

# A Mighty Tree Falls

By Jamie Buckingham

I still remember the first essay I was assigned to write in Logic 101 in college. The question: "If a mighty tree falls in the forest, and there is no one around to hear it fall, does it make any noise?"

It's interesting how you remember the questions, but forget the answers.

Here's how I think I answered. I started with a *premise*: Noise is caused by air waves striking an ear drum. I developed my *thesis*: To have noise you need air, vibrations and an ear drum. I arrived at my *conclusion*: If a mighty tree crashes to the ground, despite the presence of air and vibration, if there is no ear drum in the vicinity, there is no noise.

Now a mighty tree has fallen. This morning, sitting in my study almost 2,500 miles away from where he died in Pasadena, California, I heard the noise.

It came from a phone call. "The patriarch has gone." I shuddered as all lesser trees in the forest shudder when the father of trees finally topples.

David du Plessis is dead.

I knew he would die quickly when he stopped traveling. From Rome, to Stockholm, to Lubbock, on to Singapore, back to Richmond—he lived out of his suitcase.

I once boarded a plane with him in St. Louis. By the time I fastened my seat belt he was asleep. Like all apostles, he lived to travel.

I do not mourn his death. I mourn the open space left against the sky—the space where his majestic branches once dominated the scene. The question is not "Will anyone hear the noise?" A half-billion ear drums resonate with the sound. No, the question is, "Who will take his place?"

With the same breath I ask it, the answer comes. No one!

David, like John the Baptist, was one of a kind. There can be no successor. His work was for this age, and it is finished.

What a wonderful way to go!

To be like old Jacob, who, after blessing his sons, "drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people" (Gen. 49:33, NIV).

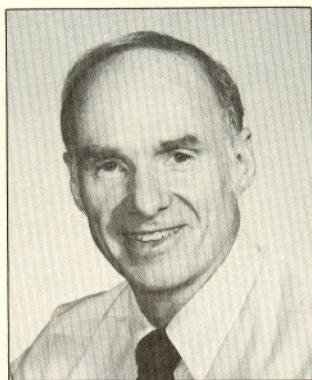
To be like Paul, who could write with such assurance: "The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness..." (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Glenn Anderson called me from South Carolina two weeks before David died. "I'm going out to see him," he said. "He promised to bless me before he leaves."

Two days later Glenn sat beside his bed, holding his hand. "I know what you want," the old warrior said, "but I am too weak to pray aloud."

"It's enough that I am with you, old friend," Glenn answered.

They sat for a long time in silence. Then David half rose from his bed: "The burden of the Lord..." But his throat filled with vomit and he collapsed—unable to speak. Glenn



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helped him as his 81-year-old body, fighting against the Force which was calling his spirit home, cling to earth.

It was his precious wife Anna who finally convinced him it was time to pack his suitcase for one last trip. He agreed, and called his family into his room and said one final goodbye.

Other giant trees will rise from the mulch of his life, but no one will replace him. Who can? He was Mr. Pentecost!

He was the most gracious and the most opinionated man I ever met.

"Jesus never had a single altar call," he snorted. "Neither did Paul. But that's all Pentecostals talk about. I never give altar calls

because they're not biblical."

Once he interrupted a group of us in a leadership conference while we were singing. "That song is heresy," he said with his South African brogue. "It is wrong to plead 'fill my cup' when the Bible says Jesus has already filled you with His Spirit. Why ask for something you already have?"

I first met him 20 years ago, the afternoon I received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He was speaking at the Full Gospel Business Men's Convention in Washington, D.C.

I fancied Pentecostals to be uneducated shouters. Pulpit-thumpers. I pictured them as men dressed in checkered sports coats with high-water trousers and white socks who hawked washing machines and oil stock while they preached. But David was none of that. Such behavior embarrassed him. And he was bold enough to say so.

His nobleness, though, showed me there was more to God than that portrayed by some of His servants.

Later we served on numerous boards together. I was with him in Jerusalem in 1974 when he preached his classic sermon on forgiveness at the First World Conference on the Holy Spirit. "On a hill not so far away...."

We struggled through those "summit conferences" when everyone was upset over the "shepherding" issue. He had blunt things to say about the people involved. Later he softened and put into practice his preaching on forgiveness. When he died he held in highest esteem those he had earlier judged.

It was the mark of greatness.

Bob Slosser, David's biographer, and I once sat and talked about the man's greatest contribution. Was it his pioneer work bringing Pentecostals and Catholics into dialogue? Was it his willingness to work with the World Council of Churches when all the rest of us had written them off as pinkos? Was it his great teaching that it is Jesus who baptizes us into the Holy Spirit?

We concluded it was none of these. Rather, he taught three generations of us that it is possible to be led, daily, by the Holy Spirit.

A mighty tree has fallen, and the sound resonates in the ears of our hearts all over the world. ■