

# Renaissance Man

Seven years ago Mark Rutland walked around an aging college campus in Lakeland, Florida, and saw an institution where enrollment was dwindling, dormitories were dismal, and the academic atmosphere was uninspiring. Rutland had been asked to take over the presidency of the crumbling school, Southeastern College.

“Absolutely!” the enthusiastic minister told the board of directors who had invited him to be in charge of the small Assemblies of God campus. He went straight to work—and hasn’t stopped.

Since Rutland accepted the top position, Southeastern has more than doubled in enrollment, turned around financially and built state-of-the-art facilities. Major construction projects include new dormitories, a cafeteria, administrative offices, a bookstore and a fitness center that now enhance the beautiful central Florida campus.

By all accounts, Southeastern College is a success story. Plans for its future include seeing it become a full-fledged university next year.

On first consideration, Rutland might have seemed like an unusual pick to lead the charge to save Southeastern. Trained and ordained a Methodist pastor, he had worn a number of ministerial hats during his career to that point—from traveling evangelist to worldwide missionary to megachurch pastor.

That well-roundedness, however, is just what seemed to give him the edge. He has proved to be a pastor with a strong business sense as well as an intellectual with a creative bent and soft heart.

In addition to college president, Rutland is founder of Global

Servants, a worldwide missions organization; CEO of Rutland Group, a consulting agency; leader of Couples' Conferences, a ministry to marrieds; author of 10 books; and a sought-after speaker and preacher. He has found success—but it has come to him from an entirely different direction than even he would have predicted.

Yet the man who has gone from would-be-entrepreneur to college president and global evangelist remains humble about all he has achieved.

"I'm not sure there's anything unique about me, other than maybe my willingness to take a risk," the trim, well-dressed Rutland observes while sitting back on one of the couches in his comfortable office at Southeastern. "It has to be a rational risk because if you can't save the ship, you might go down with it. But there are many people who won't try."

### **'Blackmailed' Into Service?**

In 1967, as a 20-year-old married college student at the University of Maryland, Rutland was ready to try anything. He was headed for a degree in public relations, and he was an officer of the Young Republicans as well as president of the university's Young Americans for Freedom chapter. He had his sights set on fame and fortune—and not necessarily in that order.

Then God came calling and turned Rutland's life upside down. The student with a head for business found he suddenly had a heart for ministry. Instead of entering the corporate world, he entered Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta and became a Methodist pastor.

Today he credits his success to three things: his surrender to God, a radical encounter with the Holy Spirit and the teachings of his parents.

He grew up in a family in which taking on adventure was

accepted. His parents were “nomadic,” he says, frequently moving but imparting a strong work ethic and sense of creativity to Rutland and his three siblings.

“My dad always instilled in us that, as Americans, you could learn anything if you had to,” Rutland says. “He also said that nobody owes you; you owe life.

“I remember that I asked my mom why she always fixed up the gardens of the houses where we lived—because we didn’t even own them—and she said that if in every house you leave the flower bed better than you found it, you’ll be happy.

“That’s what I try to do—leave the flower bed better than I found it,” he adds.

Rutland’s childhood “flower beds” were planted in Texas, California, Missouri and Maryland. When he was in junior high school his family became active in the Methodist church in Maryland, where they remained for his teen years. He went to church regularly, but it wasn’t until he attended a youth camp during his early teens that the gospel pierced his heart.

Rutland was “blackmailed” by a youth pastor into going to the camp in Blue Lake, Alabama. The minister had bailed him out of jail after Rutland was arrested for joy riding with friends in a car he didn’t know was stolen.

The pastor had agreed to post Rutland’s bail if he would attend the camp. After the deal was struck, Rutland went out of his way to participate in the camp as little as possible.

One night, he was caught trying to skip the evening service. A camp counselor physically dragged him into the meeting, where Rutland says he heard the “first meaningful gospel message” of his life and made his way up the aisle to beg God for forgiveness. He received his salvation and something more: a call to preach.

## **A Loaded Gun and a Miracle**

Through the rest of high school and into his first two years of college, Rutland ignored the call—and the Lord—and fell back into rebellious ways and materialistic ambition. He married his junior high sweetheart, Alison, when he was 19 and she was 17. She found God in a personal way at a Youth for Christ convention during high school.

After their marriage, Rutland realized his rebellion might cause Alison's spiritual downfall. He came under conviction, surrendered his life to God and finally heeded the call to ministry.

He embraced Methodism as his calling and after seminary at Emory was appointed to the Little River United Methodist Church in Woodstock, Georgia. There he learned how to preach and how to manage a church, but his personal ambition again reared its head. He maneuvered his way out of Little River by accepting a position at Oak Grove United Methodist Church in Atlanta.

Even though the position was a step up and the senior pastor a wise shepherd, Rutland entered the darkest time of his life. The couple's first child was born, and the added responsibilities of fatherhood made him think he was living a lie.

"In early 1975, I went through a really bad time," Rutland says, admitting that he battled sin and depression and attempted suicide. His marriage was falling apart, and Rutland says he felt like he was headed for a nervous breakdown.

At one point, he actually put the barrel of a loaded gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger. Miraculously, the gun jammed. In the midst of his turmoil his senior pastor at Oak Grove, Charles Boleyn, paid Rutland's way to a conference about the Holy Spirit.

## **'You Must Go to Ghana'**

Rutland, who considered himself thoroughly evangelical, believed the manifestation of the Holy Spirit ended at the close of the New Testament era. Yet the mid-1970s had ushered in a charismatic renewal, and evangelical pastors were trying to figure out what to do with all the enthused believers now sitting in their pews claiming to have been changed by God's Spirit.

Reluctantly and with a large chip on his shoulder, Rutland attended the conference—and was never the same. He received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the second day of meetings.

"It was a seismic shift," Rutland says of his charismatic experience. "It was a polar shift. All of the gunk in the gears was suddenly gone."

He says his depression lifted completely and he was filled with a joy and fervor for ministry that has never departed. His marriage was healed, and he returned to Oak Grove and began preaching with passion about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, witnessing the manifestations among his own Methodist congregation

Soon afterward he experienced the call to become a traveling evangelist; an unction that he says was supernaturally confirmed through dreams and direct answers to prayer. He launched Trinity Foundation (today called Global Servants) and hit the road on a mission to teach and preach the "full gospel" in Methodist churches.

"I felt a great burden to bring renewal," Rutland says.

The work soon expanded until he found himself preaching revivals across the United States and branching into missionary trips all over the world.

"I never really made the decision to leave the Methodist

church," Rutland says. "Doors just opened somewhere else."

For the next decade, he and his expanding family (the couple by then had three children—Travis, Rosemary and Emily) followed wherever God led. He spent time in India and South America, founded a girls home in Thailand, and followed a God-given vision to Ghana, which he recounts in his autobiography, *Launch Out Into the Deep* (1987).

In the book, Rutland writes that he awakened one night, saw a three-dimensional world map and was flooded with feelings of love for countries on the map as he began to weep. He then saw a picture of a large group of black people in an open-air setting, staring at him.

Rutland asked God to tell him if the vision had come from Him. He says God answered that it had.

"In the years ahead, I will turn your life upside down," Rutland heard God telling him. "Things will come into your life from directions you do not even know exist tonight. I will use you, change you, tax you, break you and send you as you cannot imagine. But first you must go to Ghana."

Shaken, he hesitantly shared the vision with Alison the next morning, then waited for further instruction from God. From March to October he waited. Finally, he felt an urgency to just buy a ticket and head to Ghana.

### **A One-in-2 Million Chance**

Against the advice of friends and other ministers, he decided to go. In December 1980 he flew to Accra, Ghana, with no plan, no contacts and no idea what he was going to do when he got there.

Yet from the moment he landed, God brought people across Rutland's path to direct him—from a customs agent who led him out of the airport to a Spirit-filled Christian taxi driver

named Moses. Rutland checked into a hotel and waited to see what God had for him in Ghana. He agonized over whether he had done the right thing, weeping and praying most of the first night.

The next morning a man named Bamfo knocked on his hotel door, looking for him. He had been sent by the faculty of a small Methodist college in the city of Kumasi that Rutland had written to months before to offer his preaching services. The president had received his letter only that week and had taken it to a faculty prayer meeting to have it prayed over.

During the meeting, one of the professors stopped the prayers, stating that God was telling him Rutland was already in Ghana. The professors contacted Bamfo in Accra, who went hunting for Rutland. In a city of almost 2 million Bamfo found him at the hotel and took him to the college to preach.

That “miracle” encounter led to weeks of revival and ministry in Ghana. It also fulfilled Rutland’s vision from months before in which hundreds of Africans were seated in the open air, staring intently at him as he preached the gospel. Rutland’s love for the Ghanaian people keeps him going back today.

## **The Road to Influence**

After working 10 years in missions, Rutland received a call from Paul Walker, pastor of Mount Paran Church of God in Atlanta, one of the largest churches in the country. Walker had a proposition for the evangelist-turned-missionary: Would Rutland plant himself in Atlanta for two years, preaching in tandem with Walker? Mount Paran had two campuses 18 miles apart, and Walker couldn’t do it all.

Rutland accepted. From 1988 to 1990 he preached to thousands of well-dressed Americans in a megachurch instead of thousands of poverty-stricken natives in South America, Africa or Asia.

“It was really a defining moment for me—that Dr. Walker would make a personal investment in me,” Rutland says. “It was such a high-profile church, and I got to witness that level of leadership.”

After preaching nearly every Sunday for two years, a call came from Florida—this time from the Assemblies of God. Would Rutland be willing to take on the pastorate of the near-failing megachurch Calvary Assembly of God, in Orlando? Calvary was just weeks—perhaps days—away from bankruptcy, \$16 million in debt and in turmoil from a scandal when Rutland—a Methodist who had been serving in a Church of God—was voted into its pulpit.

For the next five years, he battled to turn the church around, working with creditors and the congregation to improve the financial picture and doubling attendance from 1,800 to 3,600. The risk had paid off, but at a tremendous emotional cost for Rutland. Church members had been deeply wounded and scarred by the scandal and financial upheaval, and ministering to them was both rewarding and tough.

“It was somewhat like trying to adopt 1,800 abused children,” Rutland says, adding that the five years at Calvary were the most educational, yet the most difficult, of his career to date. “It was just a very strenuous five years.”

Still, the lessons learned at Calvary led him right to the helm of Southeastern. Having stopped one Assemblies of God church from sinking, he was considered by the Assemblies of God board of directors to be the perfect man to take on the rapidly declining Southeastern College.

“I think a passage of Scripture that is becoming clearer and clearer to me is that He orders our footsteps,” Rutland says. “I don’t think I really understood that until now.”

“I know that I would not be alive today without the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Without the baptism of the Holy Spirit, I



would not have been called to Mount Paran. Without Mount Paran there would have been no Calvary [Assembly]. Without Calvary, I would not have been ready for Southeastern.

“To be able to be president of both Global and Southeastern, when both had their best year last year, is great,” adds Rutland, 57. “I am really enjoying my life. I feel like this is a season for bearing fruit.”

As for Southeastern College, where others saw problems Rutland saw only potential. He continues to believe the potential is nearly unlimited.

“It just needed [defibrillator] paddles put on its chest and for someone to scream, ‘All clear!’ then give it a jolt,” Rutland says. “I saw the opportunity to extend my reach, my message, far beyond the students to the board meetings they’ll one day conduct, the Little Leagues they’ll coach, the children they’ll raise.

The concentric circles of influence seem almost intoxicating. It is very exciting.”

## **A Master Communicator**

**Rutland longs to see the evangelical church winning souls with the Holy Spirit-infused joy of charismatics and the charismatic church winning souls with the Holy Spirit-filled passion of evangelicals.**

Mark Rutland is more than just a preacher, teacher and college president. By day he wears the hat of college and ministry president. That role includes consulting even with family members on aspects of his ministry responsibilities—daughter Rosemary, who works with him on campus; sometimes with son Travis, who manages the work of Global Servants in Ghana; and daughter Emily, who oversees a girls home he founded in Thailand.

On weekends, he heads out to preach. But at night, Rutland hangs up his suit and holes up in front of a computer screen, pouring his soul into print and onto paper.

He is doing what he loves best—communicating in print.

A prolific wordsmith, Rutland is writing his 11th book—his first novel—which is due out next year. He says he grew up in “a house of words,” where he and his siblings were encouraged—and expected—to express their opinions, and to read, write and learn.

“Words were important in our house,” Rutland says. “My parents had a wide range of interests and were very bright, with an education that went far beyond any formal education they had.”

His autobiography was published in 1987. Since then he has released several other books, most notably a series of gift-sized books with one-word titles that have become favorites of Rutland’s fans. Collectively they are the Words of Life series.

In *Nevertheless* (2002), he demonstrates how Jesus used one simple word to overcome Satan. Rutland says in his introduction to that book: “I am convinced that there is a way for us to always have the last word with life and the devil.”

In *Dream* (2003) he examines the lives of the biblical patriarch Joseph and Joseph the husband of Mary. Using their dreams as a backdrop he challenges Christians to take their own dreams seriously and to learn how to pursue a God-given dream.

In *Power* (2004), the newest in the Words of Life series, he examines the difference between human ability and supernatural strength. He also offers what he calls a “divine recipe” for spiritual success—which includes a heavy dose of humility and selfless sacrifice.

Humility is a constant theme in Rutland's books, including his 2003 release, *Character Matters*. His passion is that church leaders will embrace biblical values, starting with Jesus' fundamental decision to empty Himself and serve others.

For Rutland, that is the secret of all true success.

How does Rutland write so many books? Most ministers with as many jobs as Rutland undertakes probably would find it difficult to find the time to write at all. But he has turned this extracurricular activity into a science.

On a typical weekday, Rutland spends time in the morning having coffee with his wife, Alison. Next, he puts in a full day at the college, from 8 a.m. until about 6 p.m. Then he and Alison have dinner at home, or the two of them join students for a meal in Southeastern's cafeteria. He usually sits down at his computer by 9 p.m. and writes until midnight.

"I really love to write," he says. "It is a challenge for me, and I feel like I have something to say."

In his writing, Rutland communicates his clear belief in the manifestations of the Holy Spirit today, detailing the miracles, visions, dreams and healings he has seen. What makes his writing so appealing is his understanding of both Scripture and theological works. He writes from intellect more than emotion.

He longs to see the evangelical church winning souls with the Holy Spirit-infused joy of charismatics and the charismatic church winning souls with the Holy Spirit-fired passion of evangelicals. Only then, he believes, will revival truly occur.

"I feel that what I am called to do more than anything else is express the experience of the Holy Spirit in my life because that's what changed my life," Rutland says. "If everything else was gone and I had the Holy Spirit, I could rebuild my

life. If I lost the Holy Spirit but had everything else, I wouldn't have anything. I would lose that joy."

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