regan). Also left to cherish Doug's memory are his treasured siblings and Patricia's: Reynold Tarpley, Sherryl Tarpley, and Greg Tarpley, Richard McIntosh (Judi), Cheryl Gillaspay (Joseph), Cindy Jernigan (Burton), and Judy Bennett (Scott); countless cousins, nieces, nephews, and friends, and thousands of students who were the better for his influence in their lives.

All who knew and loved Doug are invited to attend or livestream the Celebration of Life service on Saturday, November 9, 2024 at LifeSpring Assembly of God Church in Riverside, California. The memorial service will start at 10:30 a.m. Pacific Time. The link to the service and the online guestbook is <https://jamesdouglastarpley.com>. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorial donations be made to the scholarship fund of a Christian college of your choice or to the American Heart Association.