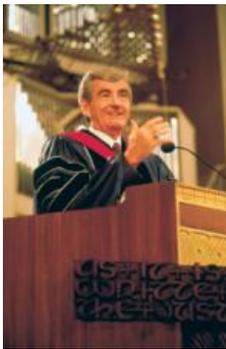


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“Excellence in All Things and All Things to God’s Glory” — The Legacy of Dr. D. James Kennedy

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The death of Dr. D. James Kennedy is yet another reminder of what the hymn writer Isaac Watts saw when he wrote that “time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all its sons away.” Dr. Kennedy died this morning at his home in Ft. Lauderdale. He had been out of the public eye since suffering a significant cardiac arrest last December 28.

James Kennedy founded the [Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church](#) in 1959, the year I was born. Within just a few short years the church became one of the nation’s largest Presbyterian congregations. Along the way he established a host of affiliated ministries. He taught thousands of Christians how to share their faith, one on one, through [Evangelism Explosion](#). He reached millions through his television ministry, “[The Coral Ridge Hour](#).” He educated generations of children and youth through [Westminster Academy](#) and trained ministers through [Knox](#)

[Theological Seminary](#).

He was a visionary with few peers. The motto inscribed on a flanking wall of the church’s massive sanctuary certainly made an impression on me as a young man: “Excellence in All Things and All Things to God’s Glory.”

Some friends and associates called him “Jim,” but to the rest of the world he was *Dr. D. James Kennedy* — followed by a list of academic degrees. A dance instructor before his conversion and call to ministry, Kennedy always had a sense of himself, his movements, and his voice. He could often be intimidating, and he always made an impression. My wife Mary, who worked as a teenager at a local hamburger restaurant, always knew that voice from the drive-through when he ordered his meal. He used the same voice at the hamburger joint that he used in the sanctuary — and to the same effect. He commanded attention.

A theological conservative, he led Coral Ridge into the young Presbyterian Church in America in the 1970’s and was highly involved in a host of evangelical causes. He defended biblical inerrancy and the doctrine of justification. He believed in the need for sinners to come to Christ, and called persons to come to Christ by faith.

Many Americans knew him primarily through his television ministry and his involvement in national political issues. He contended for national righteousness and was a defender of the unborn before many other evangelicals were even awakened to the crisis. He at least flirted with the language of Christian Reconstructionism, but he never left his first love which was for his own congregation.

My indebtedness to Dr. Kennedy is very personal. I was a young Southern Baptist who as a teenager had serious questions about the big issues of the Christian faith. Dr. Kennedy’s ministry at Coral Ridge addressed those big questions. He was unafraid to take on the intellectual challenges of the faith. He was kind to a Baptist teenager, introducing me to Francis Schaeffer and dignifying my questions. He clearly enjoyed talking theology and he was the first person I had ever met who demonstrated this joy. He was kind. I was hooked. In no small way my own calling as a theologian can be traced to Dr. Kennedy’s influence. I was inspired by his intellectual engagement and motivated by his vision of excellence for God’s glory.

My indebtedness also extends to Mary, my wife, who attended Westminster Academy and graduated as valedictorian of her class in 1979. She is living proof to me of the reach of Dr. Kennedy's vision and ministry.

Dr. Kennedy watched events within the Southern Baptist Convention with interest and encouraged me as I became president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He knew what was at stake here, and he assured me of his prayers. Then, several years ago, he came to Southern Seminary, preached in chapel, and told students what he had learned about the local church and the challenge of evangelism. During the chapel service, he looked to me with tears in his eyes, and told me that he had never before heard the sound of so many men singing hymns together.

He has joined the great host now, and that chorus exceeds any on earth. I am thankful to God for the life, ministry, and personal influence of Dr. D. James Kennedy.

A memorial site is found [here](#).

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