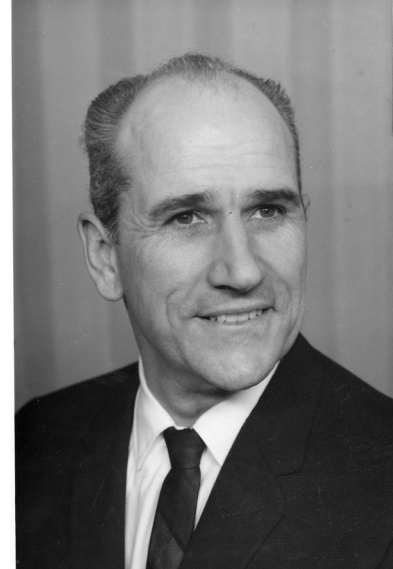


BIO OF KENNETH LYSLE WATTERS

Kenneth Lysle Watters sought to love the Lord his God with his whole being, and to love his neighbor as himself. He was motivated to do so by his relationship with Jesus Christ and his understanding of the Bible—God’s Word. He deeply valued the Bible as God’s self-revelation, and sought to share what he learned from the Bible with others. He taught Bible classes of one kind or another for 66 years, from 1939 to 2005. He memorized hundreds of Bible verses over his lifetime and knew at least the general content of nearly every chapter of the Bible. Above all, he desired to see every person, especially those speaking minority languages, have access to the Bible in their own language. He gave most of his life to serving the minority language communities.



He was born on June 22, 1917, in West Liberty, Iowa, to Fred and Nellie Mae (Scott) Watters. He died January 12, 2008, in Santa Ana, California, surrounded by family down to the third generation. They read Bible passages to him and sang his favorite hymns together as he grew weaker and weaker because of his cancer.

Shortly after Ken’s birth in 1917, the Watters family moved to Wisconsin. They then returned to Iowa in 1923 when he was five, and eastern Iowa was home until 1934. From 1934-1936 he attended Drake University where he studied commerce and finance for three semesters, but the Depression was strong and funds were limited so he did not finish his studies. Instead on July 14, 1936, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and was sent to San Diego to Communications School.

In the U.S. Navy, Ken’s spiritual journey began in earnest. In 1938 he visited his parents in Iowa. Providentially Dr. Charles Fuller spoke at the West Liberty Fair grounds near his parent’s home. Dr. Fuller’s messages had an impact on Ken. He then attended a few Navigators’ Bible classes and, at the encouragement of his father, visited a church in San Francisco one Sunday when in the Bay Area. That Sunday in 1939 in San Francisco, he made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ. At the time he was serving on the staff of a U.S. Navy admiral on the battleship New Mexico.

He became an active participant in the Navigators. By the end of his first year as a follower of Jesus Christ he was teaching six Bible classes each week. He was also memorizing hundreds of Bible verses. This continued throughout his Navy career. Watters served in the Navy for nine years and attained the rank of Chief Yeoman. His military career took him to numerous ports in the Pacific, including Pearl Harbor where he was present when it was attacked. Watters was offered the opportunity to become an officer more than once, but he chose to remain a Chief Yeoman for one reason. He believed as Chief Yeoman he could have more open and trusting relationships with both enlisted men and officers, and so have more opportunity to share the message of the Bible more freely and openly up and down the naval hierarchy.

On May 30, 1945, he married Vivian Pauline Fusby in South Pasadena at the Trotman home. Vivian had served six years as an administrative assistant to Dawson Trotman, the director of the

Navigators. Ken had met Vivian through this Navigator connection. Interestingly, Dr. Charles Fuller performed the wedding.

The couple discovered that they shared a God-given burden to provide the Bible to people without it in their own language. For a brief time after Ken finished his service in the Navy, the couple headed a Navigators home in Brooklyn, N.Y. where they disciplined young men. But in the summer of 1946, Vivian and Kenneth joined Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL and went to Mexico for training in cross-cultural and survival living at Jungle Camp. In early April 1947, they went to Peru to serve a people group through linguistics and Bible translation. Initially Ken helped direct the financial affairs of SIL in Peru. At that time the burgeoning mission faced significant challenges because their center was not in an ideal location. It was hard for the SIL workers to access the people groups and the remote areas where they needed to work. In 1949 the Watters helped establish Yarinacocha, a center along the banks of Lake Yarina in the Amazon near Pucallpa, Peru, a much better location. The Watters' then served among the Cocama language community in the Amazon for a couple years, before assisting Cameron Townsend as associate director from 1952-1954.

When joining Wycliffe and SIL, Watters had given up his earlier interest in accounting, thinking he could better serve God in other ways, but his financial training proved to be crucial. When a need arose for someone to direct the work at Wycliffe's home office in Glendale, California, Ken Watters was chosen to return and provide leadership at headquarters. During his years of faithful service, he served variously as secretary-treasurer, treasurer and vice president for finance for SIL and Wycliffe. He would also speak all over the world on behalf of Bible translation and often traveled to do financial consulting with SIL branches. His travels took him to Alaska, Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Australia, Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Coast and parts of Europe. He also served for nearly two decades on the boards of SIL, Wycliffe and JAARS.

Together Ken and Vivian raised four children, including two sons, John and Jim, who would also serve with Wycliffe, and two daughters, Juanita and Judi. The parents were proud of their sons' contributions to the ministry of Bible translation. Vivian died in 2000, after a difficult bout with Alzheimer's. Ken married his second wife, Virginia Lee, in 2001.

Ken Watters emphasized the necessity of prayer and God's empowerment for reaching the world with the truth of the Bible. In his view, advancements such as aviation, computer technology and descriptive linguistics are useful tools that were given to the world for a purpose—to help see the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the last times. He dedicated his life to God's service, because he believed the value of reaching people with God's Word is far greater than the cost of translating it. Watters declared, "God wants every language to have his Word, and He didn't say anything about cost. What's cost to Him?"

In tribute to his father, Ken's son, John, shared the following:

The impact of my father on my life these 60 years has been enormous, and I could point to numerous ways in which he invested in me and influenced me. But if I were to pick one thing above all else, it would be his clear love for God and His Word. He highly valued Scripture and loved meditating on it. He has had an enormous influence on me doing what I am doing today with Wycliffe Bible Translators.