

# Stephen Strang: How I Remember George H.W. Bush

The eulogies have been pouring in for former President George H.W. Bush this week. Many of them are very eloquent, saying what a great American he was and how devoted he was to his family, country and God.

I doubt my comments will get repeated much. Yet I feel I must share with my readers my feelings about this great man I met on four different occasions—the first of four presidents I’ve been privileged to interview in my four-decade-long career.

I first met George Bush in Orlando when my longtime friend and mentor Doug Wead brought together a small group of Christian leaders to meet the vice president around 1985. He was going around the country drumming up support for a presidential run, and Doug was supporting him. I didn’t have strong feelings about whom to support at the time, but I was honored to meet him, and he seemed to have been a good vice president to Ronald Reagan.

A year later, the big booksellers convention was in Washington, D.C., and Doug gathered a group of about 70 publishing executives and a few preachers in 1986. I remember that Tammy Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart and Jerry Falwell were there at the official vice-presidential residence at the Naval Observatory in Washington. (This was a year before Bakker’s and Swaggart’s big scandals.) After greetings and photos, Bush spoke to the group. Someone asked him a question regarding his faith. I’m sure all they wanted to hear was that he was born again, but the vice president danced around the question. He said his faith was very private and that in the Episcopal church where he was a member, they didn’t use terminology like that.

He went on to win the election of 1988, and Doug helped him secure the evangelical support. Before he was sworn in, he gathered some evangelical leaders in the White House to give advice on whom to appoint to various positions. Paul Crouch, Dr. James Dobson, Beverly LaHaye, James Robison, Jerry Falwell and several others were there. How do I know? I have a framed picture of that meeting in my office. I was only 37 at the time. I felt very out of place, so I listened but didn't say much. It turned out Bush also listened and seemed interested but then appointed whom he had planned. That seemed to be the way both he and his son George W. Bush, who was later elected, governed. They wooed the evangelical vote but then stayed at arm's length once elected.

My best visit with President Bush was in 1992 on the National Day of Prayer at a breakfast in the White House. Doug arranged for me to sit at the president's table. The nine people at his table were each allowed to ask a question. I had read in the news that later that day the Lithuanian ambassador was meeting with Bush, so I asked about Lithuania, which was trying to get free of its ties to Russia. I told the president I had just been to Lithuania and saw firsthand how much they wanted their freedom. I told him I hoped the United States would support their efforts.

In all my dealings with the president before and after his election, he was always the gentleman everyone knew him to be. He was dignified and carried himself with decorum. Because of his privileged background (his father was a U.S. senator and his family was wealthy), some criticized him as "patrician."

Others said he wasn't the strong leader Reagan had been before him. But he was strong in his own way, and I felt he did a good job presiding over the breakup of the Soviet Union and standing up to Saddam Hussein in Kuwait. I remember the night the U.S. and U.N. forces invaded Kuwait. I was on TBN to talk about something else, but even though Paul Crouch didn't usually discuss politics, we did that night, not knowing what

was ahead.

I believe Bush would have been re-elected had not Ross Perot led a third-party challenge and split the anti-Clinton vote. But Bush conducted himself with decorum, and it was a smooth transition. As a former president, Bush was seen at the right places and said the right things but didn't interfere with the sitting president, even when it was his son George W. Bush. Recent interviews have quoted the junior Bush as saying the only thing his father ever said was, "I love you, and I support you unconditionally." He was like that with all his children.

In 2003, stories began to come out about how George W. Bush had been born again after he was a drunk at age 40 and had to make a decision about the rest of his life. As I began to research his deep but very private faith, I felt someone should write a book about it.

We recruited Stephen Mansfield to write the book, called *The Faith of George W. Bush*, and published it through Charisma House.

In the process of writing, I began to understand that George W. Bush's faith was rooted in the strong faith of his parents. In fact, there's a story about how he was sitting in church, listening to the pastor preach about Moses' reluctance to follow God's call on his life to free the Israelites from Egypt. He began to sense that God intended that preacher's words for him. As if to confirm this prophetic feeling, his mother, Barbara, turned to him after the sermon and said, "He was talking to you."

But this legacy of faith came not only from George W. Bush's parents. The Bush family's Christian roots go back generations. His great-great-grandfather, James Smith Bush, was an Episcopal priest. A distant relative named George Bush (his namesake) wrote a book in the 1840s about the importance

of supporting Israel. This was half a century before the the rise of Zionism. This George Bush is immortalized in the Friends of Zion museum in Jerusalem.

We could speculate a lot on how a spiritual heritages are handed down from one generation to the next. Of course, each of us must have a personal relationship with the Lord, not just rely on our parents or family heritage.

From what I've seen and read, George H.W. and Barbara Bush both had a deep faith that guided their values and actions. There was never a hint of scandal. Time seems to have shown that George H.W. Bush was a globalist (as was his son) who called for a New World Order in his 1989 inauguration speech. While I believe that's a wrong strategy, I think he was sincere in his desire for world peace and influenced by political trends in Washington and the world.

I believe George H.W. Bush was a good man, and the good far outweighed the disappointments—such as how he and the Bush family did not support President Donald Trump in the 2016 election. Bush was a patriotic American who served his country with valor as a naval aviator in World War II, as a congressman, as director of the CIA, as vice president and president and more.

His impact on our country, in both his administration and that of his son, will live on for generations. Now that he's gone, I believe he is in a better place, and I appreciate his life and legacy.