

Paul Crouch: One of the Giants of Our Generation

Paul Crouch Sr. passed away last Saturday, about the time my plane was taking off from Paris. By the time I landed in the U.S., my cell phone was full of text messages from friends asking if I'd heard the news.

I knew Paul was pretty sick. I had tried to visit him a couple of years ago when I was in Los Angeles, but a member of his family said he didn't feel good and didn't want me to see him so sick. Then he rallied and was much better for a couple of years. Recently he was put back in the hospital. And when the *Los Angeles Times* called me a month ago to be interviewed for his obituary, I knew it wouldn't be long until I heard the news he'd passed away.

Because I'd known Crouch for so many years, I was able to explain to the *Times* reporter (who didn't seem to know much about him) how he had a humble upbringing, not a lot of education regarding broadcasting and not much money. Yet he had a vision to grow TBN, and he was one of the most tenacious men I've ever met.

I told her stories of traveling with Paul to visit Enlace—TBN's Spanish network in Costa Rica—and then flying to meet with the Nicaraguan president to negotiate opening a station for TBN in that war-torn country. I told the reporter of the time I once had to negotiate with Paul. It was so intense that I ended up with a headache and remembered thinking I had just negotiated with the very best.

Anyone who knew him well knew he was a shrewd businessman and was able to juggle many things at the same time. Running a huge, multimillion-dollar broadcasting empire required him to handle an awful lot of details. For example, when TBN made an

ad buy in one of our magazines, I knew it had to meet with his approval.

The *Times* didn't tell any of my anecdotes. Instead they quoted me only on this: "He has created an enormous platform for many ministries to do what he says is very important to him—that is, to spread the gospel not only in this country but around the world."

I truly believe that.

I said much the same thing to one of the local television news channels that asked to interview me since they couldn't get anyone from TBN or the Holy Land Experience to give a comment. (The Holy Land Experience is in Orlando, where I live, and TBN owns a station here.) I told them the same thing—that Paul Crouch was a visionary and that he was determined to build TBN and to spread the gospel.

Over the years, I related to Paul in many ways. I interviewed him for an article in *Charisma* 25 years ago. He interviewed me on the *Praise the Lord* program several times.

For three years, we had a program on TBN called *Charisma Now*. While I mostly interacted with his wife, Jan, who headed up all programming, I had a lot of dealings with Paul. (Doing a TV program was an interesting experience, and ours was one of their top 10 programs, measured by response. But since we are not a nonprofit ministry that collects donations, and since TBN doesn't let you sell anything on the air—they say the program becomes an infomercial, which they don't allow—in the end we couldn't find a financial model that worked for us. Plus, I had to realize that journalism was my calling, not broadcasting on TBN.)

Over the years, I've become a friend to his two sons, Paul Jr. and Matt. Each is brilliant in his own way. And their mother, Jan, as controversial as she may be, is brilliant in her own way. This is a unique family with a unique calling that has

left an imprint on Christianity not only in this nation but around the world.

Like me, the Crouches grew up in the Assemblies of God. Like me, they started with very little and had to believe God to see the vision become a reality. But the comparison stops there. I can't compare my vision to Paul's. If I do, mine's small and his was huge. Even though I have my detractors, I'm not nearly as controversial. Maybe that's because I've spent most of my career reporting mostly to the church on what God is doing rather than sharing those things on camera to the entire world.

I believe you can measure a man by the size of his vision. If that is so, then Paul Crouch is one of the giants of our generation. Sure, he had detractors. He made mistakes. But knowing him all those years, I believe he was sincere—and had he not been such a stubborn German (as he used to like to call himself), then TBN would have died in the early days.

I thank God for Paul Crouch and his life and the legacy he leaves. I believe he was welcomed into heaven by the Lord saying to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

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