



**“The Marshmallow Iron”
by President Matt Proctor**

Last week, I learned from Lynn Gardner again.

Dr. Lynn Gardner served as OCC’s academic dean for seventeen years, and he was my apologetics professor. He has a brilliant mind, has authored several books, and was a tough teacher. (I had one professor—gruff on the outside, soft on the inside—that we called the “iron marshmallow.” Dr. Gardner was kind, but academically unbudging—we called him “the marshmallow iron.”) He drilled into my head the arguments for the truth of Christianity and the existence of God. I learned apologetics from Lynn.

I also learned about plainspoken communication from Lynn. Smart as he was, Dr. Gardner had a knack for making complex ideas simple, and his classes were peppered with folksy sayings.

- On judgmental Christians: “They think, ‘If you don’t tick like I tick, you’re a heretic!’”
- On understanding difficult concepts: “That’ll give you a charley horse between the ears.”
- On one man’s political views: “He’s more conservative than horseradish!”
- On a German philosopher: “You gotta gargle your tonsils to say his name.”

When Lynn hired me as a professor 22 years ago, he even taught me to teach. But the greatest lesson I learned from Lynn Gardner was how to endure suffering. Some people, like Job, seem to experience more than their fair share, and as a professor, I watched Dr. Gardner endure difficult trials:

- In October 1999, their 34-year-old son Mark—a deacon at College Heights Christian Church—was killed in a car accident, leaving behind a little boy and a pregnant wife.
- In January 2000, their granddaughter Hope was born with serious physical problems and faced four surgeries over the next year.
- In February 2000, Dr. Gardner was diagnosed with a terminal lung disease.
- In 2003, Dr. Gardner’s wife Barbara had a grapefruit-sized cyst removed from the lining of her heart.
- In June 2004, Dr. Gardner underwent a double lung transplant, with many subsequent complications.
- In October 2005, Barbara Gardner was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Through these gut-wrenching years, I heard him say things like, “I found out I did believe with all my heart in the gospel.” Things like, “Psalm 16:3 says, ‘In your presence there is fullness of joy.’ This joy is not back-slapping gladness but deep peace that all is well in my relationship with God.” Things like, “I am thankful for every day of life. Every day is holy, a gift of God. I want to make the most of every day to serve the Lord.”

He was honest about the pain, but Lynn Gardner kept trusting God. “It’s not a time to *lose* your faith, but to *use* your faith.” Just this past week, Dr. Gardner moved into a Joplin nursing home. His body is failing, his bones soft, but his faith is still strong and his soul still sturdy. He really is the “marshmallow iron.” When I stopped by to see him and his wife Barbara, he smiled and said, “The Lord is taking good care of us.”

Lynn Gardner hasn’t stood in front of a classroom for years. But he’s still my teacher, and maybe there’s a lesson for you, too. This week, regardless of your hardships, keep trusting God.

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