

A Tribute to Roy Harthern: What He Taught Me About Life and Ministry

Last Saturday, Roy Harthern went to be with the Lord. He was a great man who left a legacy that greatly impacted my life and, indirectly, yours, through *Charisma* magazine and our organization.

Tomorrow, July 13, I plan to attend his memorial service at Calvary Assembly in Winter Park, Fla., the church he pastored from 1970 to 1981 during the time that *Charisma* magazine was birthed, in 1975. I expect a big crowd because he is well-known in this area and affected many lives.

You probably know Harthern as Benny Hinn's father-in-law. I've known his daughter, Benny's wife, Suzanne, since she was 14. I first heard Roy preach when I was a teenager. My wife, Joy, knew him most of her life since he preached services for her father, an Assemblies of God minister, in the 1950s. When Joy and I moved to Orlando, we visited Calvary Assembly partly because Harthern was the pastor, and we never went anywhere else.

wrote about Harthern's life after he died last weekend, and you can read that [here](#). This is my personal reflection, and I'm finding it very emotional to write this. While others may be able to eulogize him much better than I, here are lessons I learned from him. Even though you may not have known Roy Harthern, I hope these things may speak to your life.

- **He taught me to be open to the entire body of Christ.** When Harthern came to Calvary Assembly, it was a typical small-to-medium Assemblies of God church. By the time Joy and I came in 1973, it had grown to 600 members. Later, it grew to 6,000 members, one of the biggest in

the nation at the time. Those were the early days of the charismatic movement, and Harthern welcomed people from other denominations who would often attend only on Sunday nights to hear his Bible teaching on end-time prophecy. Often these people would start attending full-time, especially if their denominational church was not open to their new experience in the Spirit. Only in this environment could a magazine that serves the entire body of Christ have been born.

- **I learned how to be innovative, expand and have dreams and visions.** When Joy and I came to Calvary, it already had begun a radio program. In the next few years, Harthern built a new auditorium and began raising funds for the church's current 5,000-seat auditorium. In the 1970s, Calvary started and hosted Jesus Festivals, drawing thousands of youth. Calvary sent Festival of Praise, led by prolific musical director Thurlow Spurr, to maybe hundreds of churches. It built a high-rise for the elderly that is still fully functional. Calvary got a license and founded Channel 52, bought years later by TBN. And did I mention starting *Charisma* magazine? All of this and more happened in a span of only 10 years.
- **Roy Harthern attracted talent and recognized ability.** When Thurlow Spurr joined Calvary as its minister of music in the mid-1970s, he was already nationally known. (Did you know Thurlow was on the first cover of *Charisma* because he was recognized enough to write about, even in a fledgling church magazine?) When a young evangelist from Canada named Benny Hinn first came to America, he could have gone anywhere, but he was attracted to Harthern and Calvary. (He had his offices at Calvary at one time.) Hinn was drawn to Harthern as a leader before he met or fell in love with Harthern's daughter. Harthern also attracted successful businesspeople like Alex Clattenburg to get involved in the church as youth pastor. Later, Alex left the business world to go into full-time ministry and today is one of the most

successful pastors in Florida. There are many others too numerous to mention who have gone on to establish successful churches and ministries. And it all grew out of Calvary.

- **He took a chance on me and *Charisma*.** Into this environment came a young, newly married newspaper reporter with a heart to be something great for God but with no experience, no money and, frankly, not a lot of business ability. But when this young man (me) asked the church leaders if they would like to publish a little church magazine, Harthern and the other leaders said yes. Little did they know (nor did I know) that God would use it to spawn an international media ministry. I've said publicly many times how much I appreciated Roy Harthern's belief in me and the dream I had to publish a little magazine called *Charisma*.
- **Roy Harthern also taught me about vision.** He had a vision to build a great church. He had a vision to build a 5,000-seat auditorium that was unheard of at the time. He must have been influenced by big thinkers like Dr. Yonggi Cho of Korea, whose church grew to several hundred thousand members (and he served on Cho's board). He became a good friend to Derek Prince and other major ministers of the era. As a young man, I was first exposed to men like this through him. Slowly, I began to understand as I watched Harthern that God had given me a vision too.
- **He also taught me about walking in faith and believing God for finances.** Faith was so important that he made it part of a 10-week new believers class. He asked me to team with a medical doctor to teach it. We taught the class on faith and another one on finances. We took turns teaching each class, and we used Harthern's notes from which he taught us and all the other instructors. In teaching the material, the Scriptures and truths being taught became part of my life. As a 20-something, I benefited from teaching it far more than my students

likely did.

There are many more things I learned from Roy Harthern in the five years I was on his staff, such as how to conduct meetings or interact with staff or solve problems. I also saw how he used his bold, outgoing and charming public persona to lead others. It's a side of my personality I had to develop over the years.

Roy Harthern was a great man, a visionary and a great leader. But he was not perfect. Even in the darkest chapter of his life, I saw him over time deal with it with integrity and grace. After a difficult situation came to light (on which there is no need to elaborate), he submitted to correction, worked through the situation in his life and held his family together. To my knowledge, his life after that was a model of integrity. He didn't quit the ministry, even in the face of great disappointment. He did the right thing, and in the end he finished strong.

That's been an example to me, and I hope it is to you.

Steve Strang is the founder and publisher of Charisma. Follow him on Twitter @sstrang or Facebook (stephenestrang).