

Was George H.W. Bush a Born-Again Christian?

In recent decades, evangelicals have become an important voting bloc in presidential elections. This was true as far back as Ronald Reagan. And when his vice president, George H.W. Bush, ran for president, evangelicals wanted to know if Bush Sr. was “born again.”

Since the death of this great president, I have written several times about how I was able to interview him and interact with him on numerous occasions. I also understand why we Christians are interested in where our leaders are spiritually. In fact, I wrote God and Donald Trump partly to deal with this question about our current president. However, I also know what Jerry Falwell Jr. said is true: “We are electing a commander in chief, not a pastor in chief.”

I know policies are the most important, not a leader’s personal piety. Yet if we know they believe as we do, it gives a certain comfort. So was George H.W. Bush a born-again Christian? To find out, I reached out to my longtime friend Doug Wead, who worked under Bush Sr. in the White House and was my contact to the late president. The 41st president was certainly a good man, but did he know Jesus?

Although George W. Bush was bold about his evangelical faith and even spoke about his born-again experience, his father was more reticent about his personal religious beliefs. When I asked Doug where Bush Sr. stood in his faith, Doug responded, “It’s very complicated, Steve.”

Doug explained that whenever someone runs for office, they feel they must please everyone, including those of diverse faiths. As a result, politicians say what they know the top influencers want to hear and often get confused about what

they truly believe.

When Doug wrote memos for the president regarding what evangelicals believe, the president never responded with personal opinions. Instead, he asked questions, which many times gave Doug glimpses into the president's faith.

"He had great fascination and curiosity [regarding religion]," Doug says. "But most of his faith, in my opinion, was driven by his mother. She was Episcopalian, but she not only read C.S. Lewis, but she read all of Francis Schaeffer's books. She loved Francis Schaeffer and met him personally. ... She really knew the Lord."

In fact, Doug attributes Bush Sr.'s humility to his Christian mother's teaching. Some say that when Bush Sr. was a boy, he hit a home run, and when he came home to tell his mother, she simply told him not to brag. But Doug says that's not what really happened.

"The real story that he told me is that he was playing tennis with his brother Herbie and came home and bragged on it," Doug says. "His mother said, 'Let another praise you, but not you yourself (Prov. 27:2). You can brag on Herbie, but if you won, I don't want to hear it from you.' So she was a very godly woman."

Humility is just one of the many godly character traits the world saw in Bush Sr. In fact, he's one of the few presidents I can recall who never had even a hint of scandal regarding his marriage to Barbara. If only all our presidents—including Trump—were as honorable as Bush Sr. was in this regard.

"Part of that is he believed in works," Doug says of Bush Sr.'s clean life. "I remember a conversation he had with a bunch of preachers, and James Kennedy hauled out his famous question: 'If you were to arrive at the gates of heaven and St. Peter were to ask you why he should let you in, what would you say?' [Bush Sr.] said, 'I'm a good man, I've lived a good

life, I've tried to be fair to everybody.' And everybody looked stunned! It was the classic wrong answer for a bunch of born-again pastors!"

When one of the preachers told Bush Sr. he gave the wrong answer, Doug says, the two got into an argument about whether a Muslim man who lived a good life would go to heaven or not.

"Afterward, George Herbert Walker Bush said, 'I'd like to talk more to those guys!'" Doug says with a laugh. "So a part of him, ironically, with living this very clean and careful and good life, was his belief that that mattered and made a difference."

While we don't know exactly what Bush Sr. believed at the end of his 94 years, we know he certainly lived a long and interesting life. He was raised in New England in a wealthy family, and his father was a U.S. senator, allowing him to live in privilege. At different times in his life, Bush Sr. served as a congressman, ambassador to the U.N., director of the CIA, first representative to the People's Republic of China and even Republican National Committee chairman during the Watergate scandal with Richard Nixon.

But Bush Sr. also had quite a war record. On his 18th birthday, he enlisted in the Navy and served in World War II. During one of his missions, his plane and those of eight others were shot down. He survived the attack but was stranded in a rubber raft in the Pacific. As he neared the shore of Chichijima, Japanese soldiers began shooting at him. It was later discovered that the officers in that area practiced cannibalism. The other pilots who were shot down in the mission were later slaughtered by their captors and eaten. By God's grace, though, a U.S. submarine found Bush Sr. in the Pacific and rescued him.

"When people said, 'Are you a born-again Christian?', he would say, 'You know, I've had many moments in my life that were

life-changing, where I felt God's presence,'" Doug tells me. "And that was one of them. Why did God spare my life?'"

Certainly, it was because God had a plan for Bush Sr. The Lord raised him up as president in a pivotal time in history.

"I think he'll be ranked as one of the great presidents," Doug says. "I think they'll say that Lincoln saved the Union, but Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush saved humanity, because we were on the verge of nuclear war. ... Ronald Reagan called for the Berlin Wall to come down, but I saw it come down ... under George H.W. Bush."

President Bush Sr. did not have a forceful personality like Ronald Reagan's or Trump's, but he was strong in his own way. And God used him to do mighty things in his time as president.

Be sure to listen to my podcast below to hear Doug share more interesting stories about Bush Sr. and his incredible accomplishments. And if you enjoyed reading about his personal faith, I encourage you to share this article with a friend or post it on your social media!