

Tribute to a Great Servant of the Lord

Cecil Wiggins was a great pastor and fervent proponent of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as well as one of the largest givers to missions in the Assemblies of God. He died quietly in his home last Saturday, as we reported here. He was 87.

Even though you may not have heard of him, he was well-known in Jacksonville, Florida, where he pastored Evangel Temple Assemblies of God for 45 years. In 2010, he turned the church over to his son and longtime associate, Garry Wiggins. It is the largest Assembly of God in that part of Florida, and he was widely known and respected all over the state.

I knew Brother Wiggins, as I called him, for 46 years. He was a good friend of my father-in-law, the late Rev. Harvey Ferrell, who pastored in Jacksonville when I met Brother Wiggins. I remember attending a Good Friday service with my future father-in-law at Evangel Temple in 1972. That was almost exactly 46 years ago—before I married Joy. Over the years, I've become friends with his son, Garry, and attended church services at Evangel Temple many times. When I visited, Brother Wiggins would always say something to me about how he loved my father-in-law, who passed away 22 years ago.

Wednesday, I attended Wiggins' funeral in Jacksonville, and though I don't often write about funerals, his was one of the nicest I've ever attended. It gave me an opportunity to give tribute to his life and legacy. What impressed me most was what he wanted on his tombstone: "Servant of the Lord."

He was eulogized again and again by prominent ministers such as John Kilpatrick, Wayne Blackburn, Terry Raburn, Paul Zink and Jim Raley—all of whom discussed his spotless integrity and his deep prayer life. They talked about how he had built

Evangel Temple from a fairly small church to the megachurch it is today. It seems to me Garry is cut out of the same cloth. Several of Brother Wiggins' grandchildren are on the staff or involved in the church, as are other family members.

His grandson, Pastor Jordan Wiggins, spoke about the last time he talked to his granddad—the day before he died—about having to preach a funeral for a 2-month-old baby. Brother Wiggins said he should preach about how King David grieved when his baby died and then got up and went on. Second Samuel 12:23 quotes David as saying: "But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Am I able to bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me." Now Jordan said he can't bring back his granddad, but later we can all go to him, implying heaven.

Missionary and evangelist David Grant shared how he recently talked to Brother Wiggins about missions, his passion.

Approximately 2,500 attended the service. It was respectful and dignified, but there was also rousing charismatic worship and some of Brother Wiggins' favorite songs, such as "I'd Rather Have Jesus."

Garry said it was his dad's wish that he preach his funeral. He talked about what a good man his dad was, how fun-loving and family-oriented. Then he compared him to great Bible leaders and to Jesus Himself.

Finally, they played a video of the last time Brother Wiggins preached—March 7, two and a half weeks before he died. He looked vibrant, but the family said he was failing. He talked about casting out devils and speaking in new tongues. Then at the end, he gave an altar call and invited people to accept Jesus. What a fitting way to finish a wonderful service. If you want to watch the service, go to the church's website. You can also contribute to the Cecil Wiggins Memorial Fund, as I am doing.

I can't attend a wonderful funeral of a great man of God

without wondering what my family and associates will say about me when I've finished my race. I hope I'm remembered as Cecil Wiggins was: a man of prayer, generous in missions and a servant of the Lord.