

Stephen Strang: Remembering the Legacy of Houston Miles

Bishop Houston Miles was laid to rest in South Carolina yesterday in a small graveside service attended only by family due to concerns and limitations of COVID-19. He died Sunday at age 92 of natural causes brought on by old age. I knew and loved Houston, and I recorded an episode of the *Strang Report* podcast with my recollections on Monday. I hope you'll want to listen to it.

My late mentor Jamie Buckingham, a contemporary of Houston in the heyday of the charismatic movement, once said: "Houston's a great man, but he doesn't know it." It's true. He built a successful megachurch, Evangel Cathedral, in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Then a group of 10 pastors who looked up to him and who felt they didn't fit into any existing church movement asked him to be their "covering." That resulted in the creation of Evangel Fellowship International, which now has several hundred churches in the U.S. and many more in other parts of the world. Yet he was so humble; he never seemed to take credit or consider himself the giant of the faith he was.

As I share in the podcast, Houston and his lovely wife, Evelyn, were longtime friends of my in-laws, the Ferrell family. Houston was saved as a teenager under the ministry of my late father-in-law Harvey D. Ferrell when he pastored First Assembly of God in Panama City, Florida, around the time of World War II. Ferrell mentored Houston when he felt called to the ministry. He later performed the wedding of Houston and Evelyn when they married in June 1949. They remained friends for many years.

Even though I knew the Miles' son Phillip in college, I didn't get to know his parents until I married into the Ferrell

family. I quickly came to love and respect Houston and enjoyed our interaction over the years. He was especially helpful to the family in 2008 when my brother-in-law Howard Ridings, his close friend, died of cancer.

But there were also many happy times. On the podcast I tell a few stories about how we'd have a big family gathering when he and Evelyn visited. Houston and I told jokes in a rapid dueling fashion. It was sort of like "Can you top this?" I held my own, but Houston always won in telling jokes.

Houston was godly and full of integrity. He accomplished so much and touched so many lives. He was an example of what every Christian leader should be like. He will be missed. On a personal level, I lost a longtime friend who was a role model and mentor. My podcast with my sister-in-law Rosella Ridings was my personal way of paying tribute to his life and our friendship.

ran a nice obituary the day after he died, but it bears repeating in case you missed it. Here's what we ran:

As a pastor, Bishop Houston Miles inspired, loved and led. As senior pastor of Evangel Cathedral in Spartanburg, South Carolina, from 1968-1999, he allowed the Holy Spirit to transform a traditional Pentecostal church into a vibrant, exciting outreach that birthed churches, ordained ministers and grew in members from 140 to 2,400.

Dr. Miles was born Oct. 28, 1928, and died Sunday, Dec. 13, 2020.

"It is with joy and sadness that Evangel Fellowship International (EFI) announces the passing of our beloved Bishop, Houston Miles," the ministry said in a public statement. "We know how much the Miles family is loved, and we are asking that you please honor them with time to deal with the passing of their husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. The one thing you can do now is pray for the

family, friends, EFI family and the many people impacted by a life well-lived.”

Dr. Miles was called to pastor at 18, according to his son, Phillip Miles, who honored his father in October during EFI’s virtual conference called “2020: A Call to Courage.”

In a video, he tells of Miles’ first revival as a young minister. On the first night of services, the town drunk in Port St. Joe, Florida, was saved.

The next night, “the whole town came out,” and they had one of the greatest revivals the town had ever seen.

A year later, the man who had been known as the town drunk was a leader in the local church. This is just one example of how Dr. Miles invested his life—and through him, the life of Christ—into others.

“He started out powerfully, a confirmation of his calling,” Phillip Miles said. “He went on to build one of the largest churches in South Carolina. And later, in the ’80s, he started EFI, which became a home for hundreds of pastors who were isolated or displaced. It was a safe place for so many people who came and said they felt loved and accepted.”

Before pastoring Evangel Cathedral, Dr. Miles led the First Assembly of God Church in Mableton, Georgia. He served on the board of directors of the National Leadership Conference for several years—alongside John Hagee, Jamie Buckingham, Ken Sumrall and Jim Jackson. For several years, the group held an annual conference for pastors and leaders at Ridgecrest, North Carolina.

In 1982, Dr. Miles said he began to meet with pastors who asked him to take on a new role, mentoring them.

“At first I recommended that they join another existing fellowship rather than start something new,” Dr. Miles wrote

in a blog about the founding of EFI. "Their answer was 'We don't relate to them. You are our pastor.'"

EFI formally organized in 1983, an answer to the pastors' request. This fellowship of churches and ministers is dedicated to developing and promoting unity and strength among its members.

Today, the fellowship is global, with members sharing the gospel in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, the Caribbean and South America. It is based in Conway, South Carolina, and is led by Phillip Miles.

One way EFI has supported members is through conferences, which have hosted ministers such as T.D. Jakes, Miles Monroe, Charles Blake, Bob Mumford, Rick Godwin, Tommy Barnett, Buckingham and Sumrall.

In 1991, the group launched Operation Russia, an effort to take the gospel to the Russian people. Since then, numerous campaigns have supported ministry trips to Russia. Dr. Miles led a team from his church to the Russian mission field six times a year for several years.

"Thousands of people surrendered their lives to Christ," Dr. Miles said. "Everyone who attended a crusade was given a New Testament in the Russian language." Dr. Miles was known for often telling people: "The more you pass on to others, the more you keep for yourself."

Dr. Miles lived and died a rich man, rich in the sense of love, influence and appreciation. He leaves his wife, Evelyn Miles, with whom he shared a great love story of 71 years. He also leaves his son, Phillip H. (Lynn) Miles; four grandchildren, Levi Miles, Rachel Miles Pellegrino (Joseph), Justin Miles and Jonathan Miles; as well as three great-grandchildren, Ezra, Isabella and Isaac Pellegrino.

"We lost Bishop Miles this morning to go be with the Lord. God

be with Evelyn and Phillip and the entire Miles family. My deepest sympathies to all you that knew and loved him deeply. May God comfort you all and give you peace,” said Tiffany Martin Eubanks, who alerted friends on Dr. Miles’ 90th birthday page on Facebook.

“Praying for Mrs. Miles, Pastor Phillip and all their family and friends,” wrote follower Dean Jackson.

“May God bless each one that knew and loved him and give you peace. I just can not wait to see my friend and buddy in Heaven,” he added. “Awesome man of God, take your rest,” said JoAnn Landrum in her comment. “You’ll be greatly missed.”

“We love and appreciate you bishop and dad,” said Phillip in his October tribute. “We are honored to follow in your footsteps.”

Details on a memorial service will be announced once plans are finalized. There will be a virtual opportunity to join. And listen to this podcast featuring Charisma Media founder Stephen Strang and guest Rosella Ridings about Dr. Miles ‘ life and ministry. {eo}

Please join the Charisma News staff in praying for the Miles family as they experience the loss of Dr. Houston Miles, a great man of God. {eo}