

He Was a Spiritual Giant

How Oral Roberts touched Charisma's publisher

Growing up in the 1950s, I knew there were two Christian leaders who stood head and shoulders above the rest—Oral Roberts and Billy Graham. I never dreamed I would get to know Oral personally, publish one of his books, serve on one of his boards and even visit him “to say goodbye.”

Once Oral told some leaders that if they were ever asked to speak and were unprepared, they should tell their testimony. Now I feel inadequate to pay tribute to a man who did more than probably anyone in the 20th century to bring God's healing power to the church. So I'll just tell my testimony of knowing him.

I met Oral through my mentor Jamie Buckingham. I was barely 30 when I was invited to a meeting of about 100 leaders in the newly built City of Faith, on the Oral Roberts University (ORU) campus in Tulsa, Oklahoma. During the meeting Oral walked around the room and prayed for each person. When he came to me he said: “Never doubt the gift that's within you.”

I had only recently started *Charisma*. Oral must have sensed I was unsure about God's call on my life. Yet he saw God's hand on this fledgling magazine. He told me later he read

every issue.

And once he recorded a short endorsement that I'm so proud of I put it on the special online tribute we posted ().

Once Oral asked me to serve on ORU's board of regents. I felt as a journalist I needed to keep my objectivity, so I declined.

Now, 25 years later, my son Cameron (who graduated from ORU) is the youngest member of ORU's new board of trustees. Instead, I served for many years on the International Charismatic Bible Ministries board. It brought me to Tulsa for many years and I enjoyed rubbing shoulders with this great man.

I have met heads of state and titans of industry. But never had I met a man who could humbly walk into a room with such a commanding presence. But Oral wasn't perfect, and he spoke candidly of his shortcomings.

And while he lived in utmost moral integrity, he sometimes did things he must have regretted. When he was desperate to keep ORU's medical school afloat in the mid-1980s, he threatened that "God would take him home" if he didn't raise the money.

I wrote an essay in our local newspaper explaining that many Christians believe after they accomplish all they can, God will call them home. That comment is often made at funerals to provide

comfort when someone's life is cut short. Apparently Oral felt that if he failed to save his medical school he would have nothing more to accomplish and he'd go to heaven.

The money did come in, but it wasn't enough to save the medical school. ORU suffered a great setback and it left ORU heavily in debt. Yet the university and his vision survived and lives on.

The day of Oral's funeral on December 21 I looked out my hotel window to the beautiful campus that had once been a farm on the edge of Tulsa. I'd heard Oral tell how he had walked that vacant property, prayed in tongues and then interpreted back to himself direction from the Holy Spirit. I have used that prayer technique many times.

After Oral retired to Southern California, I arranged to visit him "to say goodbye." I took my friend R.T. Kendall, who wanted to meet him. Oral admired several of Kendall's books, so he wanted to meet him and I went along to help conduct an interview we published in *Ministry Today*.

I saw him only one more time—at Mark Rutland's inauguration as the third president of ORU. After the ceremony others on the platform exited amid great academic pageantry. As Oral was helped off the stage by his caregivers he gave a great wave as

if to
say goodbye.

Later Mark spent some private time with ORU's founder. After their conversation, Oral put his feeble arm around Rutland's shoulder and said, "Now I'm ready to go home." Rutland assumed he was ready to go back to Southern California. Later he realized Oral meant he was ready to go to heaven.

Oral Roberts inspired millions, including this former newspaper reporter. I'm thankful he saw a gift in me. His legacy of faith makes me want to use that gift to its maximum impact.

Steve Strang conducted several interviews with Oral Roberts, including this one in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the early 1980s.