

The 40-Year Odyssey of Charisma

Editor's note: How the Holy Spirit guided Charisma from a magazine to a media company is an amazing story of God's grace and blessing. This article appeared in the anniversary issue August 2015. Today the magazine kicks off a 31-day anniversary celebration on

My favorite Scripture is Ephesians 3:20: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all we can ask or imagine, according to the power that works in us."

As I look back on the 40-year odyssey of *Charisma*, this has been true again and again. God has done exceedingly abundantly more than I could have dreamed as a young newspaper journalist who in 1975 wanted to use my talents to do something significant for God. My talent was to write and to network. I'm not a singer or a preacher. I didn't feel called to be a foreign missionary. What could I devote my life to where my wife could also serve with me?

In hindsight, I can see God's hand and I want to give Him glory for anything that has been accomplished! But at the time I merely had an opportunity to start a small magazine for my church, Calvary Assembly in Orlando, Florida. On a practical level, it provided a way for me to supplement my meager salary as a beginning reporter. I'm not sure I even had a great vision for a magazine. It was merely the door God opened and I walked through.

At the time there were several well-known, successful Christian magazines, so competition was tough. I had no money personally to start a publication, let alone a business. But God must have had a plan, and it was a good plan. Slowly I was able to learn the publishing business. I learned to network

with leaders. And I wrote or published articles on Christian growth, on charismatic teachings and on new ministries that were popping up—like TBN, Kenneth Copeland or Marilyn Hickey.

As time passed I began to develop a vision and I could see what our unique position was in the world of publishing. I could cover the burgeoning charismatic movement as a journalist, informing and inspiring and covering stories the secular press didn't cover or the mainstream evangelical press ignored.

The first year I worked full time at the local newspaper—one of the largest in Florida—and did *Charisma* as a part-time job. Then I took a leap of faith, quit my job and delved full time into what has become my life's work. Little did I know about the changes that would happen in the charismatic renewal, in the culture or in the media. Nor could I envision a company where four decades later we would publish best-selling books like *The Harbinger* in both English and Spanish, release a new translation of the Bible (the Modern English Version), or publish several magazines including *Ministry Today* and *Christian Retailing*. In 1975 the personal computer hadn't been put on the market. And I could never have envisioned what we know as the Internet or how it has changed our lives.

While I'm known as the founder of *Charisma*, no one accomplishes anything alone. My wife, Joy, has not only stood by me as a wife, but she has been a leader in our company, competently guiding our finances and figuring out in the early days how to do what we had to do with very little cash flow. Today the issues we face are much more complex and she has a steady hand as a financial person. But even more importantly, she is a spiritual woman who has helped keep me and our organization focused on pursuing the Holy Spirit.

Over the years leaders such as Jamie Buckingham, Jack Hayford and Marilyn Hickey have come alongside to encourage and help

guide. And the Lord has brought us a talented and motivated team of people who understood that what we did was more than just publishing or media; it was a ministry. Over time people come and go, but those who buy in stay a long time. Today our average staff person has been with us nine years. And we have a very diverse staff—43 percent minority—which reflects the diverse readership we have. They are motivated to inspire our readers to radically change their world.

Forty years is a long time to cover in a few words. In 1986 we incorporated *Christian Life* magazine, which included book publishing and another magazine. Its founder, the late Robert Walker, had been doing back in 1939 what I was doing in my generation—reporting on what God was doing in the world. So our “merger” was smooth and helped catapult us into the big leagues of evangelical publishing. As an organization, we have moved several times in Central Florida and built several buildings before our present headquarters in Lake Mary, Florida. We’ve won many awards. I’ve had some great experiences ranging from interviewing three U.S. presidents to getting to speak at the United Nations. But it’s not about me. It’s about the vision and serving the body of Christ.

In many ways these last 40 years have been difficult. When we face new struggles I try to encourage the staff that struggle is not new. We’ve always struggled. But that’s when we must have faith and God comes through! And yet they have also been great years. I have few regrets. I am richer because of the people I’ve met, those I’ve worked with and the articles we’ve written or the books we’ve published.

The changes of the past few years in our culture and the wave of iniquity is like nothing I’ve seen in my lifetime. At a time like this I believe what we do is even more important. As far as media companies go, we are small. What can we do? We can merely be a light! In the middle of a sunny day, a candle doesn’t add much light. But where there is total darkness a single candle brings a lot of light. There is so much darkness

that shining our light is more important than ever.

As Christian journalists, we must stand for righteousness. We must publish the truth. We must report on those people and ministries who are making a difference. We must encourage and motivate—and sometimes confront. We see ourselves as part of the body of Christ trying to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ and to stand for righteousness in our world. But we can't do it alone. We must partner with you and together we can accomplish more than anything we can do alone.

Someone said life begins at 40. *Charisma* (and our organization) is 40, but we're not done. We're just beginning. While Joy and I are getting to the age when we are thinking about succession, we're thankful we have a new generation of leaders in Charisma Media who are committed to carrying the vision into the future.

I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for His mercy and grace and for whatever has been accomplished! And we know we need Him more than ever. So I ask you to pray for us—that we will be strong and full of faith; that we will follow after righteousness and not compromise. And that we will withstand the attacks of the enemy as we try to be faithful to the vision God gave me as a young journalist to report on what God is doing around the world.

Steve Strang *is the founder and publisher of Charisma*