

A Tribute to Bill Bright

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History ultimately decides who is great and who isn't. Even in Christian circles, those who are well-known when they die aren't always remembered as great. Others, obscure while alive, become bigger than life later.

One man who is certain to be remembered as great is Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ International, who died in July at age 81. Our obituary on page 15 lists his impressive accomplishments. He tirelessly pursued his stated goal of "fulfilling the Great Commission each year until our Lord returns."

Bright's memorial service in Orlando, Florida, was a virtual who's who of the Christian world. Leader after leader recounted how Bright had influenced his life.

More than one person mentioned a contract Bright signed 50 years ago in which he made himself a "slave to Christ." Perhaps this act of total surrender is what allowed God to trust him with an annual ministry budget of \$450 million as well as the winnings from the Templeton Award—\$1 million—every penny of which he donated to funding his ministry.

In a day when self-promotion and greed are commonplace in ministry, Bright was different. He lived an average, middle-class lifestyle and modeled the Spirit of Christ even in the most ordinary things.

I had the privilege of knowing him from the late 1980s, when

we hosted a dinner for him in our home. That was several years before he announced he would be moving his ministry to Orlando in 1991. During the years I interacted with him numerous times and once invited him to address our staff.

In the 1970s I was influenced by Campus Crusade for Christ while a student at the University of Florida. Later, after my life was touched powerfully by the Holy Spirit, I became aware of the Campus Crusade policy against speaking in tongues and assumed Bright was against charismatics.

By the time I met him years later his position about charismatic gifts had mellowed somewhat. And toward the end of his life, he seemed to welcome charismatics, who were drawn to his emphasis on intercessory prayer and fulfilling the Great Commission.

Two years ago we ran a cover story in Charisma on Bright by Andy Butcher that served as a living tribute. You can find the article online at [by clicking on the Bill Bright article icon](#).

After the article appeared, Bright sent me a letter. In the 28 years I have published Charisma I've received no more than a few dozen letters thanking us for an article. So the fact that he wrote was unusual.

But even more striking was the humility with which he wrote. First, he said how much he appreciated the wonderful cover story "about Vonette's husband." (Vonette was his wife of 54 years.)

Then he added: "My prayer is that our precious Lord will use it in a mighty way to touch and encourage the readers, and

that they will know what a powerful Savior we serve. To Him be all praise and glory!"

Andy and I had visited him in his apartment overlooking a lake near downtown Orlando. I went along in part—I thought—to say goodbye to him.

At the time he was already afflicted with the debilitating lung ailment that took his life, and he was not expected to live long. But he actually survived for two more years, during which time he accomplished more, Ted Haggard of the National Association of Evangelicals says, than most men do in their lifetimes—including fulfilling all 80 of the mandates God gave him when he was first diagnosed with the disease.

That day Bright thanked us in person for the article. Then he prayed for me and Andy—a prayer I will never forget.

He repeated some of his prayer in his letter to me. I share his words now both to give tribute to his memory and to show his open, loving spirit.

He wrote: "Your great witness for our Lord, through your various publications and other activities, are an inspiration to us. May His hand continually rest upon you and all of your endeavors for His kingdom. It is an honor to be serving with you in the greatest spiritual harvest of all time."

The honor, Dr. Bright, is all ours.

Stephen Strang is the founder and publisher of Charisma.