

Eight People I Admired Most in 2008

As we end this year I want to reflect on eight individuals—seven of whom I know personally—whom I greatly admire. These are the people who inspired me most in 2008:

✘ **1. Rick Warren** has used his considerable influence more responsibly than almost anyone I've met. For example, in August he was able to get John McCain and Barack Obama together on the same stage for the first time. Each had received enough votes to win his party's nomination (even though the nominating conventions had not yet been held). In what Warren called a Civil Forum, he asked each of them the same questions about faith and values. It became quickly apparent that the candidates had major philosophical differences, although each presented his views articulately. Warren was very civil toward them, and his gracious tone broke the stereotypical image of conservative Christian leaders who get mean and nasty when it comes to politics. If you missed my Strang Report about this event, [click here](#) to read it.

Later in the year I had the privilege of attending a Civil Forum that Warren held with President George W. Bush in which the pastor gave an award to the president for the considerable work he's done to help AIDS victims in Africa. If you missed my report on this a couple of weeks ago, [click here](#).

✘ **2. Mike Huckabee** dared to run for president even though his campaign was under-financed and his conservative values are often considered an anathema by the media and political elite in our country. It's well known that I endorsed Huckabee early in the 2008 presidential race. I personally raised money for him. A year ago this week he was just a few days from winning the Iowa primary—a huge upset. The other upset in Iowa was Barack Obama's win. Of course, we know the rest of the story

on his campaign. Mike Huckabee went on to win 7 more states and glean 4 million votes. Had he won South Carolina instead of falling short by a couple of percentage points, he might have gained momentum, won the GOP nomination and won the presidency.

I was around Huckabee enough in various situations to see that he was always consistent behind the scenes as well as in front of the camera. He now has a very interesting program on Fox News Channel on which he continues to champion causes that I believe are important. I hope we have not heard the last of Mike Huckabee in the political process.

✘ **3. Sarah Palin.** Of all the people on my list, Palin is the only one I don't know personally. I first heard of her in June 2007 while on a cruise to Alaska with Texas pastor John Hagee. He had a meeting with her while we were docked in Juneau. He came back to the ship raving about this sharp, young, female governor. He mentioned her name, but I didn't remember it. So, like many others, I was surprised when McCain picked her as his running mate. But I became a strong Palin supporter just a few moments after I'd learned of her very strong stand on pro-life and other moral principles.

I learned later that Palin has a Pentecostal background, as I do. The January issue of *Charisma* features a cover story on Palin's faith. I wrote about her in October and so far have received more than 1,450 reader posts, the biggest response ever to my blog. You can read what I wrote by clicking [here](#).

✘ **4. Kim Daniels** is a speaker, author, pastor and "apostle" in Jacksonville, Florida. Her husband, Ardell, and I have become very close friends. We've also published several of her books as well as many magazine articles. I admire the way she stands strong for what she believes and how she speaks the truth even when it's not popular. In the recent presidential election she took a lot of flak as an African-American because

she opposed Barack Obama's pro-abortion views.

I know that she has a remarkably accurate prophetic gift and operates in a powerful anointing when she opposes demonic powers, both in individual lives as well over nations. If you missed what she wrote in my blog a couple weeks ago, you can [click here](#).

✘ **5. Scott Plakon** is my longtime friend and golfing buddy who was recently elected to the Florida House of Representatives, representing District 37 where I live. When I knew he was going to run for office, I asked him if I could have the privilege of being the first to donate to his campaign. Of all the people I admire, Scott is—unlike most on this list—not known nationally. Yet he is the one I know the best. As a friend he's stood with me during some difficult times; I too have stood by him.

I've known for a long time that he had a dream of becoming a public servant by age 50, after he had established a successful business. In March, when the Florida legislature convenes, he will be a week away from his 50th birthday (even though he looks much younger). Because I'm his close friend I have seen that he did not compromise during his campaign—even though there were opportunities to compromise, and even though there were major compromises on the part of others in local political races.

Scott is a strong pro-life advocate. Part of the reason is that his mother became pregnant with him when she was unwed at age 17. Some encouraged her to have an abortion even though it was not legal at the time. Scott also stands strongly on the other moral values and will do a great job in the Florida legislature. I hope he is a prototype for many other believers who will enter the political process.

✘ **6. Jim Garlow** pastors Skyline Church in San Diego, the church formerly pastored by John Maxwell. I got to know Garlow

through pastor Jack Hayford probably 15 years ago and have watched his life and career. He has done a great job as a pastor. But this year he became a real leader in getting Proposition 8 passed in California. He was able to mobilize pastors who, in turn, mobilized their congregations to pass the amendment—which defines marriage as between one man and one woman. Garlow and his army of volunteers overcame what they thought were overwhelming odds to get Proposition 8 passed by 52 percent. However, he has come under intense criticism by the radical left.

While Jim was undergoing enormous pressure regarding Proposition 8 and providing outstanding leadership, he was dealing with intense pressures in his personal life. His wife, Carol, learned two years ago that she had more than 100 cancerous tumors and was given a 5 percent chance to live. However, she is doing great today. I admire the way Jim has stood strong with Carol during this difficult period.

✘ **7. John Stemberger** is an Orlando, Florida, attorney who is president of the Florida Family Policy Council (FFPC). He also led the fight to get the Marriage Amendment on the ballot in Florida. After the FFPC collected 611,009 names on a petition to get the amendment on the ballot, many of the names were disqualified. I was told this was merely a political ploy to keep it off the ballot. Yet under these extraordinary circumstances John got the necessary signatures in an incredibly short period of time.

The battle really began at that point because Florida law requires 60 percent voter support to pass a constitutional amendment. This is the highest standard in any state. John worked tirelessly, crisscrossing the state and brilliantly strategizing to involve African-American and Hispanic pastors, many of whom voted for Barack Obama but who also voted for the Marriage Amendment. It ended up passing by 62 percent. I admire his tireless effort, his strategic brilliance, and his

absolute commitment, both to preserving traditional marriage as well as to saving the life of the unborn.

✘ **8. Stephen Strader.** Last but not least is my long-time friend Stephen Strader, whom I've known since 1967. His father, Karl Strader, was my pastor until I went to college and we've remained close friends over the years. Now Stephen pastors Ignite Church in Lakeland, Florida, my hometown. Over the years Stephen has always had a heart for revival. He was quick to agree to allow Todd Bentley to use his church for revival meetings beginning in early April of this year (even though Bentley had admitted to moral shortcomings in the last couple of years, although he had supposedly been restored to the ministry).

Within days it was obvious that this was no usual revival meeting. The services lasted for hours, with many miracles being reported. The services were first broadcast on the Internet and then by God TV, and people came from around the world. I first visited the services in early May and wrote about my experiences. If you missed it you can [click here](#).

There were things that concerned me about the Lakeland Revival from the beginning, including the fact that Bentley was ministering for many hours a day seven days a week. That inevitably leads to a crash, which happened only a few months later.

In addition, Bentley invited Paul Cain to the platform even though Cain's ministry has been discredited. Bentley also claimed to communicate with the same angel that reportedly appeared to evangelist William Branham. However, Bentley did seem to modify some of his statements when others challenged him, and he took references about the angel off his Web site. Throughout all of this, Stephen was loyal to Todd because he wanted the revival to expand. He also reached out to spiritual fathers to help him "shepherd the revival." His plea convinced C. Peter Wagner and others to bring Bentley into "spiritual

alignment" at a widely publicized service in late June. There are those who believe the service was inappropriate, partly because prophetic words spoken over Bentley indicated that the revival would continue. As it turned out, that very week revelations began surfacing about Bentley that resulted in him leaving the revival. In July Bentley announced he was divorcing his wife. You can [click here](#) to read more about this.

I admire the grace Stephen demonstrated while he handled enormous pressure and intense criticism. He pastored his church in such a way that it emerged from this revival stronger than it was before. He also kept a humble spirit and a passion for revival even though Bentley left in disgrace. This had to be a huge disappointment to Stephen. I also admire the fact that he was teachable and open to constructive criticism from those in ministry who had concerns about Bentley's theology and practices.

✘ On a personal note, I want to add to this list my immense admiration for Dr. J. Howard Ridings, who passed from this life on April 17. He was my brother-in-law. I actually met him and his wife, Rosella, in 1969—several years before I met Rosella's sister Joy, whom I later married. Howard and Rosella have been very close friends, and Howard in many ways was like a spiritual father to me, especially after my own father died 12 years ago. Howard had a successful ministry as a pastor and missionary for four years in both Singapore and Hong Kong. For the last 10 years I had the privilege of having him on my staff at Strang Communications. For the last 18 months of his life he battled cancer. Several times it appeared to be in remission. But his body finally wore out, mainly from some of the treatments he was undergoing.

At 2 a.m. on Wednesday, April 17, Howard breathed his last and was ushered to the other side. Standing around his bed were Rosella, his son Dean, daughter Denae and their spouses; as

well as me and Joy; our sons Cameron and Chandler; and my daughter-in-law, Maya. I loved Howard deeply. I had opportunities to eulogize him both in print and verbally in many ways. But for me this was the single-most difficult and traumatic event in 2008. While my admiration for Howard was not due to anything he did during this year, I wanted to take this opportunity to once again publicly say how much I loved him and miss him.

I invite you to post your comments on my blog. Tell me whom you admired most in 2008 or let me know what you think of The Strang Report, which I launched one year ago.

Happy new year.

Steve Strang