



**GREAT  
SOUL-WINNING  
CHURCHES**

**ELMER L. TOWNS**

Great Soul-Winning Churches  
by Elmer L. Towns

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## Foreword

*Great Soul-Winning Churches* was first suggested to me as a project for the pages of *The Sword of the Lord* by Fairy Shappard, Advertising Manager. I had wanted to write for *The Sword of the Lord* because of its vast outreach and influence among fundamental churches, hence I jumped at the opportunity, knowing full well the tremendous pressure created by a weekly deadline.

Thirty-six articles appeared in *The Sword of the Lord*, August 1972 through March 1973; 19 are included in this book. I traveled to each church, interviewed the pastor, surveyed the work and evaluated the total ministry. From my experience I wrote the stories that appear in the book, printed almost without change from the original copy. (The statistics at the back of the book were added when the book was ready for press.)

For a church to qualify for the series, it had to reflect the spirit of fundamentalism found on the pages of *The Sword of the Lord*. Dr. Rice and I consulted and eliminated some churches suggested. Our basis for the article: (1) a clear testimony for fundamental Christianity, (2) a reputation for separation from apostasy and stand against worldly contamination, (3) an aggressive soul-winning program, and (4) a Sunday School averaging over 1,000. Some smaller churches were included because they had rapid growth or other outstanding qualities that made them exemplary to the Christian world. Some of the churches scheduled for inclusion in the series were dropped because, after I visited their congregation, I found little to commend them to other churches.

All churches in this volume are not included in the annual listing in *The Sword of the Lord* of 200 baptisms or more. I believe all of them will be included in this listing within the near future. Also, all of the churches are not in the annual listing of the 100 largest Sunday Schools in *Christian Life Magazine*. I trust each of them will be included.

This is my third book on large, growing churches. Four years ago I wrote *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. This volume helped to expel the prevalent pessimistic attitude toward Sunday Schools. It demonstrated Sunday Schools could grow. My second book, *America's Fastest Growing Churches*, Impact Books, Nashville, Tennessee, revealed *why* ten churches were fast growing. Both books appeared on the best-seller list in the *Christian Bookseller Magazine*.

At the end of *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools*, I included principles that cause the Sunday Schools to grow. There I suggested that the laws of Sunday School growth as published in several Southern Baptist works were no longer applicable. In *America's Fastest Growing*

*Churches*, I tried to include deeper motives for growth. There I stated theology was a causal factor for church growth. A difference in methodology among fundamentalists, evangelicals, and liberals were noted.

In *Great Soul-Winning Churches*, I have included at the back of the book spiritual principles that produce church growth. Principles and theology are not enough to build a great church—a spiritual dynamic is necessary. Gasoline and wood are not enough to ignite—fire must be added. As you read the stories of these successful pastors, note that correct principles and biblical theology are evident; but, more important, watch for the driving power of the Holy Spirit.

This volume has a threefold purpose. First, to encourage Bible-believing Christians by demonstrating that their simple faith in Christ and allegiance to the fundamentals of the faith will work. Many Christians in discouraged fundamental churches need to know that God's promises in the Scriptures still work, if a group of people will just claim them.

Second, this book provides an example to struggling churches. Bill Monroe read *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools* and figured if Dallas Billington could build the world's largest Sunday School with only an eighth-grade education, there was no reason he couldn't build a church. May the examples in this book stimulate a legion of pastors to attempt great things for God. I pray that the examples of sacrifice, principles and dedicated soul winning may help pastors and workers to build churches and accomplish great miracles for God.

The third purpose of this book is to let the world know the strength of fundamentalism. Many have slammed the fundamentalists, accusing them of anachronistic gullibility. The media have portrayed them as picketing hermits naively holding a poster, "The end is near." Fundamentalism is a growing movement. Not only are fundamentalists establishing new churches, the existing ones are expanding in members, attendance and finances. Mainline denominations are declining in all these areas. Although the liberal-oriented denominations are now larger, the fundamentalists have the edge on the church future. No one has a guaranteed future; the churches in this book don't have a fool-proof future, nor the fundamentalists as a movement. Only those who stay in the will of God are assured of success. From where I sit, these churches and fundamentalism are the only hope this nation has. If we don't reach this nation *now*, we may never have another opportunity.

The churches in this book are dynamic and growing. The general community may not agree with them, but they are respected for their success. Bankers want their sizeable deposits, the building trades bid for their contracts, the media listen to their opinion, and law-enforcement agencies approve of their emphasis on Americanism, coupled with the fruit of changed lives. Drunks are dried up, families are reunited and crooks go straight.

May the stories of these churches continue to accomplish the purpose for which they were established. So many have invested so much in their past; may these chapters add to their accomplishments.

Sincerely in Christ,

ELMER L. TOWNS

## Chapter 1

### ***Florence (S. C.) Baptist Temple*** ***Bill Monroe, Pastor***

#### **“Stability and Excitement”**

How large can a church grow in three years? How stable can a young church become in 36 months? Stability through excitement is the key to growth at the Florence Baptist Temple, begun in November 1969. Attendance averaged 504 this past quarter, with a high day of 1,355 on its third anniversary and a weekly offering approaching \$2,000, a modern streamlined \$200,000 building, a Christian day school and an area-wide ministry. But the future has more excitement: the congregation is selling a second \$200,000 bond issue, and by this fall will double its building, occupying an auditorium seating 1,100—an unthinkable attainment for a three-year-old church.

Bill Monroe had a deep feeling that God was calling him into the pastorate. He had read *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools* many times and concluded that “if Dallas Billington could work in a rubber factory and build the largest Sunday School in the world, why not me?” Monroe had sung in a gospel quartet all over America and knew these large churches. Being music director for Dr. Greg Dixon, Indianapolis Baptist Temple, no longer held the same challenge. He wanted to preach. Monroe, only 25 years old, walked into Dixon’s office and told him God was calling him to preach. Two weeks later, he was driving out of Indianapolis, all of his belongings on a Ryder Rental Truck heading for Columbia, South Carolina.

Bill attended high school in South Carolina, having graduated from Edmunds High School in Sumter, where his father pastored Harmony Baptist Church. Monroe knew of the great independent churches up north and in the midwest, but he did not know of such great churches in South Carolina. He spent three days in Columbia, but couldn’t find an apartment to rent, his furniture still on the rental truck. Pastor David Wood, Harbor Baptist Church, counseled with him and suggested a church was needed on the other side of town. Nothing opened up there, either. Then Monroe visited Florence, South Carolina, where an old friend, Larry Denham, lived. They drove around looking at the subdivisions. Florence, a city of 42,000, was quite a mission field with no independent fundamental church. Within an hour, Monroe found an apartment and a place for his church on the air base, an abandoned theater building that had been used by the Florence Little Theater Association, a decaying frame structure with red asbestos brick siding peeling off the walls. The interior was painted completely black so no light would reflect.

As Monroe looks back, his first message there was the first sermon he ever preached. He had spoken at other meetings or Sunday School, but he had not preached before beginning the church. The roof leaked, and one time as ‘:Monroe preached on baptism during a hard rain, the roof sprung a leak, drenching him with water. During the next two years, the church service was cancelled several times because of rain and, according to Monroe, “No one took his coat off that first winter.” Two hundred dollars a month spent on fuel oil couldn’t keep the building warm.

Sunday School was held in a room out back, which was nothing more than tin wrapped around studs in a concrete floor. The ladies stuffed rags in the holes in the nursery wall to keep it warm and had to watch the children carefully lest they rip decaying beaver board off the walls.

When Monroe went into the Little Theater, some traditional church men in town made fun of him, accusing him of having “whooping religion” or reviving the Salvation Army. Even though the young congregation had questionable facilities, they had a prediction of success. Dr. Greg Dixon drove down from Indianapolis to preach the organizational sermon, Cecil Hodges presided at the business meeting, and six other pastors were there in May, 1970, when the church was chartered. This was the first Baptist Bible Fellowship church in the area. Monroe relies heavily upon the counsel of both Greg Dixon and Cecil Hodges when he has a problem. He simply picks up the phone and seeks their advice on how to build a church, for those who have done it can help him most.

Monroe sold door-to-door products part-time for the first four months to keep his family alive. He testifies, “We ran up all the credit possible on our credit cards; the church just wouldn’t go forward.” Attendance began with 18 and for two months averaged only 23. Monroe confesses that he was discouraged. When Monroe had been in Florence several months, he discovered that there was a former independent Baptist church, the Baptist Tabernacle. Rumors regarding the split-up of that church had hurt fundamentalism in the area. True or not, the rumors hurt young Monroe. The former church had split and both sections went into the Southern Baptist Convention. No one seemed to want anything to do with an independent church.

In January he attended a Georgia-South Carolina Baptist Bible Fellowship ministerial, where the pastors asked him to appear and tell about his work. After they heard of his vision, they pledged \$100 a week to help with the new church, most of the money coming from Pastor Cecil Hodges, Bible Baptist Church, Savannah. The pastor came back to Florence elated. According to him, “I visited with more enthusiasm than ever before.”

Next March, he had one of his greatest victories; the congregation prayed for 55 in Sunday School. He gave away a “Judas coin” to everyone who came. Monroe testifies, “People kept coming, more than I had ever seen, and we hit 55 that day. It was a real answer to prayer.” In May, they went for a goal of 100, giving away goldfish and sponsoring a local quartet; they had 102 in Sunday School. On the church’s first anniversary in November, attendance reached 200 for the first time. The church, with its youthful pastor, was on the march. Still the church had no capital assets, but were renting the old theater building for \$58.50 a month. By this time they were paying the pastor full-time. Monroe signed a note at the bank for \$1100 and bought three old buses. Attendance pushed its way to 140 in Sunday School, a phenomenal growth, judged by the history of the church.

After Monroe had been in the church two years, he attended the pastors’ school at First Baptist Church, Hammond, Indiana, where Dr. Jack Hyles taught him to be bold in his leadership, to let the people know where he was going, what he expected and why he had such expectations. When the author challenged the congregation to have 7,000 in Sunday School and be one of the largest in the world, there was spontaneous “Amen!”—as if every person in the room expected to build the largest Sunday School in the world right in Florence, South Carolina.

The young church needed property and a permanent location to convince the community they were in business. Monroe used his business experience to wisely invest the bonds in his church. The small congregation that had nothing, then needed to buy everything:

Land	\$ 35,000
Building	125,000
Driveway and Parking lots	5,000
Illuminated sign	2,200
Printing press and equipment	2,500
Office equipment	1,500
School desks and Chalkboards	2,000

The congregation moved into the 15,000 square feet of new facilities on April 9, 1972. They had room for expansion. The new auditorium would seat 500 and the thirteen classrooms furnished space for the Sunday School to reach 500 average attendance. Only 377 attended Sunday School on the first Sunday they moved into their new building. However, Monroe feels that represented a great victory, because there were 32 additions. The community knew that the church was there to stay.

The new facilities on a four-lane highway are located in a pecan orchard that one visitor called “a natural South Carolina landscape.” Modern architectural lines attract the visitor, the building is carpeted throughout with wide halls, and well-lighted facilities make it look like a modern public school.

After he moved into the facilities, he bought more buses, running the attendance up to 200 on the buses. There is a large sign in the hallway, “Goals are set for the bus workers” and three columns of statistics: (1) Souls sought, (2) Souls brought and (3) Souls saved. The first column indicates how many visits were made, second, how many attended Sunday School, and, third, those who have accepted Jesus Christ.

“This is the only independent, fundamental Baptist church in 75 miles,” according to Pastor Monroe. He feels God has put him in the area to build a large church to saturate the entire area. He testifies, “I have followed *Church Aflame* (written by the author and Jerry Falwell) in building the church to completely saturate the community through a church newspaper (circulation of 1,100), radio, Sunday School buses and organized visitation.

Monroe is known as “the preacher who rebaptizes people,” to which he answers, “When we get church members of another faith, who often admit they were not saved in former church memberships, they must be baptized as a profession of faith in Jesus Christ.” He preaches hard against sin and has high standards for his workers and Sunday School teachers. They can’t smoke, use alcoholic beverages, dance, or attend movies.

Even though the church is young, there is a purity among the members evidenced in other fast-growing churches. A high number of entire families attend the church. Before they were saved many were members of dead churches. They bring to the church stability. Many in town call Monroe a “Holiness Baptist” because of the enthusiastic singing, evangelistic preaching and rebaptizing of church members who are really saved in the church.

Monroe confessed that he floundered in the Lord's work before going to work for Indianapolis Baptist Temple because of the interdenominational influence in his life. He had briefly attended an interdenominational Bible College. "Deeper life" ministry had no appeal to him; but when he met Baptist preachers concerned with soul winning, building churches, doing something for God, he felt a compelling urge to preach the gospel. His study of the doctrine of the local church led to his call to the ministry.

Monroe accepted Christ at five years of age at his mother's knee. His father, Frank Monroe, had been a preacher in West Virginia, who later moved to South Carolina. He grew up in a parsonage and confesses, "I had an uneventful childhood." He attended the University of South Carolina for three and a half years, a business major, before deciding to go into a quartet ministry, traveling first to Fort Worth, Texas, where he met his wife, the former Norma Phelps. Later, he became director of music for the Indianapolis Baptist Temple.

## FUTURE

When Monroe moved into his new facilities, he indicated they would be starting a Christian school the following fall. He began with 75 students in kindergarten through grade 3 and next year will expand to grade 6 and 4 kindergartens, with a total of 225 in school.

Four full-time workers staff the young church, and they plan in the near future to add a Minister of Youth (Youth Pastor) and a Minister of Music (full-time music man).

The chart below shows the Sunday School growth in 1972:

First quarter, avg. att. per Sunday 221

Second quarter, avg. att. per Sunday 280

Third quarter, avg. att. per Sunday 393

Fourth quarter, avg. att. per Sunday 504

There were 324 conversions during 1972, with 163 baptized (85% adults).

Two years ago, the church had a \$26,000 income; last year the budget reached \$62,717. This coming year, the people pledged \$107,742 for total expenses, a 133-percent increase over the previous year.

Monroe feels the church will be averaging 1,000 in Sunday School before the fourth anniversary. This is not a visionary goal, but a possibility. Next month they begin selling a \$200,000 bond issue and, according to all indications, they will have an easy time selling the bonds, providing for an additional 20,000-square-foot building. Monroe will build an 1100-seat auditorium, an unbelievable size for a congregation three years old. In addition, he will provide nursery and classroom space, dividing the present auditorium into two buildings. The young pastor indicates they will average 1,000 when they move into their new facilities, which will accommodate 1,200 in Sunday School.



## Chapter Two

### ***First Baptist Church, Hammond, Indiana*** ***Jack Hyles, Pastor***

#### **“The Most-Copied Church in America”**

The most influential church in the United States is the First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana, because it is copied by thousands of other churches who have implemented the same type of ministry and experienced the same success. According to one pastor’s observation, “There are more churches like the First Baptist Church of Hammond than any other church.” The church is successful because Jack Hyles has influenced thousands of pastors through the yearly pastors’ conference; because Jack Hyles has influenced thousands of pastors through the eighteen books which he has written; and because Jack Hyles has influenced thousands of ministers through the number of pastors’ conferences where he speaks each year.

Six years ago Dr. Hyles faced a major decision for his ministry. He had 22 invitations on his desk to come and hold city-wide revivals. In addition to that, he had an invitation to become president of a college and of a seminary. He realized he couldn’t do everything, and he spent the day fasting and praying, and determined that God wanted him to use the rest of his life: (1) pastoring the First Baptist Church to make it one of the most effective churches in America, (2) writing books to help preachers become more effective in their ministry, and (3) preaching to preachers to motivate them to go back and build great churches. Back of Dr. Hyles’ desire to motivate preachers is deep concern. “I’ve cried for the United States many times,” replied Dr. Hyles. “Our country is going to the Devil and we’ve got to build strong fundamental churches to save our nation before it’s too late.”

There must be a strong base for Pastor Hyles to make an impact on other preachers; therefore he gives a maximum amount of his energy to strengthen and enlarge First Baptist Church. Ground has been broken for Baptist City, a \$2 million, 26-acre project in Schererville, Indiana, that will include the Hyles-Anderson College which this year began with 302 day students. Hammond Baptist High School is also located there, with approximately 500 students. There is also a Christian day school, which, with their grade school in downtown Hammond, has a combined enrollment of 431 students. In the future Dr. Hyles plans to add apartments for senior citizens, an orphanage and a shopping center. He indicates the church will remain in downtown Hammond.

The Sunday School this year averaged 5,912 and was recognized by *Christian Life Magazine* as the largest in the United States. The author presented the plaque to Dr. Hyles on September 17, congratulating him for building the church from 720 in 1959 to its present height, truly a modern-day miracle. When Dr. Hyles accepted the plaque, he testified, “I’d rather have the world’s greatest Christians in my church than have the world’s largest Sunday School.” Then he smiled and commented, “The world’s greatest Christians have made this the largest Sunday School.”

In addition to being large, the Sunday School has an apparent quality education that is evidenced by the number of teachers. Many other large Sunday Schools have gone to the large room, master teacher plan, but Dr. Hyles still emphasizes the small classrooms with approximately one teacher for every ten pupils throughout his Sunday School. Other Sunday Schools have gone to the master teacher plan because of the difficulty of recruiting teachers; however, Dr. Hyles is known as a “master motivator” and getting teachers is not one of his major problems. Most of the adults who come into First Baptist Church are those who were led to the Lord there and these make excellent candidates for teaching positions.

This fall the Sunday School is averaging over 6,000 and Dr. Hyles plans to average 7,000 before the year is over. At present 1,500 people go soul winning weekly through the 17 visitation programs of the church. The 500 teachers and workers are required to visit, alone with the 300 college students. The deacons and every full-time staff member, and all the faculty members of the college are required to spend at least two hours a week attempting to win others to Jesus Christ.

The church has 450 retarded persons on roll and six classes to minister to their needs. Also, there are nine classes teaching the 250 deaf enrolled in the church and five classes ministering to the 200 Spanish-speaking people who attend First Baptist Church.

Hyles testifies that “First Baptist ‘out-socializes’ the social-action liberals.” He cites the free hot meals given to the poor each week, the clothes distributed, the baskets of food and the money given to those in need. Dr. Hyles testifies that his soul-winning church “does more social action on the way to reach sinners than any liberal church in America.” He concludes, “It’s an outward show with them, whereas with us it’s obedience to the commands of Christ.”

The Hammond City Rescue Mission, operated by the church, has two services daily and serves three hot meals to those who attend. Also, there is a full-time church worker who ministers to the shut-ins and handicapped of the city.

The church owns 102 buses and has 86 routes at present, bringing in approximately 2500 riders each week. The longest regular route stretches 30 miles from the church, even though one bus goes to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station some 80 miles away (one way). When viewing his bus ministry, a visitor humorously remarked that his buses ran from “Indianapolis to Minneapolis.” The \$200,000 bus center can park 60 buses in an inside heated garage, and this author considers the bus director, Jim Vineyard, one of the best bus men in America.

A recent survey shows that Dr. Hyles ministers to 10,000 people at the First Baptist Church in Hammond in some way every week. There are a number of visitors in addition to a number of shift-workers who cannot attend Sunday School, but are present on Sunday evening, Wednesday evening, or at other times during the week. Last December 19, the Hammond church reported the largest Sunday School up to that time, when over 12,500 attended the Sunday School.

When asked why so many preachers imitate him, Dr. Hyles responded, “I’m not a big shot—I’m just common.” He indicated that most preachers could follow his example because he is “copyable.” Even though Hyles testified to being a common man, the author feels he has a

high IQ and is exceptionally brilliant, has one of the best organized churches in America, and has successfully used media such as radio, although he has not gone on television.

Hyles' books have been extremely influential because they are not theoretical, profound or slanted to the intelligentsia. They are practical, simply telling the world "how he did it." Yet the pastors who have used his books and been influenced thereby testify that there is profundity in simplicity. Pastor Dick Seaton walked into a Christian bookstore and picked up a copy of *Let's Go Soul Winning*. The words set his heart on fire, for he read for the first time what he had always thought the book of Acts taught. Seaton visited the First Baptist Church, and went soul winning with Hyles. Later he founded the Midway Baptist Church, Phoenix, Arizona, and had over 1400 in Sunday School on his first anniversary. There are thousands of other ministers in America who will follow what Hyles writes, simply because the contents are practical. Dr. Hyles has published 18 books, two of which have passed the 200,000 sales mark. He considers his book, *The Hyles Church Manual*, his best contribution thus far.

Dr. Hyles has more invitations to speak at ministers' conferences than he can accept. Last year he preached in nearly every state of the Union, at 12 different denominational conventions and, according to his account, preached to 22,000 preachers and flew 150,000 miles. However, he is always in his pulpit on Sundays and dedicates time each week to go soul winning in Hammond.

There are 90 pictures of ministers on the wall of his study, proving his influence. These 90 are men that he has led to the Lord who are now in full-time pastorates.

To understand the great influence of Jack Hyles, one must examine his background and how God developed him into a leader. He was born and reared in poverty in Dallas, Texas; his father was an alcoholic. Today, his mother is a member of First Baptist Church, where he receives an annual salary of \$8,450 plus house allowance; and even though the deacons have tried, he will not accept a raise in pay.

Hyles began preaching at age 19 at the Marris Chapel Baptist Church, Bogata, Texas, with 19 members, for \$7.50 a week. He was working in men's clothing at J. C. Penney when a young lady walked out of ladies' hosiery and told Hyles that their church was without a pastor. The church had had two candidates but needed a supply for the coming Sunday. He preached at this small Baptist Church a few miles outside of Marshall, Texas, and the following week when the vote was taken, the first candidate got 19, the second 8, and Hyles got 28 write-in votes. One lady and the teenagers voted for Hyles. The deacons were furious, and three of them phoned Hyles and demanded that he come to the church. . .now. It was 12:00 midnight when the three deacons sat him on the front pew and stood over him and charged, "Young man, you're not old enough to pastor this church." One man vowed, "I own the largest store in this community and most of the members rent from me." The treasurer threatened, "I won't write a check for your salary." The deacons concluded, "You will not walk into this pulpit next Sunday morning."

Hyles drove around that night and finally stopped to pray in an East Texas pine thicket, kneeling on the sand hills. He determined five things that ultimately would help him build the largest church in America. (1) No man would ever tell him what to preach. (2) Money will never be the object of my ministry. (3) I will always be a friend to my friends. (4) I will be loyal to

biblical principles, not to institutions. (5) I will make decisions for the ministry based on what I think is right and never go against my conscience.

Hyles preached that Sunday and did not get a pay check for eight weeks but his fear of God has made him fearless in leadership of men. As one deacon testified, "I *know* my pastor will do the will of God; therefore, I would never oppose him on anything." The people of the First Baptist Church are among those most loyal to their pastor anywhere in the United States.

The pastors' school began ten years ago when a minister came from California and asked to visit First Baptist Church for a week. That pastor spent one hour with each of the church workers and went home and doubled his Sunday School within two months. A neighboring pastor came from California and followed the same sequence and went home to double his Sunday School. Soon Hyles found that he couldn't spend time with each visiting pastor because he was hurting his own growth in Hammond. Nine years ago they opened a pastors' school and expected fewer than 50 pastors-but 169 came that first year from 29 states and Canada. He didn't expect to repeat the conference the second year, testifying that, "I thought I had them out of my hair." But the movement snowballed and this past year nearly 1,400 pastors and other workers came to Hammond, and during the past nine years every state in the Union has been represented and 19 foreign countries.

This year *Christian Life Magazine* recognized Forrest Hills Baptist Church, Decatur, Georgia, as the fastest growing in the United States, another church influenced by Dr. Jack Hyles. A few years ago, Curtis Hutson, the part-time pastor and postman, saw for the first time *The Sword of the Lord* and that Dr. Jack Hyles had baptized over 700 people in a year. Hutson thought the figure was a mistake-no one baptized that many-but went to hear Hyles' famous speech on "How to Win Souls." During the sermon Hutson realized (1) he didn't have a New Testament church, although he preached to a small group each week, and (2) it was possible for him to lead people to Jesus Christ. Two days later Hutson led three people to the Lord and there has not been a single week since that time that he has not won at least a person to Christ. Last year Hutson's church increased from 1,263 to 2,109 and according to Hutson, "I have been more influenced by Dr. Hyles than by any other living pastor."

## CONCLUSION

Hyles was asked what is his greatest ambition in life. He testified, "I don't have many numerical goals, even though we would like to average 7,000 in Sunday School this fall." Then he concluded, "The soul-winning fundamental churches are the only hope of America. I want to build a New Testament church that can be reproduced all over America, to help save our nation." He is doing just that.

## Chapter 3

### **Forrest Hills Baptist Church, Decatur, Georgia Curtis Hutson, Pastor**

#### **“Georgia’s Largest and America’s Fastest Growing Church”**

Soul winning made the Forrest Hills Baptist Church the fastest growing in America last year, when average attendance increased from 1263 to 2109. The growth came from God, but the principal human instrument is the dynamic pastor, Dr. Curtis Hutson, a soul winner in his personal life and an effective leader who has organized the congregation to reach the lost, causing the church to jump from 80th place in the annual *Christian Life* list, to become the 26th largest in the nation. A plaque was presented which read: *America’s Fastest Growing Sunday School, Forrest Hills Baptist Church, Decatur, Georgia. Attendance Increase from 1263 to 2109. Presented to Dr. Curtis Hutson by Christian Life Magazine, November 5, 1972.*

When the plaque was presented, 5,138 people (the largest attendance ever) were present. Just four years ago the Sunday School averaged 350. Over 2,600 rode the buses on the big day.

Churches are carried to greatness through many avenues: by great preaching, efficient organization, Bible teaching, lay evangelism, Sunday School buses, radio or TV outreach, or a diverse ministry. But soul winning is the foundation of a great New Testament church and Forrest Hills Baptist Church is no exception. Pastor Curtis Hutson is a great soul-winning preacher. There were 1156 new additions and 879 baptized this year; average weekly attendance increased by 846. Room for expansion came when the congregation moved into a beautiful new auditorium that will seat 2500, and now Hutson has a vision of reaching the Greater Atlanta area with the gospel.

But the church hasn’t always been large, nor has it always been a soul-winning church. The Lord’s work in Hutson’s life is reflected in the new evangelistic outreach of the church.

Curtis Hutson was saved when he was eleven years old in a country church near Atlanta. After he had gone forward, the pastor had his kinfolk come stand with young Curtis at the front of the church. Hutson testifies that the church was probably anti-soul winning and anti-education. He grew up in DeKalb County and is a graduate of Avondale High School, only a few blocks from the present location of the church. After he was married, he told his wife they should get their family into a good church.

While attending church, Hutson felt called to preach, but he had no formal training. He was invited to preach in several of the country churches around Atlanta. He held a revival in 1957 in the Forrest Hills Baptist Church where 12 of the 40 members attended the first meeting. Hutson’s preaching filled the little church, which was not much by today’s standards. There were 12 pews of six-foot length, and the church could seat just over 50 people. At the end of the revival, the pastor resigned. Hutson told his wife, “They’re going to call me to be the preacher,” and they did. Several preachers advised Hutson against taking the church, indicating it would



hurt his ministry. But he did. Hutson stated, "I pastored for five years in an anti-soulwinning ministry."

Hutson delivered mail for a living, in addition to his weekend preaching. A subscriber to *The Sword of the Lord* moved and did not leave a forwarding address. As postman, Hutson had to file a Form 3547 with the sender of the mail and then destroy the mail; he kept the copy of *The Sword of the Lord* and read it, instead. It advertised a meeting in nearby Antioch Baptist Church, indicating that Dr. Jack Hyles, speaker, had baptized 700 that year. Hutson thought that it was a misprint, that probably an entire association had baptized that many.

Hutson decided to take time off from his job and go meet Hyles and hear what he had to say. He testified, "For the first time in my life, I heard sensible preaching." He further reiterated, "I was enlightened as to the New Testament Church and realized that I didn't have a church, even though I had been a pastor for five years." Hyles gave a two-hour soul-winning lecture. Hutson indicated, "I had never heard the plan of salvation so clear." As the young preacher listened, he knew he could win people, and he thought of people he wanted to win to Jesus Christ. Hutson went out the following Saturday and won three people to the Lord, and there has never been a week since then that he has not led someone to Jesus Christ.

Hutson indicated the change in the church was not spectacular. "I just began to preach the Bible and my people began to bring their Bibles and take notes." He added, "My people began to grow with me," and noted that "When I began to win souls, God gave us soul winners in the church." In the past four years the church attendance has jumped from 350 to an average of over 2,300 this fall, due mostly to the soul-winning leadership of Curtis Hutson.

A definite step forward was taken at the Forrest Hills Baptist Church when Curtis Hutson realized he needed to step out on faith. The church was paying him \$75 a month, in addition to his job at the post office. He couldn't live on \$75 a month because his house payment was \$95, besides insurance, food, and other payments. He read the promise in Scripture, "My God shall supply all your needs." He kept on his knees before God and prayed, "If You don't mean what You said, I don't want to preach." He quit his job and launched out by faith. At first the money didn't come in, and on one occasion Hutson needed \$50 to pay the month's bills. He and his wife prayed, and at 12:00 midnight a couple came to the door and brought him a check for \$50. God had spoken to their hearts and indicated that they should get up that night and bring it to him.

Everything in Forrest Hills revolves around soul winning, even the budget. Hutson claims, "Soul winning produces - finances. I get people saved and let God worry about the finances." God is blessing the church, bringing in over \$10,000 a Sunday. To which Hutson adds, "We don't have a budget, stewardship committee, or pledge cards. It's not that I'm against it. But God has been so good to us in supplying our needs that we haven't needed it."

Dr. Hutson believes soul winning is the secret of the growth at Forrest Hills. He witnessed to his barber, and now his barber leads other people to Christ every week. Some people complain that they don't have soul winners in their church. Hutson maintains, "You don't attract what you want, you attract what you are. . .if you are a soul winner, you will attract soul winners to your church."

A lady from another church phoned Dr. Hutson, asking him to visit the hospital and win a friend to the Lord. When he asked her why she didn't call her pastor, she replied, "We don't specialize in that at our church."

Hutson expects new Christians to go out and win souls immediately. He asked, "Why should a Christian wait until he is matured in the Lord? A candle gives light when it is first lighted, not when it is almost burnt out."

One night Hutson's wife was away from home visiting her relatives, and he couldn't sleep. One of the men in the church had told him to call him at any time to go soul winning. Hutson called him at 1:00 a.m. "You mean now?" was the man's sleepy response. "I'll pick you up in 15 minutes," the pastor replied. They took a red gas can and drove out on Interstate 85. The man kept asking, "Where are we going?" The young preacher smiled. "You wait and see." After a few miles they saw a stranded motorist.

Hutson said to the frustrated driver, "I've been looking for you." The stranded motorist figured Hutson wanted a cut-throat price on his gas. The disgruntled driver asked, "You want ten dollars?" He growled that Hutson would make a profit of nine dollars and forty cents. "I don't want money—I just want to talk to you," was the surprising response. "Have you ever trusted Jesus Christ?" Hutson led the man, his wife, and children to the Lord. That night Hutson and his friend kept going back with their red gas can, filling it up and finding stranded motorists. They led 18 people to the Lord before sunup.

A man who knew about Hutson's patrolling the Interstate, died and in his will left the church a pick-up truck and enough money to convert it to a service truck.

Two or three times a year, Hutson gives a lecture to his people on soul winning. It's simply "How to Win Souls," not a sermon to motivate soul winning. He tells them what to say and how to get the people down the aisle to make a public confession of Jesus Christ. Approximately 90 percent of those he wins walk the aisle to make a public profession. He teaches his people, "Get a definite commitment to come to church and come forward." Hutson asks the question of a person after he accepts the Lord: "Will you come to church? Will you come forward and make a public profession?" Then he tells him that "Satan is going to make every attempt to keep you from coming forward." He encourages the new convert not to let anything keep him away.

When Hutson first started winning souls he was out one night visiting some families who visited the church. It was after 9:00 p.m., considered too late to visit. He told the Lord, "If the lights are out at the next house, I won't stop." The names of the couple on the card showed an old date. They had visited the church four months previously, and Hutson was embarrassed by the long delay in returning their visit. When he came by the house, a rental truck was backed up to the front porch. He went to find out if they were moving out of if this was a new family moving in. When Hutson found they were the same family, he apologized: "I'm sorry it took me so long to get by and visit you folks." He asked where they were moving; the answer revealed that the husband was moving, the wife was not. They were separating. Both had their father and mother there, and Hutson took the young husband to the back room and led him to the Lord. Then he talked to the wife and she accepted Christ as Saviour. Then Hutson helped them unload

the furniture. There are four other couples in the church that Hutson has remarried to the original mates, after winning them to the Lord.

Hutson indicates, “Praying is good, but it is not a substitute for duty.” Hutson says that many people pray to win souls, then tumble into bed and do nothing about it. “Action and persistence are the best qualities of a soul winner.”

The fame of Hutson as a soul winner spread throughout Atlanta. A visitor came from another church and asked to go visiting with him. Hutson confessed that, in an endeavor to impress the visitor, he pulled his best prospect cards, hoping to win several souls that night. The lights were out in every home they visited, and Hutson was discouraged, thinking the night had been a failure. On the way back to the church he apologized, explaining that “Usually we catch people at home.” The man looked across the car at Hutson and said, “I’m not sure I’m saved.” Under the trees in the church parking lot, Hutson led the man to the Lord. They went in and told the others, who rejoiced with them. The man went back to his dead church, got his wife, and today they are faithful workers in Forrest Hills Baptist Church.

Hutson is not ashamed to weep in prayer over sinners, nor is he reluctant to cry when he talks to them about getting saved. One of his favorite verses is, “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:6).

An expectant attitude permeates the church at all levels. Ray Williams took a junior class of 12 boys. He asked the boys to pray with him that God would double the class and give them 25. The next Sunday morning, Williams watched the boys file in one after another. He reached his goal of 25 boys, and they kept coming: 37. . .42. . .and finally 50 on that day. Ray was flabbergasted and said, “Boys, I don’t know what we are going to do. We have more than we can take care of.” A little boy in the back of the room raised his hand and confessed, “It’s all my fault, teacher—I prayed for 50.”

Hutson indicates he even prays about parking places. “When I go to Decatur, I remind the Lord that other fellows have more time to look for parking places than I do.” He grinned, indicating that he got his parking place.

Hutson believes the Bible is the only thing worth preaching in his pulpit. He does not emphasize social renewal, social concern, or relevant messages. His people love the Bible preaching and teaching they get at Forrest Hills Baptist Church. After Hutson had taught for an hour at a Wednesday night prayer meeting, a new Christian stood up and asked, “Brother Curtis, do you know anything else?” He answered, “Yes.” “Well, tell us about it.” He revealed the hunger his people have for the Word of God.

When dealing with agnostics, Hutson never tries to prove that the Bible is the Word of God, he just uses it. He goes on to illustrate that, when a soldier is in battle, he never tries to convince people he has a sharp sword, he just slices heads. Hutson indicated in the last year he has won three agnostics to the Lord.

The church has relocated twice from its small beginning that could seat 50 people. First, the congregation moved , into a basement church. Then they moved to their present location off

the Interstate bypass and Stone Mountain freeway. Hutson saw the field where the church is now located. A neighboring lady told him it wasn't for sale, but he looked up the owner, who told him, "It wasn't for sale yesterday, but it is today." The church has built on its present location three times. Last spring they dedicated a new auditorium that will seat 2,500.

A preacher walked into Hutson's new 2500-seat auditorium and remarked, "I'd hate to be responsible for filling this church—you'll never fill it up." Hutson grinned and replied, "When a farmer builds a barn he builds according to the crop he expects to harvest. And I know how much sowing has been done around here." Since Decatur borders the Greater Atlanta area, Hutson believes they need the largest church possible, to reach one of the greatest cities of the southeast.

Recently, the church bought Avondale High School, where Hutson attended as a boy, when the school moved to a new building. He indicated, "When I went out for basketball, I was second string and couldn't get on the playing floor. Now God has given me the floor." In September, 1973, Hutson plans to open a Christian High School. This year they opened kindergarten through seventh grade with approximately 200 students.

Last year, Hutson set a goal to add one bus a month, enabling them to go from 1263 in Sunday School to average 2109 in the spring. The riders on the bus increased by 400, from 600 to 1,000. Those who come in cars increased by 450. This is healthy growth, showing expansion is not by the bus crowd only, while at the same time the evangelistic fervor of bus workers is responsible for conversions where people drive to church. Last year there were 879 baptized and 570 the year before that, and the church is still growing.

*Work* is the secret of Hutson's success. He indicates, "I keep on winning souls when others quit." He looks at his gigantic growth over the last year and indicates, "We still haven't scratched the surface. There is much work to do." Hutson has a deep belief that the soul winner who makes the most visits will win the most people. And the man that wins the most will have the fastest growing Sunday School.

## Chapter Four

***Trinity Baptist Church,  
Jacksonville, Florida Bob Gray, Pastor***

### **"A Church Built on Preaching"**

Many feel that one of America's greatest preachers speaks every Sunday at Trinity Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida. Pastor Robert C. (Bob) Gray, who came to the church 19 years ago, has grown in national reputation as the church has enlarged its size. Gray is known as an eloquent Bible expositor, a compassionate pulpiteer, a hard denouncer of sin and an effective Holy Spirit-filled preacher who pleads for souls.

The church was averaging 250-300 in Sunday School when Gray was called in July of 1954; this spring they are averaging 3,400. Last fall when they moved to new facilities some five miles away, the church averaged 3,000 each week. The biggest day saw 4,880 on November 19, 1972, on what was entitled "Mission Impossible" Sunday.

On the platform Gray enters wholeheartedly into the service, singing lustily the congregational numbers, praying fervently from the pulpit and preaching with every ounce of energy. His auditorium Bible class averages 510, and almost every seat in the 1,800-seat auditorium is filled for the morning service. Some 15 sections of children's church next door accommodate the boys and girls ten and under.

When it comes time to preach, Gray opens his Bible and gently strokes the pages; he loves the Word of God. Next, he removes his watch, then kneels to lead the congregation in prayer. Arising, he loosens his tie, places on the pulpit a tablet with sermon notes; within minutes his face is spotted with sweat.

Bob Gray has more than outstanding Bible content to his sermons, although he has that; he has more than compassion in his voice, even though he pleads; he has more than pulpit polish-many call him America's perfect preacher; he has more than style and class-he preaches with his whole being: Bob Gray has an holy unction from God that stirs and excites all those who listen.

Trinity Baptist does not have a comfortable pew, for Gray stirs his listeners. If a man is outside the will of God, he is stirred or excited to dedication or he is irritated to anger. There are few that Gray cannot reach through his preaching.

During the invitation Gray continues to preach while the choir is singing. He gives the gospel, he quotes the Scripture, he pleads with men to come forward as the choir sings. The workers meet those who come forward, but Gray continues to plead with people to make a decision.

Bob Gray has been accused of being a "long-winded preacher." Perhaps the reputation grew because he spoke for three hours at a Baptist Power Conference in Myrtle, Mississippi. (Indicative of his esteem is the fact that he has been invited back for 17 successive years to Myrtle.) Also, one Sunday morning when God's presence was evident in the service, over 50 adults received the Lord-not in one group, but one or two at a time as the invitation continued to be sung. Because people kept coming, church didn't let out until 2:30. The next week kids went back to Tennessee Temple Schools with the legend of Gray's being a long-winded preacher. The fruit of his ministry is more than souls who have been saved; 132 young men have gone out into the ministry under his preaching.

Bob Gray was saved at age 10 at the Idlewild Baptist Church, Tampa, Florida, on November 22, 1936, at a Sunday evening service. It was pouring rain outside, with a small congregation of approximately 60 inside. Gray testifies that George H. Gibson, a railroad man who faithfully taught the Word of God and wept over his junior class, was responsible for his salvation.

Gray entered the Air Force at age 18 and lived a wild life. While he was a crew chief on a C-46 the engines konked out on a take-off and their plane made a belly landing. Shaken, Gray



testified, “I knew I had to get right with God, but didn’t know how.” As he was getting ready to go overseas, Christie Marasco helped Gray rededicate his life, took him to street meetings and set him on the right path. When Gray reached Germany he realized men were dying and going out into eternity; he also knew that few chaplains preached the gospel. Gray went on, “I had a growing conviction God was calling me to preach, and I settled it in Germany.”

Gray ended his term of enlistment as a newspaper correspondent covering the Nuremberg Trials in Germany. He graduated from Stetson University and served two pastorates before coming to the Trinity Baptist Church in Jacksonville, July 1954. Trinity was a typical Southern Baptist Church: not a liberal church, yet definitely not on fire. They had baptized 11 people the previous year.

Gray is a self-made preacher, testifying, “I have read after many other preachers, gleaned their outlines, and tried to incorporate what I felt I could communicate.” He loves to hear good preaching and spends his leisure hours attending revivals and conferences to see how men project themselves, what patterns they use to say what’s on their hearts. He said, “Preaching is more than inspiration—it’s a science.”

Gray admits that he has had no training to preach; he majored in education at Stetson “because the school of religion was so liberal.” His first two years in the ministry he also taught school to help make a living.

Through the influence of Lee Roberson and John R. Rice young Gray realized that the denominational program was not the answer to man’s need. In those days Lee Roberson was baptizing more than any other man in the Southern Baptist Convention and, according to Gray, “He was my hero.” He had attended a Sword of the Lord Conference at Toccoa, Georgia, that gave him a new perspective on the ministry. “I learned that the pulpit was to win souls, not just preach the Bible.” He went on to indicate, “I learned that being filled with the Holy Spirit was more important than denominational reputation and that the program of the church should be soul winning.”

Gray tried to work in the Southern Baptist Convention to clean it up and change it. He worked on committees, passed resolutions and tried to influence preachers to change, yet frustration grew. The church was voted out of the area’s association in 1965.

Trinity Baptist Church bought its first bus in 1956 and added two more for the convenience of its members. Wally Beebe came as bus director in 1964 and transformed their busing into an evangelistic outreach. According to Gray, “Beebe put our bus ministry on the map. He gave us a vision to go out and solicit people to come and hear the gospel where we could win them to Jesus Christ. In four years he built the bus ministry up to an average of 800 riders,” according to Gray.

When someone criticizes Trinity Baptist as a busing church, Gray considers it a compliment. He said simply, “We are not content to let people go to Hell without trying to reach them with the gospel.” The church at present is averaging over 2,400 on the buses and had a high day of 3,629 riders. When Beebe left, Leonard Willinger took over the ministry and doubled it to 1,600 riders in the next few years. Fifty-five buses cover Duval County, reaching Jacksonville

Beach. Gray chuckled. "Our people would keep going right out into the ocean if people were there."

Jacksonville is the transportation hub of Florida and when Gray saw many transients on the downtown streets, God burdened him to start a rescue mission. He toured a number of buildings in search of a location. At the Columbus Drew Building, Gray stated, "I felt impressed this was the one." He slipped away from the real estate man, hid a dime in the plaster wall as a down payment, knelt and prayed that God would give him the building. But the building remained tied up in an estate for two years. One day while praying, Gray felt impressed of God, "You can have the building if you are willing to forsake your pride and go down and pray on the sidewalk in broad daylight." Thinking that the ministry needed self-respect, Gray went down at night and leaned against the building to pray. He didn't get the building.

A year later he was praying in the afternoon and he again felt God telling him to go there and pray. At 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon Gray knelt on the sidewalk, spread his Bible open and asked God for the building, right there in the midst of busy shoppers. As he returned to his office his secretary reported an urgent phone call had come. He answered: "Don't tell me who it is-I'll tell you." Gray told her it was Norman Stowe, the trust officer, phoning about the Columbus Drew Building. It was. The bank official told Gray that they had had a meeting at 3:00 p.m. and decided since the realtors couldn't rent the building, they would sell it. He went and retrieved the dime from the wall and today it's on a plaque at the Trinity Rescue Mission. Richard McDorman, who has just graduated from Bob Jones University, is representative of the finest product of the rescue mission, according to Bob Gray.

In addition to the downtown mission, the church owns a 56-acre farm 30 miles from Jacksonville that can accommodate 24 men who need rehabilitation from alcohol or dope addiction. Don Glenn, superintendent, lives at the farm and is overseer.

The Trinity Bookstore was begun seven years ago as an outlet for fundamental Christian literature. Gray indicated there was no other place in town that screened Christian books; everything sold at Trinity Bookstore is reviewed by the manager, Mr. David Williams, and he checks with the pastor if in doubt. All profits go to the church missionaries; \$20,000 was distributed to them last year in materials selected from the store.

Trinity Youth Camp was begun eight years ago in Keystone Heights, Florida, approximately 50 miles from the church. Each summer around 200 campers per week come during its nine-week session; last year 231 accepted the Lord. The camp is under the ministry of Ron Riley, who has been with the church since 1967. Lake property was hard to get, and Gray heard about a couple who were getting a divorce, who owned the property. As he prayed, the pastor realized that if they got the divorce, he could get the land, but he wouldn't let property stand in the way of his ministering to people. He testified, "When I went to their house I did everything possible to keep that family together; I gave up that ground to God." Reconciliation was not achieved; after the divorce, the man indicated, "I wouldn't sell that ground to anyone but the church."

The Trinity Christian Academy, K-12, with 2,035 students, is the third largest Christian school in the nation. John Kager, principal, started with the school when it was established six

years ago by the church. The first year there were 160 students. Kager indicated its phenomenal growth came because: (1) Their teachers were committed to the task of education; (2) the school is kept as a ministry; hence the rates are lower than most Christian schools; (3) the academic records are higher than the city schools-the children score two years over the public schools on the Standard Achievement Tests; (4) the 5 1/2-million-dollar new facilities testify to the city that they mean business, the school is there to stay; (5) they have definite Christian standards and disciplined behavior is part of the training young people receive to pattern their lives according to the standards of God's Word.

The school has facilities for 2,500 and, according to Kager, "We could have gone larger if we had more teachers; our difficulty is finding those who meet our standards."

Associate Pastor Leonard Willinger was saved in the Navy 13 years ago and immediately came under Gray's ministry. He graduated from Tennessee Temple College and Seminary and has been in the church 6 years. He testifies, "Trinity Baptist is exactly the same today in its standards as it was 13 years ago; the only thing that is changed is its size."

To this day the church has 10 to 25 servicemen each Sunday, a Sunday School bus picking them up and bringing them to the church. After the Sunday morning preaching, Bill Montgomery takes all of the servicemen to his restaurant, where he feeds them, preaches to them and, according to Willinger, "This restaurant has gotten more servicemen saved than some missions to servicemen." He adds that most of Gray's preacher boys are sailors. The church has a number of servicemen who are presently bus captains.

## THE FUTURE

Last year the church received \$1,100,000 (church and school combined). There were 937 baptisms-quite an accomplishment for a town that is well-churched, according to Gray, with 215 Southern Baptist churches and 40 Independent Baptist churches.

The church had been located on South McDuff Avenue since 1915, and three years ago completed a four-story \$500,000 educational building. Gray stated that he had planned to buy up lots and remain there. Al Janney, pastor of New Testament Baptist Church, Miami, had been reared in the church and knew the neighborhood as a boy. When he visited Gray he said, "This building is great, but you might as well face it; you're going to have to move. I was raised here and this neighborhood is changing, so you might as well make plans." Gray indicated he was paralyzed at those remarks, but God spoke to him through Janney. As the conviction grew that he should move, he shared his feelings with the deacons; some of them mentioned they already had begun to wonder about the location. The church found 148 acres five miles west on Interstate 10.

Gray testifies, "The greatest miracle in 19 years seemed the faith of the people to vote a six-million-dollar bond issue with not one dissenting vote. They had just built, and it was a monumental decision to relocate."

A spacious four-lane paved drive greets those entering the church property. The six large sand-colored brick buildings look more like a government complex than a Baptist church. There is open space between the buildings, concrete walks, a sprinkling of Southern pine trees and a

planted grove of palmetto that says to the tourists, “This is Florida.” There is obvious room to expand.

Inside, the halls are carpeted, and the rooms filled with plastic form-fitting educational furniture, the educational environment competing with any public school in the nation. The 4,000-seat auditorium is yet to be built, in addition to a football field, cafeteria building, stadium and permanent field house. Future plans also include a local television ministry, a children’s home, and a home for “Senior Saints.”

## Chapter Five

### ***Tabernacle Baptist Church, Orlando, Florida Bob Ware, Pastor***

#### **“A Church That Has Baptized 200 Every Year Since Its Founding”**

“Lord, let me minister to a big town just once,” prayed Bob Ware in Edenton, North Carolina (population 5,000), back in 1966. He had started a church and built it up to 200 in attendance. Ware asked three pastors to pray with him that God would lead him to a big town. At the same time, two families in Orlando, Florida, were praying, “Lord, give us the right leader to begin an Independent Baptist work.” In God’s answer that fall, the two prayers coincided.

Ware got a phone call from an Orlando car salesman: “We feel God is leading us to start an independent work. We have a tent that will seat 800 people and want to have meetings on Orange Avenue, the main street in Orlando. Can you come and preach for us?” Pastor Ware went and preached to about 17 people each night. When the tiny congregation later extended a call, he felt certain, after three days of prayer, that God was leading to Orlando. The first congregation met alternately in the tent and a cafeteria of the auto auction. On December 18, 1966, Dr. Bob Gray, Trinity Baptist Church, Jacksonville, came and preached the organizational sermon.

Ware, looking for a site to build on, recalled a recommendation given to him over lunch in Portsmouth, Virginia, by Dr. John Rawlings. “When you start a church, get the best property in town, and do not let cost be a factor,” Dr. Rawlings said. Five months after Ware arrived in Orlando, he took an option on three acres of ground that cost \$72,500. He had to raise \$1,000 for the down payment. He purchased the ground in May and began construction in June, moving into the building by the end of summer.

Pastor Ware indicated that the purchase of the property is the biggest miracle the church has experienced since coming to Orlando. When he saw the property and found that it cost \$72,500, the owner told Ware that the small church’s offerings couldn’t even pay the interest on the loan. Ware gathered his small congregation in a member’s home for a week of prayer, Monday through Saturday, evenings. He spoke approximately 10 minutes, and everyone present prayed for the property. On Saturday, the small congregation gave themselves to prayer and fasting-no food for the day. Ware phoned the owner at Blowing Rock, North Carolina. The owner indicated Ware should write up the proposal and he would sign it. The proposal secured all of the property immediately, with payment to be made on half the property for five years;

then they would pay interest the next five years, with a balloon payment at the end. The owner signed the proposal, and on several occasions has tried to buy back the property. Pastor Ware went to the Citizens National Bank in Orlando and told the vice president he was a Baptist preacher and wanted to borrow \$10,000 on an unsecured note. The vice president told him, "I am a born-again Nazarene, but banks simply do not make that kind of loan." After a lengthy conversation, however, the bank official was convinced of the stability of the new church and put \$10,000 in the church's bank account, to be paid off in three years. The note was paid off in 5 months.

The congregation grew rapidly, Sunday school averaging over 200 when they moved into their facilities in September, 1967. The first auditorium seated 250 people, and a year later they moved into their second auditorium, which accommodated 900. The following year 12 Sunday school rooms were added, the year after that six rooms, and last year another 12 rooms were added.

The church had rapid growth because people were getting saved. There has never been a Sunday in the past five and one-half years that some person has not come to know Jesus Christ. The church has the reputation throughout Orlando as a soul-saving center.

During the first month of the church, Pastor Ware told John R. Rice he was starting a church. Dr. Rice asked him to set a goal to baptize 200 his first year. The pastor felt that was unattainable, but he took it as a goal and baptized exactly 200 in his first year of operation. There has never been a year in which the church has not baptized 200, and this year he has already baptized 300.

Tabernacle Baptist Church baptizes every Sunday morning. The pastor states, "I made up my mind to do everything as close to the New Testament as possible." His natural inclination was to wait for baptism, until a person had proved himself, but he couldn't find scriptural proof. At first the church went to swimming pools in members' homes for baptism, and during the winter, they went to the lakes. In the first building, they built a wooden framed box, filled it with a \$10.00 plastic swimming pool liner and kept it full, baptizing every week. The church baptizes children only after they have parental permission.

The church has approximately 40 Spanish children and a number of black children in the Sunday School. When asked why he integrated his church down South, the pastor commented, "I try to do it like Jesus would; I couldn't send them away."

One of Ware's favorite mottoes is "What would Jesus do?" This guides him in many of his decisions. He often says, "I preach what Jesus would preach," and he says to his song leader, "Sing what Jesus would have sung."

From the beginning, Pastor Ware went on the radio every morning at 7:30 a.m. He testifies, "There are many great radio preachers, so I spend most of my time telling of the great work God is doing here at Tabernacle Baptist Church." Some days he just chats with the audience, telling them the things that a pastor does during the day. The main goal of his radio broadcast is to get people excited about the ministry at Tabernacle Baptist Church.



Pastor Ware feels the church has grown because he is willing to learn from anyone who is getting the job done for God. He read where the First Baptist Church, West Hollywood, Florida, had a greeter to open the car door of every visitor who drove into the parking lot. He asked Mr. Gaskin, Robert Paul, Pop Shofner, Bob Buckles, and Hal Marston, a retired air force colonel, to act as greeters. The first week it paid off, a visitor was so impressed with the friendliness that he and his wife moved their letters to the Tabernacle.

Pastor Ware was concerned about building strong men in his church. Last winter he wrote on a sheet of paper the names of 12 men who (1) were some of his best attenders, (2) were mostly inactive and (3) had some obvious sin in their lives, such as smoking, unconcern for the Bible, etc. He called these men aside and said, "I challenge each of you to become a super-Christian." He indicated he was going to sacrifice his time for the next 30 days if they would. He asked the men to meet him each night from 9:00 to 11:00 p.m. in his office for prayer and study, and three men accepted the challenge. Ware used no outline; they just studied the Bible, memorized verses and spent time in prayer. The men had to quote the assigned verse, letter-perfect. Each night he gave them a practical assignment, such as sharing a testimony with someone, reading a chapter in a book, or applying biblical truth to their lives. All three had to pray aloud every night, even if they only said, "Lord, I don't have anything to say." Ware took them soul winning, and today these three men are soul winners and leaders in the church. They have also encouraged and instructed other men of the church to do the same.

Tabernacle also publishes the *Tabernacle Times*, a tabloid-size newspaper sent to every person who fills out a visitor's card in the church. Over 5,000 people in the greater Orlando area get the newspaper communicating to them what God is doing at Tabernacle Baptist Church.

Pastor Ware also makes use of the city newspaper to advertise Tabernacle Baptist Church. When he began carrying a Saturday advertisement in the newspaper, there were few other churches in the city that advertised. In the past five years Ware has gotten more news articles on his church into the newspaper than any other church in the city because of the activity in and around the church. He led the successful anti-sex education rally against the public school system and got the program put out of public education in Orlando. Later he ran the anti-abortion campaign aimed at the State Legislature and also campaigned for capital punishment.

Whenever he has a story, he calls the TV station- and newspapers; the reporters know he means business and give him prime space. During his anti-pornography campaign, Pastor Ware and members of his church picketed adult bookstores. He called the TV station and they gave him prime coverage on the 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. news.

Bob Ware accepted Christ on the USS Forestal, March, 1958. Ware had been a boxer in the Navy and at the age of 20 picked up a Gideon New Testament on shipboard and read it through. For the first time in his life he realized the Great Commission was for him, and he accepted Christ. Ware had just re-enlisted for six years, yet he felt God was calling him to preach. He couldn't get out of the Navy and had six years staring him in the face. He testified, "I preached everywhere the ship pulled into port. I found all the missionaries I could and preached in their chapels and on the street corners." Since he couldn't get out of the Navy, Ware determined, "I'm going to learn more about the Bible than any other man alive." He went completely through the Bible with a Moody Bible Correspondence course.

He planned to go to Bob Jones University after his discharge. During his last year in the service, he was preaching on the radio at Elizabeth City, North Carolina, when another radio pastor, Roy Harrell, asked him to go to Edenton, North Carolina, and start a church; that was September, 1962. He drove 60 miles each weekend to preach, and carried lawn chairs so his wife could rest in the church on Sunday afternoon while he visited in the neighborhood. The salary was small, so they ate peanut butter sandwiches. The church was running 100 when he was discharged from the Navy and the congregation called him to be the pastor. He stayed until 1966, studying two years at the College of the Albermarle, Elizabeth City, North Carolina. He received his Bachelor of Bible degree from Berea School of Theology.

The Tabernacle Baptist Church does not have old, established families but is a church of young converts. The pastor has baptized almost everyone in the church. He indicates he can grow rapidly and is not bound by institutionalization because his people haven't had a church tradition and haven't been taught by other preachers.

A wife had attended alone and when Pastor Ware indicated he wanted to meet the husband, she hesitated, indicating, "My husband hates Baptist preachers." The husband was a professional wrestler and told his wife, "I promise your God, if there is a God, I'll never go to a Baptist church." Ware drove to the home and was surprised to find the wrestler cordial at first. He explained the Roman Road of salvation and asked, "Do you understand?" The 250-pound man answered, "I don't understand because I'm not interested. As they walked out the door the associate pastor challenged the wrestler, "The preacher is stronger than you are." The wrestler insisted going to the breakfast bar for arm wrestling. Pastor Ware prayed for God's help. "I put that dude down," he testified. He knew that God had given him the strength. The wrestler was embarrassed and insisted on a rematch. Ware was reluctant, thinking it might have been a fluke victory, but said, "I'll wrestle you again if you'll come to church." Ware beat him a second time and the wrestler said he would be in church Sunday. After the wrestler came to church, he later admitted, "I hated the evangelistic music, he preached too loud. . .too long, and I vowed I would never come again." But the wrestler kept coming back, until one day the love of God gripped his soul and he came forward to receive Jesus Christ.

The wife of a boatswain's mate and her children attended Tabernacle Baptist Church, while the husband was in Vietnam on a gunboat. Ware has often preached to his congregation, "If you'll come and be faithful, I'll do everything I can to win your husbands to the Lord." When Eugene Coker returned from Vietnam the deacons visited him and he told them to get off the property. Ware went by on a Saturday afternoon and found Coker drunk. The big boatswain's mate yelled, "I don't like religion. . .I don't like the Bible. . .I don't like you!" Ware responded "Your biggest problem is your heart." Coker indicated that Ware had guts and he was going to come hear him preach. He came to church for a month, then one Saturday morning one of the men of the church phoned to tell Pastor Ware that Coker was looking for him. The preacher's first reaction was, "He is coming to look for a fight." But when Ware opened the door, Coker said, "I've come to get saved." He told the story of getting drunk and spending the night in jail. There he had promised God that he would get saved as soon as he got out of jail—and he did. He became a deacon, soul winner and Sunday school teacher.

The Tabernacle Baptist Church has 17 buses that bring in an average of 680 each Sunday morning. According to Ware, this is the most fruitful outreach in the life of the church. A large

company in town tried to rent three of their buses for a convention. Ware said, "No! We don't want drinking and cursing on our buses that we use to bring children to Sunday school." Even though the official pleaded, Ware turned him down. The large company bought three buses for its convention and, when they were through with them, donated them to the Tabernacle Baptist Church.

The Tabernacle Christian Schools, Grades K through 10, has approximately 325 enrolled and could take many more, except facilities are not large enough for expansion. The school has tackle football, cheerleaders and a band.

Tabernacle Baptist also has a Bible Correspondence School with 800 students enrolled. Many are saved each week through this outreach. A weekly television ministry is beginning in the next few weeks. Plans are in the making for a retirement center for senior citizens. There seems to be no end to what Tabernacle Baptist Church can do in the coming years in Central Florida.

Everything is set to be doubled in 1973. Double Sunday school attendance, double attendance in the elementary, junior and senior high schools, double giving, double spending in spreading the gospel through the mass media of radio, television, newspapers, Pastor Ware's books, records by the choir and Arnie Petersen.

Tabernacle has taken great advantage of bulk mailing to let people in Central Florida know what is happening at the "Action Church" in the "Action Center" of Florida. Church mailouts are to double to 15,000 per week next year. The Tabernacle Bus Ministry plans to run 36 buses bringing in 1600 in Sunday school in 1973, pushing their weekly average to 2300.

## Chapter Six

### ***Dayton Baptist Temple, Dayton, Ohio*** ***Gerald Fleming, Pastor***

#### **"The Church Built by a Determined Man"**

The Dayton Baptist Temple has, as of last year, the twenty-eighth largest Sunday School in America, with an average attendance of 1,907 last year; an annual budget of almost half a million dollars; and the eleventh largest number of baptisms, according to The Sword of the Lord. This large, dynamic metropolitan church, located in the heart of the north central industrial states, was begun with determination, miracles and money borrowed from the preacher's father.

In the early 1950's there was no aggressive soul-winning fundamentalist church in Dayton. Gerald Fleming was a student pastor at the Central Baptist Church, Euless, Texas, during his last two years at Bible Baptist Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. Young Fleming had been praying for more than a year about beginning a church in Dayton or one of four other cities in Central Ohio. Edwin Dunn, an older man and Dayton resident, came to the annual fellowship meeting at the seminary, held in conjunction with graduation, looking for a young man to start a

fundamental church in Dayton, Ohio. Dr. Harry G. Hamilton directed Mr. Dunn to Pastor Fleming, who, learning of this open door opportunity, immediately resigned his church and made plans to go to Dayton. Dr. Fleming and his wife left their two-year-old son with their parents in Kansas City, Missouri, arriving in Dayton about June 20, 1951, full of expectation and, according to his confession, “with stars in our eyes.” Pastor Fleming had borrowed \$25 from his father to get to Ohio, but instead of finding a nucleus of people ready to start an old-fashioned church, he found several elderly folks who were disgusted with liberalism, but they were not interested in starting an aggressive soul-winning church to reach the city of Dayton.

Even though the prospects were meager and he was broke, Dr. Fleming testified, “We would *not* be discouraged because we felt that God had led us to Dayton.” Just when Pastor Fleming’s money ran out, he and his wife were invited to use Mr. Dunn’s quarters, since he had plans to be out of the city for several weeks on some business. The situation being what it was, they gladly accepted and moved into Mr. Dunn’s sleeping room when he left the city. A preacher friend in Troy, Ohio, about twenty miles north of Dayton, referred Pastor Fleming to Dr. Dallas F. Billington, pastor of Akron Baptist Temple, who had a daily broadcast that covered Dayton, because he might know of prospects to start a church. The next day Pastor Fleming drove to Akron and walked into the office of Dr. Billington, a man he had never personally met. The pastor of the world’s largest Sunday School graciously put the young couple in a hotel for the night, provided food, and next day provided a church secretary to go through the files, where Dr. and Mrs. Fleming found 128 names in the Dayton area. It took Brother Fleming five days to visit the prospects, most of whom were not interested in helping to begin a New Testament church.

As a young lad, Dr. Fleming came through the Depression, when his family lost everything. His father was an old-fashioned “sharecropper” farmer who preached in little country Baptist churches on Sundays. Due to the droughts, floods, and bad crops over a period of several years, the family was forced to move into the small town of Independence, Missouri, where the father could get on W.P.A. As a young boy in Independence, Gerald delivered papers in the fall, winter and spring months all over the town; in fact, even to Harry Truman himself! During the summer months he worked on the farm, riding a bicycle 14 miles one way to work ten hours and then riding home in the evening. Also he sold aprons and hot-pad holders his mother made on an old Singer sewing machine, from door to door, in order to supplement the meager family income. That prompted him on one occasion, when greatly discouraged, to tell his mother, “I’ll never do anything again where I have to knock on doors.” Today he admits, “Sometimes God makes us eat our words.” The success of Dayton Baptist Temple is Dr. Fleming’s aggressive door-to-door visitation.

He was saved at ten years of age, when his family took him to a little basement Baptist church, Waldo Avenue Baptist in Independence. During his teen years he got away from God and spent the latter part of World War II as a merchant marine, sailing around the world twice.

After the war, upon the insistence of his father, he heard Dr. Wendell Zimmerman preach, pastor of Kansas City Baptist Temple, and went forward for rededication. It was here he first began to serve God, leading singing in the young people’s department, witnessing on the streets and working in the Sunday School. After young Fleming surrendered his life to the Lord for full-time service, Dr. Zimmerman recommended to him the Bible Baptist Seminary in Fort

Worth, where Pastor Fleming studied under Dr. J. Frank Norris, who made a great impression on him.

One of the secrets of the continual growth of Dayton Baptist Temple is the dogged patience Dr. Fleming has exercised in carrying out the ministry. He testifies, "I keep going when others quit; I've always found another door to knock on when the others have gone home." On one occasion in the early days of the church, in the very beginning, Dr. Fleming and his wife had visited all day and had had trouble finding the home of a Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell, finally locating the house at six o'clock in the afternoon. The young preacher said, "Honey, this house is too 'rich looking.' You wait here; I know it won't do any good, but I'll at least meet the people since we've come this far." Pastor Fleming knocked on the door and told the lady he had been called of God to start an independent Baptist church. Mrs. Caldwell cried, "Praise the Lord, we've been praying for two years for someone to come to Dayton and start an independent Baptist church." The Caldwells insisted that young Fleming go immediately and call on their friends, the Carlton family. Mrs. Carlton came out of the basement where she was doing the washing, wiping her hands on a towel wrapped around her waist, and said, "Praise God! He sent us a preacher." Dr. Fleming and his wife were hungry and she most lovingly sat them down and gave them meat, sandwiches and milk. According to the young couple, "It was like manna from Heaven." Later that night Pastor Fleming found the home of Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Orme but it was very late, about eleven o'clock, too late (by normal standards) to visit. Mr. and Mrs. Orme, with adult members of several other families, were sitting around the dining room table, discussing what church they all should attend, because they had, just a few weeks previously, been saved in a Hyman Appelman citywide crusade and felt they ought to be actively attending a church. Since the lights were on, the young preacher knocked on the door and said, "My name is Gerald Fleming. I've come to Dayton to start a Baptist church." All four of these families came to the church and all of them are still in the Dayton Baptist Temple after 21 years of miracles.

The next day Pastor Fleming got a job as a shoe salesman in Rikes Department Store and then located an apartment. He had to return to Kansas City, Missouri, and get his child, and meager possessions, but he didn't have enough money for gas, let alone food, along the way. Dr. Fleming knew that God had provided thus far and would continue to do so. At five o'clock the next morning, he came out to get in his car. He had told his wife, "We'll drive as far toward home as we can, then phone my father to come and get us." On the dew-wet grass in front of the rooming house Pastor Fleming found a \$5 bill and four \$1 bills, enough, with the few dollars he already had, to get him to Kansas City, where he borrowed another \$25 from his father and returned to Dayton. The following Tuesday evening, at the first meeting of the infant congregation, with sixteen people present in the front room of a home, Pastor Fleming preached on the parable of the ten virgins. One person was saved and there was an offering of \$16.25. Every person present in that first meeting is either still in the church or is now in Heaven.

That week Pastor Fleming rented the old Townsend Hall at Fifth and Main in downtown Dayton for \$12.50 a Sunday and the young church met there for five weeks until they got organized. But the church needed a more permanent home. Dr. Fleming appeared before the Dayton school board and asked for the rental of a school. The board initially turned down his suggestion, but an old German stroked his white beard and asked, "Young man, why do you want this building?" Without flinching, Pastor Fleming told him, "I want to build an independent Baptist church to win people to Jesus Christ." The elderly man beamed at Fleming's

determination and said, "I make a motion we let the young man have Brown Elementary School for the next year."

Dr. Fleming is eternally grateful for the encouragement he received from Dallas Billington, who announced the young church's meeting over his radio station. The well-known Billington also held a Tuesday-through-Thursday revival meeting that gave the infant congregation instant status in Dayton.

There were 120 saved during the first year of the church and on the first anniversary there were 147 in Sunday School without any special-day activities—that was the average attendance.

The church needed \$4,752 to pay for three acres on Ohmer Avenue, the planned location for the new church. Early in 1952, while the church was only months old, Fleming raised \$3,200 in one Sunday from the small congregation of 75 people, some giving \$5, others \$20, and a few people as much as \$100. The offering on that day was a good down payment. According to Dr. Fleming, "This was one of the greatest miracles in the life of our church, even though people today might think the amount small in comparison to today's astronomical figures." Some ten years later the state took the back half of the church's parking lot for an Interstate expressway, and paid the church \$94,500. According to the pastor, "This was a blessing and a curse at the same time." The expressway put the church in immediate access to everybody in the greater Dayton area and the sales price gave them a financial basis for expansion. However, half of the parking space was lost, and now the church had to expand by buying individual houses at the rate of \$20,000-\$25,000 per house. Lack of parking held down Sunday School attendance greatly from 1963 to 1967, but that problem is now being solved.

During the second summer the church held three evangelistic crusades in a large tent on the new property. Each crusade ran two weeks with a space of two weeks between them. Dr. Fleming now looks back and reflects, "Those were days of great blessings; many people were saved who still attend our church and the evangelistic outreach into the community was accompanied with the power of God that many churches seldom realize."

The young church grew rapidly, and that fall a basement church was built to accommodate 350 people. When the congregation moved into the basement, there was only pit-run gravel on the floor and the flat roof leaked; but people came and stood around the walls to hear Pastor Fleming preach. That auditorium was always full, and in those days they used no promotion, no giveaways just the preaching of the Gospel. The basement was expanded in each of the next few summers so that the Sunday School was averaging 900 before the first permanent auditorium was actually built in 1958.

The Dayton Baptist Temple began a Sunday School bus ministry during its second year of operation, not with big plans in mind, but because Dallas Billington had used buses successfully. Dr. Fleming rented four buses from a local bus company at \$12.50 each and each one brought in between 25 and 30 people per Sunday.

In January, 1970, Pastor Fleming realized that the bus ministry had to be changed from a transportation department to an evangelistic outreach. In two weeks he raised enough money for

12 buses, paying between \$1295 and \$1495 each. Since that time there has been constant growth in the Sunday School so that today they bring in a total of almost a thousand riders each week.

“The church was one of the first to institute the deaf ministry,” according to Dr. Fleming, “simply because there was a great need in our city.” Also, the church was one of the first to work with retarded children. A mother of some retarded children came to Pastor Fleming in tears, indicating there were many such children in Dayton. For many years the Sunday School class for the retarded averaged 25.

The church supports 156 missionaries in 28 countries around the world in its total ministry. The 5,000 members contribute almost a half million dollars a year.

In 1968 a three-story Sunday School building was completed to handle the 300 students now enrolled in Temple Christian School, Kindergarten and grades 1 through 8.

During the fourth year of existence, when the Sunday School was averaging about 500 in attendance, an evangelist challenged Pastor Fleming to the largest attendance in the history of the church. Brother Fleming then worked for a large Sunday crowd to close out the revival. A prayer chain link was used for a promotion, and 1,152 attended Sunday School, an unheard-of crowd in those days. Only four or five well-known churches had such large numbers, at least as far as most Dayton folk knew, but the crowd made the people of Dayton sit up and take notice of Dayton Baptist Temple.

A few years ago Dr. John R. Rice indicated that only about twenty churches were baptizing 200 a year, but Dayton Baptist Temple has been baptizing that many almost since its beginning. Dr. Fleming has not made a habit of “tooting his horn,” with the result that the church has grown steadily without the crowd applause from the American public. Last year Pastor Fleming baptized 587 and, according to him, “Anybody who is doing anything ought to baptize 200 a year.” As a matter of fact, Fleming baptizes approximately 200 each year from his own visitation alone.

The church has a 51-acre farm and youth camp located in Bellbrook, Ohio, that can accommodate 400 campers a week. Many Fellowship churches in the area participate in the camp program.

Dr. Fleming broadcasts a quarter hour daily, in addition to both Sunday services. Cassette tape ministry provides all of his sermons on tape for those who write in and request them.

The well-rounded church offers five junior churches in addition to a complete music program under Mr. Duard Bowron, who has been with the church since 1952. For the first few years he was a layman, working with the *Journal Herald*, a Dayton newspaper, before being called as Minister of Music in 1955.

Two of the keys to the success of Dayton Baptist Temple are: first, an aggressive visitation program that's geared to winning souls to Jesus Christ; and second, strong biblical preaching with enthusiasm. In the beginning years, Pastor Fleming made 200 visits a week. Although he has been in the ministry for over 20 years, he still gets excited when God does something and he still sheds tears when touched with the feelings of his people. He doesn't give

a lot of illustrations in his preaching, but keeps his people in the Word of God. Many have realized that the power of his preaching has stemmed from the number of notes he has written in his Bible in the past 22 years of study. The church, which uses no printed literature, studies the Bible only, reflecting the love that Dr. Fleming has for the Scriptures.

## Chapter Seven

### ***Massillon Baptist Temple, Massillon, Ohio Bruce Cummons, Pastor***

#### **“A Church Built on Bible Teaching”**

In these days when many churches are experiencing rapid growth, it is refreshing to see the steady growth of the Massillon (Ohio) Baptist Temple and its commitment to consistent Bible teaching. As you walk through the Sunday School you get the impression that things are orderly and controlled, there are enough secretaries to meet and register the children, there are enough teachers for each child, and there are enough small classrooms so that pupils may study the Word of God in a quiet, uninterrupted manner. It is a fundamental church without compromise and an evangelistic congregation without apology.

According to Dr. Bruce Cummons, pastor and founder, the Massillon Baptist Temple has three qualities that account for its strength, and growth. First, there is a deep commitment to teach the entire Word of God as it is for all people; second, there is a commitment to canvass the entire town according to Acts 5:42; and third, there is a compassion for the world through its missionary outreach.

First, the church's Bible teaching ministry begins in the pulpit, and Dr. Bruce Cummons is known as a careful expositor of the Word of God. He has written several booklets, recorded a number of tapes, and Zondervan Publishing House released his book, *The Problem of Suffering*, which went through two printings. He has distributed many copies of his sermons through *The Penny Pulpit*, which is distributed free, some of these being circulated in over 200,000 copies. Dr. Cummons has a live radio broadcast, “The Grace and Peace Hour,” that emphasizes Bible teaching, 30 minutes daily over a local Massillon station. A 15-minute daily broadcast is also aired over a Christian FM station in Canton, Ohio, only 8 miles away. These programs are transcribed and sent out over 32 stations including Transworld Radio and HCJB. The church has received mail from 50 countries of the world.

Even the small children in the Sunday School are taught the Word of God. On a recent Sunday Beginners were quizzed and could remember the lessons for the past five weeks as five beginners in bathrobes and turbans stood on the platform, each representing a disciple. They had used the 12 Disciples Campaign.

Second, soul winning-canvassing has been the pastor's way of life even before the church was begun. Bruce Cummons and his father did block canvassing with literature distribution to establish the church, and that pattern has continued to this day.



For a number of years, Cummons held tent meetings in the small towns around Massillon during the summer. He had a large white 400-seat tent which church members pitched in empty lots, where he preached each evening. His members helped canvass the neighborhood, provide special music, and do follow-up. Many one-week tent revivals were held each summer, and to this day Christians drive as far as 35 miles to church because they were won to Christ in a tent meeting, or through other extension ministries of the church.

Third, “Our strong missionary outreach has made us biblical and given God a basis on which to bless us,” according to Cummons. Eighty-two families from many mission boards are supported by an \$85,000 annual faith-promise offering. Cummons had visited the World Baptist Fellowship annual conference and heard Oswald Smith speak on the faith-promise plan for foreign missions. God spoke to him, and the following month they had their first conference, promising \$25,000 to missions. According to Cummons, “From that day we have never had a financial problem. We have built buildings, black-topped our lots, remodeled and bought acreage.” Cummons sees missionary outreach as a turning point in the church’s growth because, until that time, he “had not promoted missions heavily and finances had been a struggle.” He is quick to add, “We still have to trust God and plead with our people to give, but God supplies our needs.”

Bruce Cummons accepted Christ as an 11-year-old boy at an old-fashioned altar. The pastor of the Evangelical United Brethren Church in Parkersburg, West Virginia, preached the revival meeting. Every day, Cummons promised God that he would go forward that evening; but during the service he put it off. On the last night, a little German lady walked around the back of the auditorium and put her hand on his shoulder, saying, “Bruce, wouldn’t you like to be a Christian?” He said nothing to her, but immediately went forward and knelt at the altar, where the pastor led him to Jesus Christ.

Bruce was reared in an old-fashioned Christian family, where his father and mother opened the Word of God; and, as a high school student, he was active in the church youth group. At the beginning of the Second World War his parents moved to Akron, Ohio, and Bruce went in the Navy. After the war he used his training in radio to get a job as radio maintenance man in an Akron, Ohio, factory. One Sunday evening he decided not to go to church because of a heavy burden on his heart which he couldn’t explain. That evening he walked around Portage Lake near his home. He testifies, “I wept because of the burden and was angry because I couldn’t explain it.” He lay down on the bank of the lake in the green grass and prayed, “Lord, I don’t understand this burden; if you lift the burden, I’ll do anything—I’ll even preach the gospel.” The burden immediately lifted and for the first time in his life, he thought about being a preacher. That night he first told his parents and then his fiancée, Wanda, who immediately was willing to follow him into the ministry. Bruce Cummons, being a man of his word, has never been untrue to that promise he made God on Portage Lake.

Cummons talked with his pastor, Dr. Dallas Billington, pastor of Akron Baptist Temple, who suggested he prepare for the ministry at Bible Baptist Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. Bruce entered in 1948 and graduated at the end of the summer school, 1950.

There, Cummons indicated, Dr. J. Frank Norris made a great impact on him, “opening my eyes to the Scriptures, teaching me the mysteries of the Old Testament, challenging me to

build a great church for God.” He indicated that he, like many other men, came out of the seminary with faith in his heart, a Bible under his arm, and a desire to build a great church.

Cummons immediately began visiting cities in Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia and, like Abraham of old, “He looked for a city” where he could establish a church. He did not want to go to a city that already had an Independent Baptist church, nor did he want to accept an established church and build upon another man’s foundation. By the process of elimination, God led him to Massillon, a city of 27,000 people and without a fundamental testimony. Cummons borrowed \$100 from his father and added a little money that had been received as a love gift from a revival meeting, and rented a store-front at 611 Bebb Avenue, Southwest, next to a grocery store and drugstore. Twenty-two people gathered in this small 25 x 50-foot store on November 19, 1950, for that first service. The following Saturday a snowstorm completely inundated the city; Cummons’ car was drifted in as he tried to drive to Sunday School, and no one arrived at the small mission. Two little girls walked around the corner and stood crying because there was no Sunday School. This story later made a national publication. Cummons vowed, “If people are so interested in a church, I’ll give my entire life to build it.” (One of these young ladies still attends the church.)

During those first days money came so hard that the young pastor bought a piano for only \$12.00. When the piano tuner saw it, he refused to waste labor on it, but the young congregation used it anyway. One Sunday as Bruce knelt at the altar leading a person to Christ, a gentleman saw a hole in the sole of his shoe; after the service, he slipped \$20.00 into the pastor’s pocket for a new pair of shoes.

Through the ensuing years, God has blessed the church financially, reaching rich and poor alike, the unknown and the influential. Massillon’s mayor Archie Brinker was a saved Presbyterian. When he attended Massillon Baptist Temple and heard Cummons preach on the doctrine of the church, he moved his membership and submitted to believers’ baptism.

Within a year the congregation bought a 170 by 350-foot lot approximately one mile away on Overlook Avenue. That summer Cummons held a tent revival on the lot, which is today’s present location, and the Sunday School went over 100 for the first time. (Today they own 27 acres at the present location.) The struggling congregation had no financial backing and the banks would not lend them money to build. Finally, a family loaned the church \$10,000 and a shell was built, enough to get the congregation in and out of the elements. When the bank saw the commitment of the congregation, it loaned them enough money to finish the building. The church has gone through four building programs for Sunday School and now has a 1200-seat auditorium.

Cummons spends part of each morning studying the Word of God and feels that it is important for a pastor to thoroughly prepare his sermons so he can feed his flock. He writes the literature for the church and instructs the Sunday School teachers at 10:00 a.m. Wednesday morning and 6:30 p.m. Wednesday evening (because of shift workers). Afterwards they divide up into departments to plan methodology for presentation.

According to Cummons, “We have never promoted heavily, other than through newspaper, radio, and visitation.” He indicates that they have only had two contests with other

churches and have used the Twelve Disciples and Ten Commandments contests. He went on to say, "We used these because of their biblical connotation." When he sees the trinkets and food given away on buses or at other churches he indicates that he would not criticize them but that the Massillon Baptist Temple would continue to be built on its past foundation.

The radio ministry began when Cummons was preaching a revival meeting at the First Baptist Church in Ashland, Ohio. He felt burdened to get the message out to the entire missionary field. Cummons had led to the Lord Dave Johnson, a radio engineer at WTOF. As a young man Johnson wanted to get married and had no church; he called Pastor Cummons who led both him and his wife to the Lord and later united them in marriage. Johnson was able to contact other stations and get radio bookings for the church. Today he handles the recording, copying and all of the technical aspects of the church's radio outreach to 32 stations.

A number of those first Christians are still with the Baptist Temple, including Dorsey Davisson, who was Sunday School superintendent for 12 years.

The church follows a three-year Bible course written by Cummons, in addition to a Life of Christ and Life of Paul outline. A number of other churches have used their Sunday School literature.

Dr. Cummons states, "I enjoy expository preaching, yet my messages are always evangelistic, with an invitation given for lost people to receive Christ." This deep conviction to teach the Word of God stems from his observation that "many Christian are inconsistent in their lives because they are not grounded in Scripture."

Cummons' preaching is not emotional in delivery, yet the sermon grips the hearts and minds of his hearers. He is not humorous to merely entertain, but delivers compelling messages, reflecting his sincerity. He is not a pulpit orator, but a Bible expositor, appealing for decisions.

Cummons has the heart of a pastor. He said, "I never want my church to get so large that I become only an administrator, instead of a pastor. I enjoy visiting rest homes, hospitals and in the homes of my people." He went on to state very simply, "I enjoy pastoring." However, he recognizes the fact that he could not keep up with so large a flock without the help of his three assistants.

## **CONCLUSION**

The church has had a high day of 2,451 and according to Cummons, "I have never set an ultimate goal. We just want to win souls and to teach the Word of God. However, I see no limit to our outreach. We have been averaging right under 2,000. We're going to build because everything is full, our classrooms are packed and our auditorium is crowded."

Bruce Cummons is thankful for the influence of a Christian home. His father and mother had never been immersed, and were among the first to be baptized in the new ministry. His father spent many years visiting the lost and working as usher, meeting people as they came to preaching. During the height of the building campaign when Pastor Cummons indicated he needed his father most, God took him Home via a heart attack. When Bruce asked his mother

who would preach the funeral, she said, “You, because you were his pastor.” After the message, he stepped to the side of the pulpit and looked down, “I’ll see you in the morning, Dad, just inside the Eastern Gate.” So will a lot of others who have found Christ through the ministry of the Massillon Baptist Temple.

## Chapter Eight

### ***Beth Haven Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky Tom Wallace, Pastor***

#### **“A Great Church Built on Soul Winning”**

The Beth Haven Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky, has experienced phenomenal growth because it does one thing well-it is a soul-winning church. Whereas many churches in America emphasize the total church program, Pastor Tom Wallace states emphatically, “If Beth Haven has one success, it is the heart of a church giving itself to wining souls.” Beth Haven could be characterized as the single arrow shot to the heart of the target rather than a rock thrown in the pond sending out ripples in every direction. Wallace continued his observation, “When you get a lot of people aiming at the same objective, you are going to have growth. We are engrossed in reaching and teaching people to win them to Jesus Christ.”

The church began 14 years ago with 14 people under the sponsorship of Beechland Baptist Church. A contest was held among the membership for a new name and the title Beth Haven was chosen. *Beth* means “house” (meaning house of God) and *Haven*, “security.” In 1958 a small building was constructed and when Rev. John Turpin was called in 1962, the Sunday School was running 200. Turpin brought strong administration, a recognized pulpit ministry and personal evangelism to the church.

When Reverend Wallace first arrived at Beth Haven, June, 1971, he realized that he had great soul winners to build a great church upon. His first sermon emphasized soul winning and he asked the people to commit themselves to win one person to Christ that month.

During his second month, Wallace preached on baptism and set the goal to baptize 100 people. He got the names of 500 people who had made professions of faith in the church, yet had not been baptized. According to him, “I preached baptism into the system of our soul winners.” Then he gave them envelopes with the names of prospects, a copy of the sermon on baptism and told them to go out and get that person, teaching him the Scriptures concerning baptism. From the first Sunday there was a breakthrough and the emphasis on baptism has resulted in a greater soul-winning ministry at Beth Haven. They baptized 127 that July.

Wallace is characterized as a low-key preacher who gets results. He teaches doctrine in every sermon, always with an evangelistic fervor. Wallace’s preaching also has a strong emphasis on faithfulness which has a dual thrust: first, service to God; and second, separation from worldly entertainment. According to Rev. Bradley Price, associate pastor, the number of conversions in the church is the result of the power of God which is unexplainable apart from the

working of the Holy Spirit. Wallace brought a sense of organization to the people on a large scale.

Soul winning is the purpose of church organization. Wallace keeps before the congregation the need to get people saved and forward as a public confession. Because of a well-run program, the people know they can reach their community. The recent "Tell the Valley" crusade reflected a saturation concept. The pastor urged 200 people to give two hours each in which the homes were visited and a brochure introducing the church was given to each family member who responded. There is a distinct note of compassion in Wallace's preaching. He has often said that everything in the Bible is divided into two themes: (1) How to get to Heaven, and (2) How to be happy. He points out that doctrine, reproof, exhortation, witnessing and prayer all aim at one of these two themes.

One of Wallace's favorite mottoes is: "Be positive. . . Be persistent. . . Be punctual. . . Be productive." And then he adds, "Follow through."

Wallace was called to preach in 1951 under the influence of Ernie Habacker, a faithful soul winner and assembly-line worker at General Motors in Wilmington, Delaware. Habacker held services in the shop during the lunch hour and had devotions with Wallace. He got young Tom preaching. From here, Wallace attended Tennessee Temple Schools where he came under the influence of the Sword of the Lord conferences with the preaching of John R. Rice and Jack Hyles. The great bus ministry and M. J. Parker at Highland Park Baptist, Chattanooga, Tennessee, also influenced him while in school, for he was a bus pastor for two years, 1952 to 1954. Because of a burning desire to preach, Wallace went to school year round and graduated in two years, nine months. Years later, Bob Jones University awarded him a Doctor of Divinity degree.

Wallace stated, "You keep people the way you get them." The church gets them by soul winning and Bible teaching, then keeps them the same way.

The church emphasizes three types of visitation: (1) Soul-winning teams, (2) Sunday School visitation, and (3) Bus visits.

The church has 70 to 80 soul winners who go out in teams each week attempting to win people to Jesus Christ. The same two men work together each week, attempting to win the lost to Christ. The number of teams are expanded when both members of one team become proficient soul winners; they divide, each taking another person to train in evangelism. Sunday School visitation is organized so that every person on the role is visited every quarter. The bus visitation is among the most effective in America. The bus workers meet at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday morning for a full country breakfast with ham, eggs, biscuits and gravy. The workers are expected to visit five to eight hours on Saturday. Gardiner Gentry, director of the buses, maintains, "You will get ten riders on a bus for every one hour invested in visitation." The bus worker who spends ten hours will have 100 the following week. A visitor, Reverend Willie Six, didn't believe Gentry's statistics, yet he visited nine hours with Shird Robinson, a bus pastor, and they had one hundred and twenty-one on the bus the next Sunday. On another occasion, three men visited ten hours each, a total of thirty hours invested on a bus visitation one Saturday, and on the following Sunday 300 rode the bus.

Slick Goodman, a forty-two-year-old layman who is an accountant with International Harvester, holds the record for attendance on one bus for one Sunday, bringing 338 to Sunday School. Goodman averages 187 and his philosophy is simple, "If you visit a lot of people you will get a lot of people to ride your bus." An observer noted he needed tennis shoes to visit with Slick Goodman. Goodman contacts six hundred homes a week. On an average Sunday, Slick Goodman uses two buses to bring his children to Sunday School, and on a big day, three buses follow in a caravan through the neighborhood with Slick jumping from bus to bus to keep enthusiasm on each bus. Goodman has a calendar for the year hanging in his bedroom to keep him posted as to how many come on his bus each Sunday. He has a goal of bringing four hundred to Sunday School before the year is out.

The program on the buses is supplemented by two teenagers who assist in carrying out the program. A high school girl is the stewardess who walks the aisle and assists the bus riders just as a stewardess on the airlines. Gentry teaches her to smile, greet the children and help them in every way possible.

There is a full-fledged program on the buses from the time the child gets on to the time he arrives at Sunday School. They have story time, preceded by singing and fellowship. They play Bible games, serve hot chocolate and donuts, and recognize the birthdays. The philosophy is simple, "Keep attention at all times; don't let them look out of the windows. If they enjoy the bus ride, they will come back next week, no matter how long the ride takes."

One outside activity for each bus route is planned per month; such as a picnic, tug-of-war, or special outing. These are planned on the way home and do not interfere with the spiritual. Excitement is the key, as Gentry realizes kids don't ride a bus only to get a prize or a hamburger, although he does provide food, which contributes to the excitement. "Our bus rides should be the most thrilling hour of the week."

Training is the secret to the bus program. Gentry tells his people how to meet the public, what excuses to expect and how to have a program on the buses. Most of his training is motivation to get them out making calls. "I preach to them on Saturday morning before they go out."

The bus workers are encouraged to make visits 30 seconds to two minutes long, inviting people to Sunday School. "Just try to get them to ride the Sunday School bus. After they begin riding, the soul-winning teams go back and attempt to lead them to Christ."

The buses at Beth Haven Baptist Church bring in over 1200 riders each week, averaging over 50 riders per bus, with four buses running between 75 and 100 each week. The bus ministry accounts for about 25 decisions for Christ each week.

The power of Beth Haven is seen in the fact there is a prayer meeting every night at the church, and on Saturday night at 8:30 approximately 25 men gather to ask God's power for the coming day.

The Sunday School is well organized with the aim of evangelism. Teachers are committed because they know eternal consequences hang in the balance. Bradley Price is the administrator at the Sunday School.

The children are divided into Sunday School classes by their bus routes, i.e., all the four-year-old children in one bus attend Sunday School in the same class. This way children are not running all over the church. The teacher returns with the children to their bus at 12:00 noon. When Wallace begins to baptize, the teachers begin to load the buses.

Beth Haven makes maximum use of its facilities with a double session Sunday School, although the two sessions are not distinctly divided in a flip-flop manner. At 9:45 the pre-school children go to Sunday School, the first and second grades go to children's church. At the same time, junior and senior high school go to church in the rented auditorium of a nearby school building, Grade 3 through 6 to Sunday School in the junior and senior high school classes, and they switch at 11:00.

Many of the classes are built on the large classroom, lead-teacher concept. These classes can be interchanged with children's church. Other classes are built on small, self-contained rooms. For instance, there are 10 classes for the seventh graders used at 11:00 a.m. These rooms are used by younger children at 9:45.

Gardiner Gentry began the first non-literature class in the Sunday School with two people and eventually expanded to 125. In October, 1967, the church stopped dividing adults by ages and allowed them to attend where they wanted. At that time, there were about 150 adults and now are over 400 in the adult classes taught by laymen and staff members. By the end of the year, they have a goal of 1,000 adults in Sunday School.

Last year, the church had 2,600 children for vacation Bible school and ran out of room to handle the children. This year, they are planning a TV-VBS over Channel WHAS at 9:30 each morning for five days. Instead of bringing the children to church, they are taking church to the child; sixty thousand workbooks have been prepared to go with the daily Bible adventure series that will be taught through film strips, pictures and narration. A Bible cartoon each day will feature the JOT series prepared by the Southern Baptists. There will be special music and explanation of the workbook. Each child will be encouraged to fill out the workbook and bring it to Sunday School the following week to get a reward, hence tying the TV program to the local church.

## **THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT**

The Beth Haven Baptist Church has experienced continued growth in the past, but the future is even brighter.

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>SUNDAY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AVERAGE</b>
1963	588
1965	758
1967	850
1969	1066

1971            1513

1972            1862

Thus far, the church has had 1,029 baptisms in the first 11 months of this church year, with an offering of over half a million dollars.

The church needed to expand but realized it was too expensive to buy individual lots and single family dwellings for growth in the immediate neighborhood, so they bought sixty-five acres and have an eight-million-dollar-expansion plan. The new location on US 31, the main artery through town, is an ideal center for a citywide evangelistic outreach. Fifteen acres will be given over to senior citizens apartments and twenty-five acres to a cemetery.

The long-range planning committee of the church secured government census projection and made an in-depth survey in the community. According to Price, "We wanted to know the climate of our community, including shopping, industry, residential, parks and schools." The police told them the trouble spots. The committee contacted other churches to determine what plans they were formulating to take care of the community growth. The study revealed 75,000 new residents would move into the area by 1975 and according to a national ratio, there would be 40,000 people in the area who wanted to go to church but would not be able to get into the church buildings based on the present seating and projected plans of their church and others. This statistical bombshell challenged the church to big thinking and immediately the congregation began to talk in terms of a larger auditorium. The new building will seat 3,000 in phase one with the possibility of expanding to 7,500 in phase two.

The growth that Wallace had at his former church before coming to Louisville is predictive of the continued growth the church expects. Wallace led the Baptist Bible Church, Elkton, Maryland, from 35 to 2,000 and went through eight major building programs at his former church, going from \$15,000 to \$1,140,000 in total assets.

The church plans to double its buses to 100 with each bringing in 50 people. This high average is not an impossibility because 18 out of the 22 present bus workers have each brought in 100 or more riders on a given Sunday.

At present, Beth Haven has a Day Care Center, Kindergarten and First Grade. This year they are expanding to the first seven grades with 175 pupils. The registration for each class was filled before last summer vacation began.

A church that is built on soul winning has a bright future. Wallace has often said, "You don't build a great church, you build great people and a great church is the result." The people are convinced they will reach greater Louisville with the gospel.

## Chapter Nine



**Baptist Bible Church,  
Elkton, Maryland Tom Berry, Pastor**

**“A Church With Two Great Pastors”**

When an outstanding pastor has been in a church for seventeen years, his departure leaves an unsettled feeling. The congregation must detach their love from the first man and build a relationship of trust, respect and obedience to the second pastor. Baptist Bible Church in Elkton, Maryland, has made an excellent transition, thanks to the wisdom of the Reverend Tom Berry, its second great pastor, following Dr. Tom Wallace.

Berry followed a terrific pastor. He calls Tom Wallace “the most personable pastor in America.” Others say he is one of the most successful.

The church was begun in 1950 in a one-room house called Dogwood Chapel with Don Bond as pastor, then became Baptist Bible Church under Ernie Habecker’s leadership. Working part-time at General Motors, Habecker led Tom Wallace to the Lord and sent him off to Tennessee Temple College. Their new building erected on Singerly Road seated 72 people. In 1964, Wallace and the deacons met on its present location on Old Newark Road, praying for God to give them the ten acres. It was dark and rainy; the State Police pulled up with flashing red lights, thinking it was a Ku Klux Klan meeting. When Wallace told him of their intention, the trooper replied, “I hope you get this property. We need a church.” The owner carried the mortgage interest-free, and today the church owns 27.5 acres at the location.

When Tom Wallace, after seventeen years at Baptist Bible Church, left to go to Beth Haven Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, the church commissioned Bob Fitz and Pete Germeroth to go and hear Bob Kelley preach at Murfreesboro, Tennessee. They also wanted to see the Bill Rice Ranch near there and Camp Joy at Chattanooga. Dr. Bill Rice told them he knew of only one man who had built a large church in a small town, Tom Berry of Faith Baptist Church, Avon, Indiana, a town of 250 where the church averaged 585 in Sunday School. Fitz and Germeroth had decided to hear Kelley, but when they drove over to the church, a lady carrying flowers into the church told them, “Bob Kelley is out of town and tomorrow we will have a visiting preacher.” The men jumped into their truck and drove all night to Avon, Indiana, arriving at 4:30 in the morning to get a motel room. The following morning they thought they had overslept, not realizing the change in time zone, but arrived at the church just as the morning service started. Berry recognized them as visitors and after the service went to witness to them. Germeroth asked him, “Do you go and speak at other churches?” They explained that the Baptist Bible Church had lost its pastor. At that moment, Berry testified, “I felt I was in the grip of God and couldn’t get away.”

When Berry candidated, he lost his voice as he began preaching, and even a glass of water did not help. He prayed silently, “Lord, if You want me to pastor this church, they have to hear me preach.” He asked Jack McLanahan to lead the congregation in prayer that God would give him back his voice. Berry wondered if this was God’s sign that he should not go to Elkton; he was extremely happy at Avon. As God answered prayer that morning, he preached without difficulty. Still Berry wanted to be sure of God’s will and asked God during the following weeks for an overwhelming majority when the congregation voted on the call. There was not one

negative vote, as 547 people stood to their feet to call Berry. A deacon phoned long distance, "Pastor, we're here at the altar praying. When can you come?"

Tom Berry began his ministry at Baptist Bible Church on July 25, 1971. He indicates, "I had two objectives when I came to the church: (1) to prove that we could break the numerical records of the past. Immediately that fall the church broke their record, having 1,423 in October, 1,519 and 1,655 in November. (2) We needed to strengthen our financial base. Because of rapid expansion the church had borrowed \$80,000 that year for operating expenses." Berry gave attention to strengthening the financial base.

Berry indicated that when he became the new pastor, "I wasn't going to change anything for six months; I just climbed in the saddle and rode."

Berry involved the lay leadership in the financial program of the church, and when the men became knowledgeable, the congregation responded financially. First, he assigned an area of responsibility to every deacon in the church, making the man accountable at the deacons' meeting. He divided the 12 deacons' responsibilities into: head usher, jail ministry, benevolences (sick and needy), new-member visitation, active-member visitation, hospital visitation, shut-in visitation, prayer coordinator, chairman of the Missions Committee, supervision of the ordinances, clerk and treasurer.

Each trustee was given a responsibility for a physical area of the church, such as equipment, grounds, and church interior.

Even though the men were involved, Berry demanded total liberty to lead the church. He needed a free hand to lead the church in its spiritual program, although he consulted with the leadership.

Tom Berry was saved at the First Baptist Church, Urbandale, Texas. He had attended church in order to play on the softball team. His unsaved buddies also attended and kept him from going forward. One morning, standing next to his mother, he looked up and saw her crying, yet he had no encouragement to go forward. Later in the, Sunday night service, he felt, "If I don't get saved tonight, God will never speak to me again." Berry testified that after the congregation sang about eighteen verses of "Just as I Am," he walked out of the church unsaved. When he got home, his brother went to bed first, and Tom went out to the car to get his Bible. He didn't know one verse, but felt, "If I get saved, Jesus Christ will have to do the saving." He remembers getting on his knees and praying, "Lord, if You will save me, You can have all of me." From that time on, he knew he was to be a preacher.

The next Sunday, he went forward; the preacher asked, "Are you coming to get saved?" He answered, "No, I'm coming because I got saved last Sunday night." Most of his buddies came forward that morning. Later in Canton, Texas, while milking a cow, he felt the Lord was nudging him and responded, "All right; I'm willing to be a preacher." He went in the house and announced it to his mother, who was shocked. His friends at school laughed, because they felt he was a jokester.

Later he returned to Dallas and hooked up with the old crowd, thinking he would help them, but they dragged him down. After one night of revelry at the State Fair, he was troubled as

God dealt with him about his sin. He could hear God speaking: "I've called you to preach, and here you are, carousing around." About 2:30 that Sunday morning, Tom made a total surrender to God; Sunday as he reached the church parking lot, the pastor said, "Tom, what are you going to do with your life?" Three weeks later, he was at Baylor University to study to become a Southern Baptist pastor. During that year, he became disenchanted with the Southern Baptists and transferred to Bob Jones University.

He pastored two years at Brownsburg, Indiana, and spent three and a half years in evangelism. Next, Berry pastored eleven and a half years at Avon, Indiana, building the church from 60 in Sunday School with rented facilities, to 585 and \$280,000 facilities.

### **Sunday School Buses**

Sunday School buses have paid off for Baptist Bible Church in several ways. Paula Case, who made a profession of faith at age 14, rode the church bus for 10 years. After high school she worked for 5 years, then graduated from Tennessee Temple Schools and returned to teach second grade at the Elkton Christian Schools. Also, she teaches Sunday School, is in charge of Primary Church, sings in the choir and helps on a bus route.

Barbara Murray also rode the bus to Sunday School. She was converted at age 15 at revival and graduated from Tennessee Temple Schools. Barbara taught at Elkton Christian Schools for 9 years; she now writes full-time for the *Christian News Weekly*.

### **Elkton Christian Schools**

During the first year of Elkton Christian Schools, a man on his way to work hit the church van, killing two children and leaving Ray Lindsey, Jr., unconscious in the hospital. His father visited every day to pray for his son. One day as he said, "Amen," he heard his son repeat, "Amen." The doctor had indicated that if the boy lived, he would be a vegetable; yet the father got him to memorize Scripture verses. Now, the 13-year-old boy is on the honor roll at school, and each Friday evening he goes with his father to hold street meetings in Elkton.

The Elkton Christian School began in September, 1963, with only 11 students in the kindergarten, and this year has 585 students, reaching through grade 12. Paul Lunger, director of the schools, has given stability and direction.

This past spring, the school was certified by the State of Maryland; only three teachers were short in their hours for full certification. A strong patriotic emphasis is tied to biblical education, pointing toward academic excellence. Whereas last year the students in Wilmington, Delaware, tested a grade lower, the children in Elkton Christian Schools tested a grade higher than their placement.

### **Elkton Baptist College**

Berry believes God has raised up the bus ministry and the Christian School to save America. "If these don't do it, nothing will." He wants to strengthen his Christian school and to help others get started. (He gave textbooks, desks, and steered teachers to three other schools in

the area, getting them started this past year.) Berry noted that it was easy to get teachers, but they felt the pinch in getting teachers with a Christian philosophy. He is starting the college to upgrade those teachers he has and help train teachers for other Christian schools in America. Last year the principal of Elkton Christian Schools visited Bob Jones University and reported that there were 142 principals looking for teachers and Bob Jones had only 140 candidates to interview.

At present the State of Maryland will not allow them to use the name “college” unless they have a half-million dollars in liquid assets (one man has given them \$80,000 in stocks). This fall, they plan to have evening classes on Monday, Tuesday and Friday evenings, offering 9 semester hours. Berry sees approximately 80 students enrolled in the school. He plans to build an academic building and begin day classes in the fall 1974.

This spring, the \$650,000 gym and classroom building will be built that will allow the school to grow to over 900 students.

### **Publications Ministry**

The Sword and Shield Publications is an evangelistic outreach; 26,000 weekly copies of *The Visitor* are mailed to a 25-mile radius, saturating the area with the gospel. The Sword and Shield Publications grew out of an all-night prayer meeting. The people had been praying in November, 1970, when Carl Bieber mentioned the need for a Christian weekly reader that would not indoctrinate the children in evolution, one-worldism, and godless secularism. Bieber felt led to speak to Warren Perry that evening in the hall about taking over a new publication, *Christian News Weekly*. Perry, an executive with Avon products over computer operations, began immediately putting out the paper for kindergarten and first grade the next month. God so prospered the thought, that he left his \$16,000 secular employment the following June to take the \$6,000 job and has expanded to ten full-time staff members, printing 17,500 per week for each grade, K through 4, and they plan to expand through grade 6 by June.

### **Miracle Acres Camp**

The church camp name, Miracle Acres, is indicative; it was an answer to prayer. A few years ago, the property was put up for sale by the Fresh Air Society of Baltimore for \$440,000 but it didn't sell; later, they put it back on the market at \$250,000. The Baptist Bible Church offered \$125,000, along with a \$1,000 earnest money check. The owners kept the \$1,000 and countered with \$190,000. The deacons of the church said, “No, God has told us \$125,000,” to which the realtor replied, “How does God tell you this?” The men answered they felt impressed to offer this amount after praying all night. The owners countered at \$165,000, waited two months, and came down to \$135,000. Finally, they met at the property last September 15, 1971, to discuss particulars to transfer the property at \$125,000; the deal was consummated. The realtor wanted to take them out to eat, but Bob Fitz wouldn't go to the restaurant because it served alcohol-they went elsewhere. God used the convictions of a Christian to bring about His will, for if they had met at the restaurant, another client was trying to contact the realtor at that restaurant with a \$160,000 deal.

Last summer the camp registered 808, with 268 first-time decisions for Christ. The old lodge at the camp was built by slave labor; walls are two feet thick with rifle slits in them. Its rustic atmosphere is a natural for Christian camping experience.

## **The Future**

When Berry came, the church had been averaging approximately \$2,200 a week income. His first steps were to initiate a stewardship program via a banquet where Dr. Bob Gray, of Jacksonville, Florida, spoke and the people were asked to fill out a Faith Promise Card. Those who were absent received a series of letters asking for a financial commitment. The budget was raised and within 18 months the weekly offering was up \$2,000. At present the church is working on a \$4,430 a week budget to meet all of its commitments. They just completed a \$212,527 year in contributions. But when all income from the school, printing and the camp is considered, the total income was \$618,033. The church has 85 employees, the sixth largest employer in Cecil County.

Next month the church is going into a \$1 million bond program with Fidelity Plan, Inc., of East Point, Georgia. All of the debts will be consolidated into a large loan, providing finances to build the new gym, purchase additional acreage and construct a services building, containing a garage and print shop. Instead of contracting the job, they hired a crew out of the church to work full-time. Some of the men take leaves from their employment to come and do special jobs on the building, such as install steel and plumbing.

The church averaged 714 on the buses last year with 17 routes, 20 buses in three states (Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland). A new bus route is moving into New Jersey soon.

The Baptist Bible Church shows that the ministry begun by a great pastor can be furthered by another great pastor.

## **Chapter Ten**

### ***Trinity Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee Charles Thompson, Pastor***

#### **“From Carport to a Front Porch With Eleven Columns”**

The Trinity Baptist Church was begun in a carport in Lake Vista subdivision, Chattanooga, Tennessee, July, 1962, when 29 folks gathered to start a New Testament Baptist church. Ten years later, the 1,700-member congregation meets in a 1,400-seat auditorium with eleven columns on the massive front porch and the Sunday School-spreads into seven buildings valued at \$2.5 million. The Reverend Charles Thompson, who founded the church, had led in its yearly growth, reaching an average of 900 each Sunday and a high day of 1,730 in Sunday School and over 2,000 in the church service in November, 1972. On this same day a record high was reached on the buses with 1,184 riders.

Charles Thompson came to know the Lord in April, 1951, while he was a salesman for a meat company in Decatur, Alabama. God was working in his heart, even though he couldn't

analyze what was happening. First, he began having a fear of dying and went to see several doctors. Each one mentioned the Lord or the church. Charles quit smoking and drinking, although he was not going to church. On one occasion he even went through an Oral Roberts healing line, but felt at once it was not for him. Thompson called his mother-in-law to send the pastor to visit him, and two days later the Methodist pastor led Thompson to Jesus Christ. But the Methodist church did not meet his spiritual needs. God led him to the Molten Heights Baptist Church, where pastor Milford Walker took Thompson under his wing and began giving him daily Bible instruction. The Baptist church was experiencing days of revival from which 15 young boys went into the ministry. Thompson began serving the Lord by giving testimony in street meetings and visiting door to door.

Charles Thompson was 28 at the time and along with his wife Doris he had stopped attending parties. He knew that Doris was not saved but also felt he could not lead her to the Lord, so he got his wife in the car and drove to see Pastor Walker, who led Mrs. Thompson to the Lord in the front seat of the car, parked in front of the Molten Heights Baptist Church.

Two months later Charles went to Tennessee Temple Schools, and the only job he could find in Chattanooga was packing meat at \$.60 an hour, part time, (\$10.59 a week) which was quite a come-down from his \$100-a-week job plus expenses. His wife had to wait several months before coming to Chattanooga, and even when she came, finances ran out; they didn't have enough money to pay their rent on the little house. Charles and Doris were on their knees; she was crying because she had to return home to Decatur to allow Thompson to finish school. A knock came at the door and a 78-year-old man came over to ask if they would live in his furnished houses free, eat the eggs from his chickens and vegetables from his garden. Thompson declares, "I know God sent me through Bible school, knowing my age and lack of money." He went to school year-round and graduated to serve a small country church out of Chattanooga for eight years. There, Thompson had the third largest number of baptisms in the association; but he continued to pray, "Lord, give me a field where I'll never run out of opportunities."

Thompson left that church and came to Chattanooga with a burden for a broad, limitless ministry.

In downtown Chattanooga Thompson met a man who suggested Lake Vista subdivision, about 13 miles northeast of the city. On the first Wednesday of July, 1962, nine people gathered in a home. Charles preached, "What will it take to begin a church?" He mentioned it would take soul winning. . . prayer . . . hard work . . . and sacrificial giving. The following Sunday he was not too sure that he had preached the right message. Seven out of the original nine people sent him word that they would not be coming for the first service, which was held at 7730 Jocelyn Drive. But all that week Thompson canvassed the neighborhood, putting handbills in mailboxes. Thompson grew discouraged, thinking the church was not the will of God, but to his surprise he found 29 people present on Sunday morning. They borrowed chairs from the neighbors. One Sunday School class met under a pine tree, another in a lawn swing, and a third in the house. The adults assembled on the carport. Trinity Baptist Church met in the carport for the next four weeks while they were looking for a permanent building. Half a block away there were seven houses for sale, and the owners let Thompson meet in one of the houses there while he searched for property. After looking all over the area, he finally bought three lots across the street from there, and since the church had no money, he took out a personal loan for \$1,500 from a local

bank. Evangelist Talbert Moore let the church meet in his large orange tent, and as cool, fall weather came on, the small congregation huddled around the fuel oil stove to keep warm.

No one would loan the fledgling congregation money, since the church only had nine men. One of the men who visited several banks with Thompson would say each time, "See, I told you we couldn't get money." In the midst of discouragement, Charles Thompson claimed Philippians 4:19, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Thompson wrote to the Architecture Department of the Southern Baptist Convention and bought a \$5 blueprint and dug the foundation, with only \$365 in the bank. He went to a local concrete block company and said, "I don't have any money. Will you give me the blocks and let me pay you as soon as I have it?" He repeated the process with the concrete company and lumberyard. A man who worked in steel began attending the church and loaned equipment and worked with Charles, who was the general contractor. When they finished the first floor of the intended two stories, they covered it with tarpaper. At this time the congregation had reached 70 and continued to grow. The debt was overwhelming, but Thompson kept claiming Philippians 4:19. When a businessman from California moved to Chattanooga to begin a bond business, Thompson was his first customer. The bonds were printed and every one of them sold. The tarpaper was torn off and the second story was completed. Thompson constructed a \$100,000 building "on determination and guts," based on the promise of God. To this day Thompson believes God sent the bond agent to help him because after the man sold the last bond he moved back to California.

Four years later Thompson began a kindergarten. He had received a brochure in the mail from Dr. Arlin Horton at the Pensacola Christian School, advertising a leadership clinic. Thompson came home with a vision of beginning a school with high academic standards and based on the Word of God. He felt he could teach every kindergartener how to read and write, and he began the first year with one class of five-year-olds. The reputation of the school spread, and he had 100 pupils the second year. Two years later he began the day care center, and within the next two years announced an expansion to include grade 4. So many requests came that he started six grades that year, with 190 students. Last year he added junior high school and now has a student body of 731, with over 100 children in the day care center.

Trinity Christian Schools enabled the church to double their Sunday School facilities with a \$200,000 building three years ago, and last year the school enabled them to add an auditorium that will seat 1,400 and executive offices costing \$475,000.00 This fall a new \$200,000 high school gymnasium was completed to house classes, bookstores, locker rooms and complete physical education facilities for children.

The school is carpeted throughout and as one walks through the classrooms all of the implements of education are apparent. Thompson has tried to attract the best teachers without sacrificing his standards but at the same time they know that the church and pastor head the school, which Thompson feels is a biblical principle. Thompson indicates there are four principles on which the school is built: (1) Required Bible courses for all students, (2) High academic standards for all classes, (3) A biblical attitude towards discipline (students must be taught obedience) and, (4) a patriotism for the United States of America.

Thompson testifies that his greatest blessing in the church has been to see children come to know the Lord, and see their lives change through the Christian School. He testifies, “If you could see the letters that come across my desk and talk to the parents who thank me for starting this Christian school, you would know it’s all worthwhile.”

Whatever Charles Thompson does, he starts *big* and with confidence, because he believes God will bless a New Testament church. Two years ago he jumped into a bus ministry in a big way, first buying 10 buses, next a larger fleet from a public school system. The buses caused him to double his Sunday School and now bring in approximately 600 riders each week. Thompson promoted the buses, asking people to buy a half or a whole bus for \$1,000 each, then he asked the people to borrow the money and pay the loan back monthly so the buses could be purchased immediately. Buses brought 805 riders on a high day last November, 1971, when there were 1,670 present in Sunday School.

Thompson insists that all staff members in the church spend two hours each week in evangelistic visitation. This includes secretaries, cooks and custodians. Also, the deacons must agree to visit two hours a week before they are ordained to that position. Thompson indicates they discover their deacons through the bus ministry or the visitation program.

The growth of Trinity Baptist Church is phenomenal, considering there are 140 Southern Baptist churches in the area, along with the huge fundamentalistic Highland Park Baptist Church with its 50 chapels. According to Thompson, five or six Sunday School buses run in some neighborhoods to pick up children.

There is no competition between Thompson and Dr. Lee Roberson. He points out that Dr. Roberson baptized him and is his best friend; Tennessee Temple Schools is his alma mater. When Thompson first started a church, he called Dr. Roberson out to look at the subdivision, at which time the pastor from Highland Park said, “Go ahead. This is an ideal spot.”

Five years ago God led Thompson to enter the radio ministry. Now *The Trinity Hour* is broadcast daily and twice on Sunday; the Sunday School lesson and the morning service are broadcast live over different stations.

The first person that Thompson led to the Lord at Trinity Baptist Church was George Webb, who played a honky-tonk piano in a tavern. Later Thompson reached the whole family for the Lord and baptized each one of them. George is still in the church and now plays the piano before Sunday School and on the Monday radio broadcast.

Thompson feels God has pushed him into the TV ministry. He traveled to several large churches, especially the Thomas Road Baptist Church and was so inspired by what was being done, that God “pushed” him by an inner compulsion to reach Chattanooga for Christ. He began asking his people two years ago to pray for television. On Sunday, October 15, he began his first half-hour broadcast at 9:30 Sunday morning and he plans to lengthen this program as well as go on other stations with the gospel.

Thompson has attempted to get the best speakers possible to the Trinity Baptist Church. Three years ago he began his first big crusade in the church and packed out the church auditorium, next the crusade moved to a 2,500-seat high school auditorium. When the high



school was packed out, they moved to downtown Memorial Auditorium, closing the crusade with 5,000 people. In another crusade they had over 7,000, according to officials the largest crowd in the city auditorium.

A new stewardship department has been opened and A. J. Vander Meulen, Director, and Joel Osterhus have come to lead the people in the ministry of Christian giving through stewardship. Thompson indicates with the multiplied opportunities, every local church will have to open up a stewardship department to pay for the outreach of the gospel.”

## **THE FUTURE**

This fall a \$400,000 resort on the Tennessee River was given to the church to be developed for camp and conference ministry. This 34 acres of land will be used for expansion of the church’s summer ministry.

The church has purchased 90 additional acres of ground for relocation approximately three miles away from its present site. There Thompson plans to build a year-round youth ranch, nursing home, senior citizens’ home, a large Christian school and church facilities.

Thompson indicates that if he had his ministry to do over again, he would start his Christian grade school earlier and push it harder. He testifies,. “For a salesman who sold meat, I used to be hardnosed about business, but God has captured my heart with the prospect of winning children to Jesus Christ.” He goes on to testify, “I have a tender place in my heart for children and am not ashamed to reach them.” Because of this he has placed emphasis on his buses and Christian grade school. When he was told that a church could not thrive financially on a bus ministry, he responded, “Why would God ask me to win children to Christ and then not support the ministry financially?” A quick look around the Trinity Baptist Church reveals that financial support has been provided. Pastor Thompson’s latest endeavor was to recently open a Home for Girls. . . providing a home and love for girls who have no home. The next step in this ministry will be a comparable Home for Boys.

Two years ago I spoke to the congregation and challenged them to double their Sunday School attendance. Many teachers and bus workers stood to their feet to accept the challenge. At that time they were running 450 in Sunday School and now attendance averages 900. On October 27, 1972, I again challenged them to double their Sunday School to 1,800 and Charles Thompson was the first to stand in the auditorium during the invitation, indicating his willingness to do all humanly possible to double the Sunday School within the next year. If the past is predictive of the future, he probably will do it.

## **Chapter Eleven**

**Lavon Drive Baptist Church,  
Garland, Texas Gary Coleman, Pastor**

**“The Church With a Bright Past and a Glowing Future”**

Last year was a really remarkable year of progress for Lavon Drive Baptist Church in Garland, Texas, a great year to top twelve years of progress since the church was founded in 1961. High attendance reached 1,745 and averaged 1,051, with 612 professions of faith, 362 baptisms. The church added three new staff members, a Christian day school with kindergarten through grade 6 (137 enrolled), purchased 10 acres of ground at \$212,000 and launched the building of a 2,200-seat auditorium.

There are several reasons for past growth and a bright future: the young pastor, Gary Coleman, a group of determined people, a soul-winning tradition, and the influence of many godly men.

The church began when approximately 30 members came out of Miller Road Baptist Church in Garland, formerly pastored by Dr. Jack Hyles, and met for prayer in Blaylock's Nursery. They wanted to discuss the possibility of building a church on the north side of Garland. They rented a building where pleasure boats had been sold, with Sunday School meeting across the street from it in the office of a used car lot. Dr. J. Harold Smith, of Ft. Smith, Arkansas, preached for the young congregation and sent other supply pastors. The church organized with 45 charter members. Rev. Tom Bridges was called as pastor in May and laid a good foundation; he bought 2.6 acres of ground on Lavon Drive, built its first building, increased the attendance, bought a bus, and won many souls to Jesus Christ. Over the next three years attendance reached 250 under his leadership.

A false rumor has persisted that the church grew by addition of disgruntled members from the Miller Road Baptist Church; however, on the twelfth anniversary, when 1,271 attended, only 17 people raised hands to indicate they had been saved at Miller Road, while a multitude of upraised hands indicated those who had found Christ at Lavon Drive Baptist Church.

The benevolent shadow of Dr. Jack Hyles hovers over the church. First, the original core of workers came from Miller Road Baptist Church, where Hyles was their pastor. Second, when Bridges resigned, the deacons contacted Hyles and he recommended Gary Coleman as pastor. Years before Coleman came to pastor the church, someone had given him a copy of *How to Boost Your Sunday School Attendance*. Young Coleman got so excited he crammed the book into his pocket and dashed out to try to win souls, reading from Hyles' book to the lost sinners. Dr. Hyles has preached in the church on several occasions.

When the church reached its saturation, at first Coleman thought of building a two-story addition with gym and classrooms for the school. Once again Hyles' influence weighed heavily on the church. He counseled, “These people have never had an auditorium; don't sacrifice everything for the school—put the church first.” After this conversation, Coleman decided to build a large circular auditorium, now planned.

Gary Coleman grew up in Dallas, Texas; his grandfather preached at Bruton Road Baptist Church in Dallas and held brush arbor revivals in East Texas. When Gary was seven, his grandfather took him to the Willow Springs Baptist Church and preached on sin and Hell. Barefooted, with knees out of his blue jeans and a red cotton shirt, seven-year-old Gary went forward to get saved; his grandmother shouted, and his grandfather prayed with him.

Years later, Coleman heard Hyles preach on Judas, the disciple who was a church member, an officer in the church and a preacher, but was not saved. Coleman was so “shook” that he testifies, “I went to a Sunday School room and made sure of my salvation. I didn’t want to go on as a pastor without the assurance I received that evening.” The rest of Coleman’s boyhood life was spent in Bruton Road Church; he was baptized, licensed to preach, got married, was ordained and also pastored the church for five years. His father was a deacon, and his mother sang in the choir. They had family altar in the home during his growing-up years and went to every church service. Gary graduated from North Dallas High School, where he played football on the team, and married Judy Harris, who was a cheerleader, and to this day is his organist.

Gary’s grandfather sent him to Baylor University where he had a burning passion to preach. Coleman tells the humorous story of candidating at Friendship Baptist Church in Horne Community, along with two other preachers who were seniors while he was a freshman. He got a unanimous call, and the other two didn’t get any votes. When Gary began to brag, one of the deacons told him, “We needed a piano player worse than a pastor, and since you were the only one who had a wife who could play the piano, we chose you.”

At the end of Gary’s second year at the Friendship Baptist Church his grandfather died and he candidated for the Bruton Road Baptist Church, along with five other men, getting a 51 percent call. Two other pastors advised him to take it to save the church, which he did and stayed from 1959 to 1964. There he had 500 baptisms, averaged 406 in Sunday School and had a high day of 848.

Gary Coleman was 25 years of age when called to Lavon Drive Baptist Church and immediately tried to get money to build an auditorium. The church was too young to borrow money. The pastor met with his deacons for prayer. The vice president of Oak Cliff Savings and Loan phoned to say that a friend had contacted the president, indicating the church needed money. Although the young church had been turned down by every financial institution in its community, the vice-president told Coleman over the phone that they could get \$100,000 in conventional financing. Young Coleman at first thought it was a friend playing a prank. To this day he does not know who called the president of the Savings and Loan, but his people are sure that it was God working.

Only once has Coleman had to go to his people to raise money to pay bills. A few months after he arrived, he needed \$1,100 to meet expenses and called the men into a back room after the evening service. Coleman testifies, “I wasn’t going to take up an offering, but one of the men grabbed an empty trash can, and passed it around. The men began throwing in money, and they got the \$1,100 that night. The financial integrity of the church is without question. A list of all checks is printed and distributed monthly to the congregation, along with a monthly balance sheet. Each member may ask a question before the record is approved by the congregation.

In Coleman's second year, they hit 659 in a Sunday School contest. At that time, Bob Keyes, respected as a pastor and evangelist in Texas, shocked the independent world by coming to work for the church, where he organized the Sunday School, gave it leadership and also led the choir. Most thought Keyes was too well-known to work in the then small church.

The Sunday School has had steady growth, averaging approximately 125 increase each year. Coleman testifies, "We keep on winning souls and working to conserve new members through a Sunday evening training union class where we have prayer, Bible study, and informal teaching on such topics as the Christian home, tithing, and the Christian life."

The young pastor has the conviction that the leadership should be clean and dedicated to build a New Testament church; therefore the officers, workers and deacons cannot attend movies, smoke, drink, wear immodest dress, or men have long hair. The people love the preaching of the Sword of the Lord Conferences, and each year Dr. John R. Rice is a favorite guest preacher.

Coleman feels their greatest day was when 105 were converted on a Sunday in August of '72; 50 were baptized. The greatest attendance came in pouring rain October, 1972, when 1,745 attended Sunday School on a time-change Sunday. Cars were parked a half-mile away and people were shuttled to the service, because the field next to the church turned to mud.

Coleman knew that the 2.7 acres were not enough for expansion; he planned to use the 10 acres beside them (zoned to be a shopping center) for parking. A proposal came before the city council to rezone that acreage for apartments, and Coleman went before the council to oppose the rezoning, indicating that an old city plan called for a shopping center. He testified, "We didn't want to get boxed in." The council voted 7 to 1 to oppose the rezoning; and on New Year's Eve, 1971, young Coleman went into the middle of the field, knelt down and asked God to give him that property. The people prayed with him for the next six months. The owner had been asking \$30,000 an acre, but a friend of Coleman's negotiated the sale at \$212,000, or \$20,000 an acre, \$10,000 less than they had expected to pay. Their new \$800,000 bond drive was kicked off in January to pay for the existing mortgage, build a \$450,000 auditorium and refurbish the present facilities, giving the church total assets of \$1,250,000.

Last year, the church received \$228,739.81, a per capita offering of \$4.08 per week, considered strong among independent Baptist churches. The church does not have a large bus ministry, only six routes, bringing in approximately 200 people. Coleman feels his financial strength will give him a base for expansion in the future.

Last year the church gave \$36,000 to missions. Recently at the faith missions conference, \$45,000 was pledged for the 70 missionaries supported by the church, plus other agencies such as Bob Jones University, Hyles-Anderson Bible College.

Coleman gets answers when he kneels for prayer. First, he got the property. One Tuesday night he came out of Tommy Kirby's home and knelt in the front yard, claiming him for Jesus Christ. On Thursday evening, Coleman went back and led the young CPA to the Lord. Also, young Coleman knelt on the Parkway after witnessing to Joe Tyndall, and a few weeks later the

automobile mechanic went forward during the invitation on their big day when 1,745 attended Sunday School.

“Bear” Whatley, a layman in the church, was laying brick on the house for Harry Meyer who recently moved from Germany. “Bear” witnessed to Meyer and came back one Tuesday evening along with a teen-age boy but the German Lutheran wouldn’t listen to the Scriptures from the English Bible. Meyer got his German version, and each time “Bear” Whatley quoted a verse in English, Meyer interpreted from the German. The two men walked through the “Roman Road of Salvation.” The following Saturday “Bear” Whatley came back and Meyer received the Lord, walked the aisle the following Sunday and was baptized. Today he is going to Bible college, planning on going back to Germany as a missionary.

Coleman preaches with deep sincerity and conviction. Twin boys received Christ at the church and two weeks later were killed, along with another friend. Coleman was asked to preach the triple funeral and, as is his custom, he preached the gospel and asked for a show of hands but did not ask people to come forward. Sixty-five raised their hands, wanting to receive Jesus Christ at the funeral. Even though he preaches hard, there is compassion. A little seven-year-old boy came down the aisle in Sunday School and came forward again in church. Coleman put his arm around the boy and announced, “We like boys who want to be counted for Jesus.”

Coleman also believes that everything in the church should be geared to soul winning. He personally spends eight to ten hours a week talking to lost people. He has a small book in his pocket, recording the number of presentations of the gospel he makes each month and how many respond. He had led four souls to Christ the week this author was at the church. About 60 per cent of his professions get involved in the church.

Jim Lyons had been a member of the church and in full-time evangelism. In the past year, he curtailed his meetings to help the pastor during the crucial time of expansion.

## **THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT**

Even though Coleman is young, age 33, he has been recognized by his peers, the supreme compliment; he was elected president of the Southwide Baptist Fellowship. Coleman testifies, “I wanted a church of 500 in Sunday School-I had little vision. When we reached 1,000, I began to have a great vision for God.” The staff evangelist, Jim Lyons, attended the Pastors’ Conference at Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia, and responded to the author’s challenge to double the Sunday School. He came home and began to challenge the staff.

The result was a high attendance of 1,745 in Sunday School on “Over the Top” Sunday. In the immediate future the church plans to move into the listing of the 100 largest Sunday Schools, build an auditorium that will seat 2,200, have 2,000 before the summer 1973, baptize 500 in 1973, expand its bus ministry, move into special ministries for the deaf, Spanish and retarded, and add junior and senior high school to its Christian day school.

## **Chapter Twelve**

**Emmanuel Baptist Church,  
Marion, Ohio Charles Hand, Pastor**

**“Changing an Old Fundamentalist Downtown Church Into an Evangelistic Church”**

The Emmanuel Baptist Church, Marion, Ohio, is an old-line fundamental church that declared complete independence from the American Baptist Convention some 20 years ago. It had always been a good solid Bible-teaching congregation. However, there had been no spectacular growth within the last 40 years. The annual Sunday School average attendance varied from a low of 295 to a high of 417 until Dr. Charles Hand was called as pastor the last Sunday of August, 1970. The Sunday School then averaged slightly over 200. Under his aggressive leadership the theologically correct congregation became also an evangelistically fervent church. In eighteen months the Sunday School nearly quadrupled. The church averaged over 800 in Sunday School by the spring of 1972 and baptized 767 during that church year. This was the tenth most baptisms in the nation, according to a survey made by THE SWORD OF THE LORD.

Emmanuel Baptist Church had only had two pastors over the previous 27 years but had a history of “quiet wars.” Townspeople were of the opinion that the last two pastors had been voted out. That had not happened. Some members wanted a church of no more than 300, another group wanted an aggressive soul-winning program, and others were apathetic. The new pastor’s appraisal of the situation was that he would lose members no matter what he did. “I felt that I could keep a few people who did little work; or I could keep many great unsung workers and go forward for God.”

In the previous two years there had been 82 baptisms. Pastor Hand asked God to let him win and baptize more than that in the first four months of his new pastorate. There were 127 baptisms during that time. Because of the new emphasis on personal soul winning, the church grew in spite of losing people. There was no split. Individuals just dropped out. It was comparable to trying to hold a handful of sand as individual grains fall through your fingers. Members heard of the new pastor’s emphasis on evangelism and the use of promotional gifts on the buses. This was all new to them and feeling that newness was tantamount to falseness, they just never came to see the new program in action.

There is no way to know how many left as a natural result of changing pastors or how many left because of the new program, but the phenomenal thing is that Sunday School records showed less than 100 that no longer attended.

The pastor testifies, “This church is a living testimony that the majority of God’s people want a soul-winning church, pray for it and need only leadership to bring it about.” His philosophy is, “If a church can function properly without the leadership of the pastor, it doesn’t need a pastor.” He constantly reminds his people, “You do not pay me to preach or go soul winning. You pay me to administrate the affairs of this church. I go soul winning and preach on my own time just as you do.” When Pastor Hand came to the church there were 15 Sunday School teachers-12 of these are still teaching. In fact, currently the church has 54 Sunday School teachers of whom 46 were attending the church when Dr. Hand became pastor. There were 12 deacons-9 of these are still in the church. In addition, the church has the same treasurer, the same

Sunday school superintendent, the same chairman of deacons, and the same church clerk. Most of those who left were not only not doing the work of the ministry, but were hindering those who wanted to work. The church was not in the hands of the people but in the hands of a few leaders. The church needed an organizational conversion. Some of the leadership had the attitude that the pastor's job was to win souls and they were to run the church. Dr. Hand's reply was: "The pastor is a leader and should exercise leadership in every part of the church—including finances."

## Events That Changed the Church

In looking back over the past two years, Pastor Hand believes five events were used of God to transform the ministry of the church into an evangelistic instrument for God.

1. *The church adopted a budget.* Over the years the trustees had gradually been forced to assume control of financial matters since no one else seemed to be willing to accept responsibility. Dr. Hand believes that business matters of the church should at all times be in the hands of the people. The deacons or trustees do not make policy but make recommendations for church approval. The church had been accustomed to finding out where the money had been spent at an annual meeting. A budget was drawn up based on the past year's expenditures and presented to the people for authorization. Now the church was authorizing expenditures and not a body within the church.

2. *The pastor took over the Sunday School.* Dr. Hand was appointed the educational director of the church and took responsibility for the Sunday School. Wanting quarterlies out of the Sunday School and knowing that adults were long accustomed to having them, he looked for an adult quarterly that he could adapt to the lower grades. The pastor wrote lessons that were based on the same Scripture text as the quarterlies used, but approached the text from a different slant. The adults found that the quarterlies were of no use in class and began to leave them at home. Now, no quarterly is used. He writes his own material from the Scriptures and his secretary adapts it for the younger children. Recently Dr. Hand made it possible for other Sunday Schools to purchase this material. The pastor brings the names of prospective teachers to the monthly deacons meeting at which time he discusses with the deacons these prospective teachers as to spiritual qualifications. Dr. Hand then personally enlists the teachers in a private conference with each one. A weekly teachers meeting at which the teacher's attendance is mandatory is held on Wednesday evening before the regular service.

3. *590 in Sunday School.* A big attendance day was planned for the first Sunday in December, 1970. They had 590 in Sunday School, representing doubled attendance in four months. At the next teachers meeting, some workers wrung their hands, complaining, "We can't teach." They complained of chaos the preceding Sunday. Dr. Hand announced, "Now you see; if we are to do this consistently, it means we are going to have to change some methods." The teachers realized that to grow and reach lost people, they were going to have to adapt.

Dr. Hand began at that teachers meeting to show them how they could double their class size and still teach the Word of God. The Sunday School had been departmentalized but each superintendent still looked to the pastor, instead of assuming responsibility. One superintendent kept coming with problems and each time Pastor Hand would say, "This is your church and this is your department. This is your work for God. What do you think you should do?" The

superintendent got the message and began making plans and making decisions. On a good day that superintendent, Mrs. Maxine Kelley, will now have more in her junior department than once attended in the entire Sunday School. Sunday School workers are not reluctant to make decisions for fear of making - a wrong move. Many times Pastor Hand has publicly defended teachers and superintendents and then privately helped them to plan the work in such a way that criticism could be avoided.

4. *Positionizing the church.* Several years previously, ten acres of ground on the other side of town had been given to the church. Before Pastor Hand came, there was disagreement in the church-some wanted to move; some didn't. He knew that he had to positionize the church location in the minds of the community and stabilize his people. He believes that the location of the church is not the important factor in determining if God can use it to win souls. Dr. Hand led the church to borrow \$60,000.00 to air condition the auditorium, rearrange the Sunday School classes and blacktop the parking lot. It was a way to state, "We are not going to move." The financial outlay proved to the community he meant business. Before Dr. Hand had assumed the pastorate, the church had invited a church survey company to run a survey to determine the church's future location. They recommended moving, stating that Emmanuel Baptist Church could never contain more than 1 percent of the city in that building (their estimation, 380 in church). An expert from the firm came by after Dr. Hand had been pastor about a year and opened his conversation by saying, "When are you going to move? Remember you can't run over 1 % of your city here in these buildings." Dr. Hand closed the conversation by saying, "That's strange, we had over 2% of our city in Sunday School last Sunday." Pastor Hand says his is not the traditional American church but a soul-winning institution.

5. *Calling a full time music director.* In January, 1971, Pastor Hand discussed with the deacons the possibility of calling his son, Mike Hand, as music director. Young Mr. Hand had graduated from Tennessee Temple Schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with a degree in music. The deacons voted to recommend that the church call him as music director. A few opponents of the new church program saw a way to rid themselves of the pastor and program. The night of the vote brought people who had not been in church in months and even people who were not members of the church came to try to cast ballots against the proposal. The proposal carried a majority of the votes cast but not the percentage the church Constitution specified to effect a call. There were mixed emotions that night as the congregation filed out of the building. Those opposing the new church program were sure Dr. Hand would leave. Those for the new program prayed he would not leave but wondered how he could stay. Pastor Hand wondered what Scripture he would preach from the next time he stood before his people. The vote had been a disappointment. For the following Sunday morning message, God gave him a message from Ezekiel 24:18, "At even my wife died and I did in the morning as I was commanded." The title of the sermon was "What Should I Do if I Am Deprived of Something I Need to Do a Job for God." The gist of the message was that the work would continue but people would lose a blessing. In this case he meant the church would lose graded choir programs, a great church choir, etc. That morning Dr. Hand won the hearts of his people. They realized their pastor came to win souls and to lead the flock. Discouragement or deprivation could not drive him away. Those who voted against Mike to retaliate against the pastor and his program had their pettiness revealed and they left the church. The following September the church, by unanimous vote, called the same Mike Hand as music director. The church choir at this writing averages between 50 and 60 which indicates the ability of young Mr. Hand and his esteem by the people.



## **Soul Winning at Emmanuel**

Pastor Hand believes that the best way to train a soul winner is to take him soul winning and constantly emphasize soul winning. The church baptizes each Sunday morning and Sunday evening and urges each convert to be baptized immediately after conversion. He states, "A man will learn more by knocking on three doors than in all the notes he can write in a class on evangelism." Even though he feels this way, he periodically teaches soul winning on Wednesday night at the Midweek Service and at the teachers meeting. "The focus at our church is always soul winning." Three assistants, Barry Radebaugh, Ron Douglas, and Dennis Griffith have no duties that conflict with their soul-winning visitation. When Dr. Hand sees a Christian who should be winning souls, he suggests a bus captain or a staff member invite that person to go soul winning with them. The church has Thursday morning visitation for ladies, Thursday night for young people, and Saturday morning for everyone. There was no organized visitation at Emmanuel Baptist Church prior to Pastor Hand's assuming leadership. There perhaps were some personal soul winners but they were unknown to the new pastor. His two sons, Pat and Terry, at that time ages 15 and 13 respectively, were accomplished soul winners. They discovered another young man in the church, Philip Griffith, then 15, who also knew how to win souls. Pastor Hand helped these three young men to choose three girls and three driver-chaperones. The three teams went visiting teenage prospects each Thursday night for six weeks to teach the girls to be soul winners. At the end of six weeks the boys invited three other boys to go soul winning and the girls invited three of their girl friends in the church to go with them. Later these new teams also divided. The high school group grew from 13 to 90 in eight months and it is not unusual to have 50 teenagers go soul winning on Thursday evening. These teenagers have been the incentive and example for the other visitation programs in the church. Dr. Hand has an extremely good relationship with his teenagers. Bus loads go to camp at the Bill Rice Ranch in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Seven of the current graduating class are pre-enrolled in Tennessee Temple Schools and Baptist Bible College. Mr. David Goon, the chairman of the deacons, and his wife, Geraldine, are sponsors of the youth group. The Goon family practically live with the teenagers. It is their philosophy that teenagers need each other constantly and they strive to treat them as a family.

Whereas most churches have the bus workers visiting on Saturday morning, those from Emmanuel Baptist Church are out calling on Saturday afternoon. When asked the reason, Dr. Hand states, "I want to be the last person to get to that person before he goes to bed on Saturday night."

## **Soul Winning in Emmanuel**

Mrs. Susan Garver was church secretary and had been a mainstay in the church. She saw regular church members that she knew professed to be saved were going to see the pastor and getting saved. Dr. Hand had preached, "Draw a circle around yourself and give the date of your salvation." One day she said, "I am through lying. It is hard to admit. I am a Sunday School teacher and work in the church office, but pride is not worth going to Hell for." On April 9, 1971, she walked three flights of stairs to the pastor's office (it seemed like miles) and talked with the pastor. He explained salvation to her simply and completely and she accepted Christ as her Saviour. Mr. Garver was soon wonderfully saved, also.

Pastor Hand has a unique desire to lead men to Jesus Christ. He won ten husbands of ladies who attend Emmanuel Baptist Church regularly the first six weeks at Marion, Ohio. Mrs. Natalie Clark was one of the church members who requested Pastor Hand to visit her husband. He was a railroad engineer with a mean streak who threw things around the house. When Pastor Hand walked into the living room of their home, Lefty Clark, Mrs. Clark's husband, who had been preparing to shave, came out of the bathroom with soap on his face. "Bud, I want to tell you one thing. When I was a kid, Mother crammed religion down my throat, and since I'm old enough to do what I want, I want no part of that stuff." Dr. Hand fired back at him: "I don't believe that garbage. Your mother made you wash your face and I see you still do that!" Lefty laughed and said, "Go ahead and talk." He finished shaving and came back into the living room. In about 15 minutes Lefty received Jesus Christ. Now he goes soul winning with his pastor and is one of the ushers in the church. Mrs. Clark is a Sunday School teacher.

After Dr. Hand came to Marion, he still went to other cities to speak concerning the bus ministry. After six months in Marion, he recalls with a chuckle, "I began to listen to my own preaching." The church then had five buses and brought in an average of 200 pupils each week. In February, 1971, he preached an evening sermon on the ministry of Sunday School buses, laying out his vision of reaching the city. Six people came down the aisle volunteering to build a bus route. After they were all forward, he said to the congregation, "This is the last point in my sermon. We need six buses and each bus will cost about \$1,000.00." Before Dr. Hand left the auditorium that night one man gave him \$3,200.00. In the next few days two other families gave \$1,000.00 each and two ladies gave \$500.00 each. He had his six buses with \$200.00 to spare. Now the church has 15 bus routes, which bring between 500 and 600 riders each week.

A critic pointed out to Dr. Hand that 67% of the people on buses was a large ratio. He replied, "I encourage all my people to ride buses. I'd like to see 100 percent of my Sunday School pupils ride the buses; then no one would go home before preaching."

## **The Pastor**

Dr. Charles Hand is an unlikely candidate for revolutionizing a work for Christ. Such a work, if it is done at all, is usually by some young fireball just out of Bible school or college. Dr. Hand is not young as pastors go. He celebrated his 45th birthday shortly after assuming the pastorate. Neither did he receive his know-how in the seminary. In the years immediately after World War II, after having served in the Seabees, Mr. Hand went into the automobile business with his father. The business world did not bring satisfaction though he was known to be the shrewdest appraiser in his area. He attended Midwestern University in Wichita Falls, Texas, planning to teach math and history at the secondary level. He found that teaching did not look as interesting, and decided to go back into business.

It was at that point that he met Dr. Jack Hyles who won him to Christ. To overcome his lack of background in Christian work, Dr. Hand spent years of studying, reading and observing, until today he is recognized as an authority in some realms of Christian work. His doctorate is an honorary one but he says that in counting his study hours in the years since his conversion, he finds that he could have had earned doctorates in two unrelated fields but adds hurriedly, "I'd rather have what I have." He gives Dr. Jack Hyles credit for much that he knows about Sunday

School and church organization. He tells everyone, “First Baptist Church was my seminary and Dr. Jack Hyles was my seminary president long before there was a Hyles-Anderson College.”

## Conclusion

Dr. Hand gives his people in Marion the credit for the booming growth of Emmanuel Baptist Church. “If I had to drive the buses, only one would run. If I had to keep the nursery, it would not open because I have to preach.” He indicates he can only do one job at a time and needs a multitude of helpers. “I didn’t choose this church,” explains Pastor Hand. “The people called me to lead them to reach this community. I can’t take the credit for what we are doing; it goes to the people and to Jesus. But I take the blame for failure.” The work done in Marion, Ohio, should be a source of encouragement to thousands of preachers. In a recent sermon he told his people, “I am not a Dr. Jack Hyles and do not see me changing America. I am not a Jerry Falwell who can pull 20,000 people to a gospel service. I’m not trying to shake a state. I’m not even trying to shake a county. I am trying to take one small pocket city in the middle of Ohio and shake it for Christ. This is my home. I am no longer a Texan. God has seen fit to make me a Buckeye too. Let’s build a Christian city where our children and grandchildren can live with a measure of Christian influence.”

Marion, Ohio, should be a difficult town for the gospel ministry. At 38,000 it is fairly small. It is not a Southern town up North, nor are there many transients. According to reports, only six families a month move into Marion. Most of the residents have lived in Marion all of their lives. Emmanuel was an old stable church in an old stable town. The members didn’t believe masses could be won to Jesus Christ. One leader said to Pastor Hand, “If you had told me we would baptize more than 58 last year, I would have said, ‘You can’t do it.’” But the church has baptized that many every *month* since Dr. Hand became pastor.

Dr. Hand was asked when he would be satisfied. His answer was profound: “In this town of 38,000 people, I will be satisfied when we have a membership of 38,000 and they all come every Sunday.” The thrilling thing about the revolutionizing of this church is that much of the work is done by people who were members prior to Pastor Hand’s coming. He grins and says, “Who said you can’t teach old dogs new tricks?”

## Chapter Thirteen

### ***Fellowship Free Will Baptist Church Durham, N. C. Lonnie Graves, Pastor***

#### **“The Latest Answer to Prayer in the Life of a Miracle Church”**

The latest miracle in the life of Fellowship Free Will Baptist Church—known as “a miracle church”—is the location, purchase and building of a new church complex on the expressway around Durham, North Carolina. *The Sword of the Lord* was first to call Fellowship Free Will Baptist the miracle church, because of the miraculous conversion of Lonnie Graves, pastor, the supernatural preservation that God exercised in his life, his unbelievable call into the ministry, and the phenomenal growth and answers to prayer in the local congregation.

*The miracle of the pastor's birth.*—Lonnie Graves was born in Tennessee in a gypsy tent—he doesn't know the place or the date. He was born in an old iron bed with the help of "some old granny." For two years he slept in bed with his parents, but when the next child came along, he was pushed out to sleep on the dirt floor on a quilt, until his teen-age years, when he slept in the front seat of the car.

*God's supernatural preservation.*—As a boy, he helped his father repair stoves; but, since gypsies made a business of "gypping" people, young Lonnie learned well. When they got into a home, the father convinced the lady that rust would ruin her cookstove and he guaranteed its prevention by "graphiting" the whole stove for \$12.95—at the cost to him of a ten-cent bottle of stove polish. Throughout childhood young Graves did not learn to read or write, spending only three days in school in his life.

By age 10 he drank his first beer, learned to play cards, shoot dice; by age 15 he owned his first pistol and the following year, robbed his first store.

Deep within his heart, the young gypsy yearned for a better life and, at age 18, joined the army, thinking that the uniform would make him like all the other young men. There he was given his first pair of underwear, and for the first time he slept between white sheets, which made him feel like he was sleeping in a hospital.

In the Second World War he saw front lines and, without any scruples, he "killed everything that got in front of me without any mercy whatsoever." According to his testimony, "I shot men down while they were begging for mercy to get them a doctor; I robbed them of their possessions while they were dying." Graves was the most decorated man in his outfit, reaching the rank of platoon sergeant, and was wounded one time.

After the war, he settled in North Carolina, married and began to work for a living. He wanted a house, but didn't have credit or finances, so he decided to build his own, first going out and watching how other men did it. Of course, young Graves worked on Sunday, until a neighbor told him, "If you will not, I will come over and help you." The following Monday, that Christian neighbor was there. Other neighbors came to work on the house, the men inviting him to church. During this time Graves lived with his mother-in-law, who took his young daughter to Sunday School every week. After he moved into the house, his daughter requested, "I want to go to Sunday School." His wife reminded him of his obligation to the men who had helped him build his home. He decided to go, even though he did not like the idea of "school." He had been beaten two of the three days he had attended. At 26 years of age, he took a tablet, pencil, and decided to fake writing; he still could not read or write. He thought to himself, "If anybody asks me for my paper, I'll bust 'em in the teeth." According to his testimony, he sat on the back row and a lady Sunday School teacher poured, the gospel into him. "I didn't like it," but he went back for several weeks.

Then the church had a revival, and when he attended he was "mad enough to fight, because the preacher talked about me like I was a dog." His Sunday School teacher fasted four days and nights for his salvation. During the second week of revival, the evangelist showed up at his home and asked, "Son, do you want to be saved?" To which Graves replied, "More than anything else in the world."

After his conversion, when people heard his testimony, he began to get invitations to speak at other churches, to tell of his gypsy life and salvation. Shortly thereafter he told his pastor, "I believe God is calling me to preach." But the pastor told him he would have to go to college. He learned to read by recognizing the shapes of words in his Bible. The next pastor in the church asked him to go soul winning, and after they finished that evening Graves began to cry, "God is calling me to preach and I can't go to college." That second pastor told him to "go through any door God opens," then he suggested that Graves start holding Friday night cottage prayer meetings. Graves began going to different homes, preaching the Word of God, and people began getting saved.

There was a closed church on Old Oxford Road about five miles in the country out of Durham; a friend wanted to reopen it and planned to preach on a Sunday evening, but found he couldn't go. When he asked, Graves consented to go, even though he had had two jaw teeth pulled that Friday. Afterward, people asked him to come back the next Sunday evening. Then they began to talk about forming a congregation. Graves told them, "You vote for me to come as your pastor, then vote to dissolve the church and we will organize a new one." He passed a tablet around and instructed them, "Write your name in *pencil* if you want to be a member." During the week, he visited people to determine if they were qualified; when he found some drinking or cursing, he rubbed their names out. If they were good people, he inked them in.

The young church began meeting in November 1955 and rented a building for \$25 a month, a small 25 x 30-foot room which would barely hold 75 people. On the first Sunday that they had Sunday School he stood before eight people. The church was organized the following March as the Fellowship Free Will Baptist Church, with 47 charter members. The small congregation struggled for the first few years. The pastor cut wood so the ladies could prepare Brunswick stew and sell it. On another occasion, the ladies begged merchandise from neighborhood stores for an auction. As Graves stood under the auction tent, listening to the drunken auctioneer, he realized, "There must be a better way." The conservative preachers of Durham got together and asked Dr. John R. Rice to come and teach them how to build a church. It was there the gypsy preacher learned teacher standards, visitation, the Spirit-filled life and what God expected of a New Testament church. After hearing Dr. Rice, Graves indicates, "I went out on the side of a hill, knelt under an oak tree, and told God, 'If You give me power, I'll do right if the stars fall.'" There was no unusual feeling, no tingling, so Graves continued, "I made up my mind I would clean up the church and follow the New Testament."

People began getting saved, and within two years attendance reached 300. The little building was stretched; a lean-to was added on the west, the walls were pushed out to the east. Graves knew that the church would have to be larger. He bought \$15.00 worth of model airplane sticks and built a miniature church on a large sheet of plywood. He put it on the communion table in front of the congregation and told his people this was the kind of church they needed. An architect was willing to draw plans from the model. A young man stood up in the congregational meeting and asked, "How much money will the new building cost?" Graves answered, "\$60,000." Then the young speaker asked, "How much do we have?" The treasurer answered, "\$2.60." Graves had never heard of a building fund and knew very little about bonds. The young man finally answered, "Pastor, do you believe we can do it?" Graves answered, "Yes," and the man moved that they begin that evening making plans to build. Seven months later the large new church was built, surrounding the old church. The foundation was poured around the existing

foundation and the single-story building was lifted to two stories. Over 1,000 were seated in the second auditorium on many occasions.

In 1968, the church needed more room. This time Graves designed on paper a new auditorium that would hold over 2,000 people, and in 1972, the Sunday School averaged 1,218, the 92nd largest in the nation, according to *Christian Life* magazine.

*Miracle location.*—Graves tried to buy land in the present location but couldn't. Only then did he realize that he had the right building, but the wrong location. Next to a railway track, on a country road, it takes 45 minutes to an hour for all the people to get out of the parking lot after a service. Many visitors will not come back because of the inconvenience.

Graves tried to buy land on Interstate-85, but he figured \$20,000 per acre was too much. One day his wife pointed out a piece of property on Bypass 70, a four-lane expressway, a location that proved better than I-85, because it has four times as much traffic. Graves purchased 13 acres which, from the expressway, appeared to have gullies, swamps and, according to one member, "You'd sink to your knees." When the member complained, Graves answered, "For every gully there's a mountain, and we'll scrape it all even." They paid \$70,000 for the land and \$17,000 for grading—a total of \$87,000, still much cheaper than could be purchased anywhere else. The church sold \$4,000 of pulpwood off the land. A year later, the land was valued at \$244,000.

The new location will seat over 3,000, has 26 public-school-sized classrooms, a cafeteria for 200 pupils, a junior church for 300.

When Graves tried to move the church, he couldn't get a building permit from the city of Durham. During this time he testified, "I thought Heaven was shut up; for the first time in my ministry, I couldn't go forward." He would wake up at night and pray, yet felt God was not answering. The city turned him down for seven months, because there was no guarantee of sewerage. Finally, through the help of Ronald Creech, president of Capitol Church Bonds, who sold his bonds, the preacher went to see the mayor, but also did his homework and took a letter of promise from the Highway Commission to put in the service road on the expressway. He had his permit the next week.

The church needed to sell \$500,000 in bonds for the move to the new property. Graves signed a contract with Capitol Church Bonds of Durham on December 26, 1972. Forty sales teams for the bonds were organized by the bond company within the church, and within five days they got promises for the entire bond issue; the largest order was \$100,000. Because the neighborhood trusts Graves and knows that he is going to stay at Fellowship Free Will Baptist Church, they oversold the bond issue by \$300,000, a credit to his integrity and the organizational efficiency of Ronald Creech. On New Year's Eve, the actual selling of the bonds took place and, according to the Durham *Herald*, the bonds were sold that night in 27 minutes.

*Miracle School.*—The Fellowship Christian School was begun in an unusual way. Two years ago, the last week of December, the church voted to start a Christian school, but at that time Graves didn't have teachers in mind nor a principal. Yet three weeks later they began, in the middle of the year (a time when a school should not begin) with over 200 students, teachers and

complete preparation for the second semester. This year, the Fellowship Christian School has Grades 1 through 12, with 260 students enrolled for the year. Graves sees 700 to 800 students in the new location and wider outreach.

*Fellowship Hour.*—The church reaches out through three radio programs a week, the adult Bible class is broadcast live over WTIK, where Associate Pastor Norman Adams teaches over what is called “The Radio Bible Class.” The Sunday morning service is taped and played at 1:00 over the same station. Then the Wednesday night service is broadcast over live radio. The Fellowship Hour also is viewed over Channel 5 in Raleigh and Channel 12 in New Bern, North Carolina, Graves is known for his continuous sermons. Recently a mother tried to get her son to come to Sunday dinner and he replied, “Wait till he finishes this point.” The mother answered, “Come immediately. It will take him two weeks to finish that point.” She was right.

The church has 14 buses, 12 routes. Last year, it averaged 352 riders per Sunday. That aggressive ministry under Eddie Goddard has grown considerably. In the next year and on the new property Graves plans to add a bus, barn, a full-time mechanic, and go into an expanded ministry.

*The greatest miracle.*—The greatest miracle in the church is the story of Lonnie Graves, how God took a man who had nothing and made him the pastor of a large, aggressive New Testament church. Five or six years ago, Graves heard a preacher criticize, “Jack Hyles will come and preach in your church, but he won’t let you preach in his church.” Graves had Hyles preach for him and felt that the criticism was out of place. The gypsy preacher felt it was a deep privilege to have Dr. Hyles in his pulpit. A week later, Hyles phoned and asked him to come and preach at Hammond.

Before Graves was saved, he gypped people, and now his greatest desire is to “do right.” Graves testified, “Now I don’t want to do anything that is crooked. If I do the right thing, God will bless the church and cause us to grow.”

The people love Lonnie Graves. A salesman walked into a nearby store and complained to the manager, “I see the preacher is building again; I guess he will hit you up for more money.” The slight elderly man pointed his boney finger on the salesman’s chest and said, “That’s twice I’ve heard you criticize my preacher. Don’t let me hear you do it again.”

Graves believes that, just as the gypsies never gyp a man in a big way, just a little here and there, so he must do right in the small ways. He says, “The little foxes spoil the vines,” and indicates we should do the little things in the right way for the blessing of God. Never do something tomorrow that can be done today.

## Chapter Fourteen

**Emmanuel Baptist Church**  
**Pontiac, Michigan Tom Malone, Pastor**

**“Thirty Years of Growth and Miracles”**

“From tavern to temple” aptly describes the background of the location of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Pontiac, Michigan. The transformation began the day Tom Malone took his wife to lunch at a “longest-hot-dog” drive-in. As they got in their car to leave, she suggested, “Why don’t we go home another way?” Because Malone, a pastor of a small Sunday School mission on the north side of Pontiac, was looking for a church site that day in 1942, he was quick to spot a “For Sale” sign. It was on Castle Inn Tavern on Telegraph Road. As they got out of their car, parted the weeds, and looked around the building, God seemed to say to Tom Malone, “This is the place for the church.”

The Malones returned home, knelt and prayed, then called the realtor. Within two hours he had signed the document, knowing that thirteen businesses had previously used the building and one of the most infamous taverns in the city had most recently occupied it. Police reported raids there several times, backing up the paddy wagons to the front door to haul away those arrested.

Malone needed \$1800 down payment but could only raise \$100 by mortgaging his furniture. He moved into the building immediately. He began knocking on doors, witnessing to everyone he saw, and preached on Sunday. Within three weeks before the abstract giving him possession of the property was finalized, God had supplied the money. The first week, 30 gathered on the folding chairs set up on the dance floor, and within eight weeks 250 saturated the converted preaching hall. The band shell formed a perfect choir loft, and from the very beginning the church has enjoyed outstanding music through the leadership of Mrs. Joyce Malone, who still leads the choir.

Malone went on the radio almost immediately with a daily broadcast and continued to preach the gospel to the city for nearly twenty years, until the station moved to Detroit. To this day Dr. Malone testifies that the church has grown because of this deep concern to reach the lost, and concentrated visitation. Within four weeks, he had organized a bus visitation program and had four bus routes reaching parts of Pontiac with the gospel, making his probably the oldest continuous bus ministry in America. Many other larger churches that began with “convenience bus service” later dropped that ministry and only recently returned with evangelistic bus outreach. Emmanuel Baptist Church now has 700 bus workers (including drivers, captains and visitors) who operate 40 buses per Sunday and bring in approximately 1200 riders per week. The church has had a high of 3100 on the buses; in the near future Malone plans to average 2,000 riders per week.

Malone realizes that the church has been built on visitation and still puts his main emphasis on door-to-door soul winning. There are four organized programs per week, with two meals of fellowship, so that the people eat together, fellowship together, then go out and serve God together. The largest visitation program witnessed 600 who went calling, resulting in 167 decisions in the home; the following Sunday 156 were baptized. In the early days Malone listed



in the newspaper the number of visits made the previous week. During September, 1953, the members made 5,973 soul-winning calls.

Miracles in the life of Tom Malone began before he started the work in Pontiac. Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, he was reared by his grandparents on a red-clay farm in Alabama. As a boy he attended the Isbell Methodist Church, a little over a mile from the farmhouse. The second Sunday of August was their traditional time for the evangelistic meeting, but in 1935 the pastor received a post card from the evangelist, cancelling his coming. The pastor preached, and at age 19 Malone went forward and knelt at an old-fashioned altar and received Jesus Christ as his Saviour. Two weeks later he went to Bob Jones University in Cleveland, Tennessee. He testifies that the influence of Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., and the university did more to prepare him for the ministry than any other factor. Dr. Malone has served on the board of directors of Bob Jones University and he received a doctor's degree from them in June, 1954.

After graduation he went into evangelism for a year and then took a Methodist-Protestant church in Leonard, Michigan, described as the least progressive city in the United States during the past 50 years. Within six months Malone filled the church and then answered the call to come to Pontiac. He has been at the Emmanuel Baptist Church for 30 years and lived in the same house for 24 years, giving credence to the statement that a young man can build a great church for God simply by settling down and devoting his life to saturating his city with the gospel.

When the members were asked why the church was successful, many of them point to Malone's hard work and visitation. Another indicated his consistent outstanding biblical preaching. Malone prints his sermons in the *Baptist Vision*, mailed to some 10,000 preachers around America who eagerly await his sermons printed in their entirety. Rev. Tom Malone, Jr., testifies that the success of his father is due to the fact that "he builds greater sermons from scratch than any other preacher alive." When the senior Malone was asked what was the most thrilling victory he had had in the past 31 years, he testified, "When God called my son into the ministry under my preaching, and now Tom is an associate pastor in the church." Historians might feel that the greatest accomplishment of the church is the 200 young men who have gone out of Emmanuel Baptist Church to start and/or pastor other churches throughout the world.

The Emmanuel Baptist Church was one of the first to start Sword of the Lord conferences, and from the time of its beginning has had nationally known speakers in its pulpit. Dr. John R. Rice has been a guest preacher in the church for years. Emmanuel Baptist Church has also been a leader in holding Sunday School conventions for other churches throughout Michigan.

Tom Malone has stood firm for the gospel over the years. At one time one faction in the church did not want a pastor-led evangelistic ministry and began gathering forces to get rid of Malone. The agitators wanted the church like the average American Protestant church, typically dead. They called a prayer meeting and were actually praying to get rid of Tom Malone. He felt he should go to the meeting, since he was pastor, and slipped into the room as the people were praying. He knelt beside one of his workers, an educated, effective teacher, and heard him beg, "God, I want you to kill that man. I want you to destroy him." There were shouts of "Amen" in the room. Malone testified, "I got up and walked out of the room with fear and trembling-and a broken heart. I was not walking presumptuously, but trying to walk in the will of God." He knew

that his church must follow the Scriptures; he knew his ministry should be evangelistic, and that is why he had sacrificed his money, his life and his time to build a soul-winning church that would reach Pontiac. The dissenters left, but Malone continues in 1972 with the kind of ministry he founded in 1942. When asked if he was bitter, Malone replied, "How could one be bitter in the face of God's goodness and grace? We have had thousands of victories and a multitude of blessings."

Progress has not come easily. When Malone wanted to double his auditorium, the estimated cost was \$220,000 for the three-story addition. When he went to get the building permit, it cost \$222.00—every cent that was in the building fund. He paid \$222.00 just to get a card to tack up on the job, saying he was about to erect a building he had no money to finance. He began building, with the help of the men. One deacon testified, "There is not a block or brick in this building that Malone has not handled with his own two hands." A man gave the church a truck, and Malone drove the truck with supplies after he preached on the radio. He carried brick up and down the scaffold so the masons could lay the brick, and one said, "Tom Malone is the best tender I have ever had."

During the winter a fierce snowstorm ripped into the half-finished building and the tools were exposed to the weather. Malone could get none of his men to help him cover them, but finally located a Negro man who came in the blizzard to assist. Malone tells of the Negro man's dropping a heavy two-by-six off the scaffold on the pastor's head, burying him in the snow. The black worker jumped from the platform, groped through the snow to find Malone, stood him up and brushed him off and asked, "Did it hurt?" Malone later declared, "That was the most foolish question I was ever asked in my life—and at the same time, one of the most trying moments." He later testified, "Standing there waist-deep in snow, my head throbbing, I began to weep and say, 'O God, is this the ministry?' There came back from Heaven the assurance from the heart of God, 'What I have started in Pontiac, I will finish.'"

This is the miracle of the man of God who determined to reach his city for God. From the church has come Midwestern Baptist College, begun 18 years ago, with over 500 full-time students and 200 evening school students this year studying the Word of God. In the past 30 years there have been over 30,000 people who have made first-time professions of faith—a miracle in itself.

Soul winning has done more than reach people for Christ and cause attendance to grow; it has paid off financially also. A man requested Malone, "Brother Tom, I have been listening to you on the radio. From childhood my sister and I have been members of a church here in Pontiac, but no one will come and visit us." When Malone arrived at the home, he found the lady ashen-faced, the odor of illness in the room unbearable. Standing near her was a squatty gray-haired man, nearly 70 years of age. Malone led them both to Jesus Christ. He later found out that the man was well-to-do, when he put \$20,000 into the ministry. One day the man came and said, "There are 321/2 acres of ground a few blocks from the church and you ought to have them." Malone answered, "I have no money." The man handed Malone \$5,000 to buy the land. Today the church has 45 acres on which Midwestern Baptist College is built, simply because Malone was willing to go anywhere and lead people to Jesus Christ.

Emmanuel Baptist Church is ministry to people. The first family that Malone reached were the Johnsons. The father, a barber, was led to the Lord, along with his whole family, and young Tom Malone baptized them. Later, Malone endured the grief of burying their beautiful young daughter. Farther along in his ministry, he saw their other children graduate from Bob Jones University. According to Dr. Malone, "Praise God, the converts have continued with Christ over the years." People have come from little shacks by the railroad, they have come from mansions, they have come from offices, they have come from farms in surrounding areas. But, most important, they have come to Christ.

Many of the congregation count the greatest victory as the 4,670 who attended Sunday School on February 6, 1972. This year the church plans a "Feed the 5,000" celebration for its 30th anniversary, when they will gather the largest crowd in the history of the church. Dr. Malone is projecting a \$30,000 offering when he challenges his people to "Change places with God." He announced recently that most people give God 10 per cent and keep 90 per cent. He said, "Let's see how we can get along with God's 10 per cent." Malone plans to give \$15,000 of the offering that day to missions. Last year the church gave \$100,000 to foreign missions. Last year the church baptized 1,193, the fourth most in the nation, according to *The Sword of the Lord*. Malone wants to baptize 200 on his 30th anniversary, and his visitation program is planned to that end.

## THE FUTURE

Malone sees explosive growth within the near future. He projects a weekly attendance of 3,000 this fall. This is a distinct possibility, for within three months a new building will be completed that will seat an extra 900 for Sunday School. The church is just finishing a \$600,000 expansion program and its total indebtedness is only \$300,000 out of total assets of \$3 million. The continued growth of Midwestern Baptist College will contribute to the growth of the church, along with a new print shop; the new special services and a continued program of personal evangelism make the future bright.

## Chapter Fifteen

***South Sheridan Baptist Church,  
Denver, Colorado Ed Nelson, Pastor***

### **"Mr. Fundamentalist Pastors the Fastest Growing Church in the Rocky Mountains"**

The fastest growing church in the Rocky Mountains is pastored by Dr. Ed Nelson, known throughout the area as "Mr. Fundamentalist." The rapid expansion of the South Sheridan Baptist Church, Denver, destroys the false theory that a church must soften its stand on separation to attract modern Americans who are pleasure-inclined and self-indulgent. In contrast, the fundamentalist stand doesn't hinder the church's outreach, but helps it. Sunday School has increased by 1,000 in the past three years and prospects for future outreach are bright. On

September 24 this past fall a high of 2,633 was recorded in Sunday School, and the church has averaged over 1700 during the fall. Last year the church was the 79th largest Sunday School in the nation, according to the *Christian Life* survey.

The church was running 140 in Sunday School in 1960 when Nelson became pastor and has grown at its same location, buying houses, service stations, individual lots and acreage. The church belonged to the Conservative Baptist Association, but under Nelson voted itself out in 1962 because of the compromise among Conservative Baptists in the state. In addition to separation from apostasy, Nelson has been rigid on separation from sin and, as a result, according to one observer, "Most preachers will not fellowship with South Sheridan because of its separationist stand." The boys have clean haircuts and Nelson preaches that the girls should wear their dresses at the middle of the knee. No girl is permitted on the platform with a short dress. Also, the church takes a stand against movies, dancing, smoking and drinking.

"Mr. Fundamentalist" was led to the Lord through the preaching of the grandfather of fundamentalism, Dr. Bob Jones, Sr. Ed Nelson was born and reared seventy miles north of Fort Collins, Colorado, and was working as a sugar beet farmer when his mail carrier invited him to come to a revival. Nelson testifies that he went out of respect for the mailman, got mad at the preaching and hated the service, yet went back the following night and each night after that until he went forward at the end of the week and gave himself to Jesus Christ.

One event in Nelson's life that brought him to realize he needed the Lord was a farm accident with a runaway team of horses, in which he was almost killed. Because of injuries, he couldn't get in the armed services. When Dr. Bob Jones, Jr., came to Fort Collins, Colorado, for a revival meeting, young Nelson was one of the few young men in the church and was asked to lead the singing. He testifies, "I couldn't sing, but I did the best I could." Dr. Bob, Jr., told him, "Son, come to Bob Jones and get training." According to Nelson, he shrugged the suggestion off, until Sunday morning a lady approached him at the platform after the service and announced, "Ed, you've been called to preach." Young Ed slapped his knee and laughed, but she was unmoved and asked, "Will you pray about it?" That evening at the service he went forward, saying, "I'll do something for God," yet not surrendering to preach. The following morning before daybreak, Ed was in the sugar beet field and the burden of the ministry came upon him. He got down on his knees and told God he would be a preacher. That was late fall and he enrolled for second semester at Bob Jones College in Cleveland, Tennessee, which accepted him at the last minute.

According to Nelson, "I went to Bob Jones still mad at God and wanting some way to get out of the ministry." Later that fall, in a special afternoon chapel, Dr. John R. Rice spoke on the topic, "Putting Bread Before the Family," and said, "Every person ought to be a soul winner." That afternoon Nelson told God he didn't know about-becoming a preacher but he wanted to be a soul winner. The next week young Ed folded 2,000 tracts and, on a trip to Chattanooga, passed out tracts in the train station. He saw six men in black suits and black bow ties, carrying musical instrument cases, so he gave each of them a tract. As the gentlemen stood reading the tracts, he realized, "This crowd is large enough for preaching," so he stood on a bench and began preaching on Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." Many other gentlemen with black suits and musical instruments gathered. Nelson's first sermon was short-about seven minutes-and at the conclusion he had his audience bow their heads and gave an invitation. No one came

forward, but after the impromptu meeting, one of the men came and shook young Ed's hand, saying, "I'm Sigmund Romberg and I appreciate your enthusiasm." (Mr. Romberg was the leader of a big-name swing band at that time out of New York.) Ed went on to earn the BA degree from Bob Jones University in 1949.

Between 1949 to 1960, Ed was in evangelistic work, holding meetings throughout the United States. On several occasions he took a tent into a new neighborhood, won souls and gathered a congregation, called a pastor for them, and moved on to the next meeting.

When Nelson was considering coming to South Sheridan, Evangelist Bill Rice wrote him and told him not to leave the evangelistic ministry and jokingly said, "God will bust your head open." Nelson wrote his good friend back, "If God busts my head open, all right-but don't you help Him out, please!" Six years later when Dr. Bill Rice held a meeting for the church, he announced, "I know *now* that you were led of the Lord in coming to this church."

Nelson came to South Sheridan Baptist Church on the last Sunday of May, 1960, and told the people, "I will stay 25 years and we will be a large church that will win many lost people to the gospel." Nelson did not set numerical goals at that time. He testifies, "I had to overcome the small-church concept; some of our people were frightened with the prospect of largeness." Nelson did away with the WMS and several cumbersome organizations in the church. He felt that a committee-bound church was not according to the New Testament pattern which taught a simplified organization. Dr. Rice's book, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls*, did more to fashion his church administration principles than any other source. Immediately Nelson taught the people that he was the pastor, similar to the president of a corporation, and he would lead the flock of God. However, the congregation would always retain the final vote, as usual in Baptist churches.

Church growth was slow at the beginning, and increased about 75 the first year. Nelson had announced early in his ministry that they would not cooperate with any ecumenical crusade. He was out of the pulpit for nine Sundays, having been operated on for a ruptured disc. During that interval, the Billy Graham team announced a banquet to plan a crusade. The church's song leader encouraged people to attend the banquet. A deacon came to Nelson (head of the only family to vote against his call to the church) and told his pastor, "I don't agree, but we shouldn't have an undermining situation in the church." The deacon agreed to back Nelson. Nelson came to the next prayer meeting and preached from a chair. He spoke on the ecumenical movement and reminded the folks, "Your vote for me as pastor was a vote against the ecumenical movement." He didn't tell anyone to get out, but he did comment, "I think there are churches where you will be happier." There were no hard feelings, but ten families got up and walked out. According to Nelson, "From that time on, we began to grow." Nelson went to the families and told them, "You may leave us, but I won't quit loving you." And there was no bitterness from the split.

Each year thereafter the church grew about 100, until the last three years the church grew over the previous year, respectively, 269, 370, and 450 in 1971.

Nelson indicated that Bob Jones, Sr., had a great influence on him. One of the principles he picked up from Dr. Bob was, "The way to keep from having trouble-is to have trouble." By

that he said, Don't run from a problem but face it, and in the long run you will have less trouble. Recently many of the church families attended a high school football game instead of coming to a missions conference. After the game, the families came by the church, and Nelson went to them immediately and told them that they "had their priorities mixed up. . .they should have been in church." Instead of running people out of the church, his directness and honesty attract a following.

## CITY-WIDE OUTREACH

1. *Sunday School Buses*—Last year the church had 17 buses and 24 routes bringing in an average of 500 per week. This fall they have 22 buses and 30 routes, and bring in 750 per week.

2. *Deaf Ministry*—Four years ago this ministry was begun and now 30 people a week are reached with the gospel.

3. *The Retarded*—South Sheridan Baptist Church has one of the largest ministries to retarded in America, with an average of 180 in Sunday School. They had a high day of 220 recently. The church works with the Ridge Home and recently received a letter of appreciation from the State of Colorado, stating, "South Sheridan Baptist Church has done something for the mentally retarded children that no one else has ever done."

4. *Keen-Agers*—Approximately 80 senior citizens meet for fellowship, Bible study, and lunch during the week in a ministry to this neglected aspect of society.

5. *The Mile-Hi Evangelist*—The church prints and circulates to 5500 people The Mile-Hi Evangelist, showing the work of God at the South Sheridan Baptist Church. The church has a fully equipped print shop that turns out 2 1/2 million copies of printed matter annually.

6. *Radio*—Six days a week Ed Nelson chats with the city about the work of God in South Sheridan on a program entitled "Wonderful Life Hour." Also, the Sunday morning church service is broadcast live on KRKS.

7. *Organized Visitation*—There are four programs each week: on Thursday morning the ladies visit; Thursday evening, there is an all-church visitation; Saturday morning and afternoon the bus workers visit their routes; and Saturday evening, the young people have soul-winning visitation.

8. *Spanish Ministry*—Mr. Gus Salazar translates each service into Spanish, while the Spanish-speaking people, with headphones, sit in the auditorium with the congregation, hearing the message in their own tongue. Salazar, a grocery clerk, sits two stories above the auditorium behind a two-way glass and repeats the sermon into Spanish, just as interpreting is done at the United Nations. The individual can sit in the congregation and enjoy the fellowship and enthusiasm, yet hear the message in his own language.

9. *Light of Life*—George Hayes, a fireman for the city and deacon of the church, leads a ministry to reach hippies in a nearby section of the city, where a community center is rented each Wednesday evening. One of the ministers on the staff preaches the gospel service. They have

won to the Lord a number of hippies, such as Mike Dolente, a young man arrested many times and hooked on drugs to the tune of \$110 a day. Mike's mug shot in the police files showed a bearded, long-haired, dirty hippy; but today Mike is a clean-cut servant of Jesus Christ, superintendent of the Anchor Home for Boys in Mississippi, under the ministry of Brother Lester Roloff.

Roy Lainson also was reached through Light of Life Mission and came the following Sunday wanting to be baptized. Nelson said no, he must have his hair cut and a shave, as an outer expression of his new inner relationship with Christ. The following week Lainson bought a new suit, came clean-shaven, and was baptized. Immediately the ex-hippy announced, "I'm going to make myself available for the draft and obey God and country."

10. *Mission Church*—South Sheridan has been responsible for starting four churches-in Ellicott, Walden, Loveland, and Colorado Springs, Colorado.

11. *The Silver State Baptist Schools*—Nelson confesses he was "pushed" into starting a school but feels it's been one of the greatest influences on his church. Several years ago he was on the board of the Silver State High School that met in facilities donated by Dr. Harvey Springer in Englewood, Colorado. The school had about 30 students, and Nelson put his own children there and was grateful for its impact upon them. He was approached by the board in 1966 and asked to become its president. Immediately, Nelson realized that running a Christian high school was a "salvage operation," because so many young people had been corrupted by the public school system. Immediately he began an elementary school and merged the two schools into one at his church. This year 710 students are enrolled and they are currently in a \$1 million expansion program, with new kitchen, lunch room, classrooms, offices, print shop, music building, gymnasium, and temporary modules to accommodate all of the students. According to proficiency tests, the students at the Silver State Baptist School have a higher average score than those in the public schools.

The present facilities are carpeted throughout; a regal red covers the auditorium and foyer. However, facilities were not always plush. Church began in an old steel Quonset prefab but which, according to Nelson, "heated well and cooled well, but backwards—hot in the summer and too cold in the winter." The Sunday School met down the street in an old chicken house that would accommodate 80 children. When Nelson first came, a family told him that they would not put another dime in the church. They had put \$1,000 in the building fund that had been used for current expenses. The church had borrowed twice to pay current bills and it took Nelson a long time to consolidate and liquidate all of the indebtedness. A deacon told him, "You want to grow, but the people are discouraged. The young pastor came back with a campaign called "Miracle 61." He announced that they were going to build a new building without going into debt. It took them ten months to erect a \$48,000 Sunday School building. The people did their own labor, Nelson went without salary on several occasions, but the building was completed and the struggling congregation felt, "If we can do that, we can do anything." According to Nelson, "The first building was a step of faith that got us going."

Nine years later another financial victory propelled the church into its growth of the last three years. The church had planned to build a new Christian education wing and an auditorium to seat 1700. The small 450-seat auditorium was overflowing, but the quarter of a million bond

program was stymied. Nelson did two things by faith and his congregation followed. The interior of the auditorium was ripped out and two floors built in, doubling the space. Church services were held on the second floor and Sunday School moved into the first-floor rooms. The church was not then running \$10,000 a month, but Nelson challenged the congregation on March 20, 1969, to raise \$10,000 in cash over and above their regular giving in the next 30 days. The congregation voted unanimously, and by April 20 they had \$10,500. The following day they started construction, but the \$10,000 barely paid for excavation. Two days later a Nazarene farmer called and told Nelson he wanted to buy \$33,000 worth of bonds. Nelson drove to his home immediately. By the end of the week, he had sold the entire issue, enabling them to complete the building. For one year their church had been stymied in selling its bonds, but sold them out in one week when they launched out on faith. The church grew by 1,000 in the next three years. Today the church has a foyer bigger than the old auditorium.

The church has an exciting future. Nelson wants to build a ski lodge that will also be a summer camp in the Rockies. Also, he plans to work among the blind and to go on television. This fall they are in a campaign “Win Denver—Start with a Block.” The church is contacting 1,000 new homes a week, and each staff member must go out and knock on 100 new doors a week. The high school will continue to grow and Nelson feels they must use every means to reach the city for Jesus Christ, but never compromise their stand on the fundamentals. Thus, with the blessing of God, the fastest growing church in the Rockies will probably become the largest church in the Rockies.

Nelson plans to reach the goal of “3003 in ‘73” and the way they are going, they probably will.

## Chapter Sixteen

### ***Temple Baptist Church, Kingsport, Tennessee Bill Pennell, Pastor***

#### **“The Largest Church in Town, the Fastest Growing Attendance and the Youngest Pastor”**

Temple Baptist Church, Kingsport, Tennessee, called a 21-year-old pastor, William W. Pennell, ten years ago, and he has grown in spiritual stature as the church has grown in outreach and size. Next month a 1500-seat auditorium will be dedicated, a high day of 1400 has been reached, and this fall the Southwide Baptist Fellowship will meet in the church’s new facilities.

When Pennell was 13, his granddad was preaching a revival at Hibriten Baptist Church and became ill. Maston Bradshaw continued the meeting. Pennell had been to the altar many times to pray, but one night he heard the gospel clearer than ever before, as Bradshaw used the illustration of the children of Israel looking on the brazen serpent. Bradshaw said very simply, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” Young Bill went forward and, according to his testimony, “I trusted Christ as I was going down the aisle, about four pews from the front of the church.”



His persistence that has led to the building of a great church was evident in the way he won his future wife, Betty Jane Sullivan, who worked in a department store. The day after Christmas Bill met her as he went in to exchange a gift. He thought she was pretty and charming and (he found out), above all, she was a Christian. The following day, he asked for a date, but she refused. Persistently, he repeated the procedure the next day. Betty answered, "I'll take a rain check." She had a policy of not going out with a boy unless they went to church first. That Sunday afternoon, Pennell asked her to go with him that evening to the church where he was to preach his first message, Cedar Rock Baptist Church. She accepted, and two years later they became man and wife.

Pennell had two scholarships to North Carolina State College, one in agriculture and the other in furniture designing, which he accepted. Though he had felt God calling him to preach the gospel since he was 15, he rationalized, "I want to get a fine education first." He began college at summer school, but the conviction grew that God wanted him in the ministry. Finally, he stayed up all of one night praying. As the sun rose the following morning, he surrendered: "Lord, if you want me to preach, I'll do it." He at once phoned his mother, who replied, "Are you sure you know what you are talking about?"

Since he was Southern Baptist, Bill Pennell transferred to Mars Hill Junior College, where he felt he would get a good preparation for the ministry, giving up his scholarship and working in the cafeteria to put himself through school. During his second year, he got his first appointment to pastor two miles off the highway on top of a mountain at the Clear Branch Baptist Church, Erwin, Tennessee, where he stayed for over 3 1/2 years, baptized 100 and pushed attendance up to average 169. He attended East Tennessee State College. Pennell feels, "God providentially stopped me from going to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, which might have ruined me spiritually and theologically."

Temple Baptist Church began in November, 1946, when 35 people, fed up with bickering in a local church, began as an Independent church in the home of H. T. Pierce. During the next 16 years, the church had five pastors. One, R. N. Black, agreed to come if the church would join the Southern Baptist Convention, which they did in 1952.

William Pennell was called as pastor in 1962 when Sunday School averaged 151 and they had just completed a \$16,000 year. When he accepted the call, three pastors came by to tell him, "It is a mistake to go to Kingsport, because you cannot build a great soul-winning church there, no one else has done anything." As the church grew in soul-winning fervency, it also grew in numbers and outreach. With that growth came estrangement with the Southern Baptist Convention, so that 8 years later the congregation voted out the Cooperative Program and Southern Baptist literature. The motion indicated, "If apostasy continues, we are coming out of the Southern Baptist Convention." According to Pennell, "We quit giving and quit the Association, and now we are going to let them drop us from their roll." Baptisms for the last two consecutive years were 275 and 301.

Betty Pennell looks back and testifies, "We got our seals for January Bible study, gave to Lottie Moon Offering, had our RA's and GA's and felt we were good Christians." She wept and added, "I was a pastor's wife and couldn't lead a soul to the Lord until after I went to Hyles' Pastors' School." They called the years in the Convention "wasted years."

Pennell had been on an executive committee for Tennessee Southern Baptists and had preached the keynote address for a State Training Union Convention. Friends counseled him not to “mess around with the Independents,” or he would lose his prestige. Pennell answered, “When I saw the literature talking about the ‘Reed Sea’ instead of the ‘Red Sea,’ stating that sun was reflecting off Moses’ burning bush and it was not really burning, and that Jonah *may* not be an historical book, I felt I couldn’t put up with the liberalism.”

Pennell told Dr. B. R. Lakin at the time, “The Independents have nothing to offer me.” To which the elderly statesman replied, “That’s right; the Independents offer you nothing, but God offers you everything. Magnify the Lord, be true to His Word, and trust God alone.” It was hard for Pennell to venture out without denominational publications and committees, yet he knew that God was on his side. Today he confesses, “I am not fighting the Southern Baptist Convention; I’m fighting liberalism and a philosophy that’s wrong.”

The church is known for its strong stand on separation. Pennell led a city campaign against legalized drinking and is known as “the pastor that doesn’t believe in long hair, miniskirts, movies, and dancing.” He also has a strong “God and country” emphasis.

Evangelist Lakin has had a great impact on the church, willing to come when the work was small, though many evangelists only go to large congregations. Pennell recalls how Dr. Lakin sat around the kitchen table with him and talked about Dallas Billington, John Rawlings, Harold Henniger, Beauchamp Vick, and Tom Malone and pointed to Acts 5:42: “And daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to preach and teach Jesus Christ.” In Lakin’s first revival with them, they had 32 professions of faith and a total of 225 on the last day, and chairs down the aisle of the packed house in an afternoon service.

Pennell, a skeptical Southern Baptist preacher, went to a Sword of the Lord Conference in Greenville, South Carolina. He didn’t want to get mixed up with “Pentecostalism,” but when Dr. John R. Rice gave the invitation to come forward and seek the filling of the Spirit, he went to the altar and lay prostrate on the floor, praying for God’s complete filling. Pennell went to Bible lands with Dr. Lakin and Dr. Tom Malone, according to him, “searching for something, praying, ‘Lord, do something.’” One night in the Pilgrim’s Palace Hotel in Jerusalem, he wept for hours by his bed. “I got up and knew that God had met my needs.” It was as though God had outlined what to do. Pennell came home and had Malone and Lakin come for a Bible conference. He began attending Hyles’ Pastors’ Schools. That spring, in his first Sunday School campaign, attendance jumped to over 300 in Sunday School for the first time, and in the next two years the church grew by another 100. In 1970 he heard Dr. John Rawlings speak on the bus ministry at Tennessee Temple Schools. Rawlings said, “Sunday School buses are not transportation, they’re a ministry.” Pennell came home and began preaching, “Go into the highways and byways, that my house may be filled.” One bus ran with 18 riders the first Sunday, but dropped to 8 the next Sunday and struggled for six months. Pennell did not give up. Charles Whitsel became bus director and the next year the bus ministry took off, when they added six buses and, eventually, ten, not paying over \$1,000 each. Now the church averages over 500 on the buses; on a recent Sunday the buses had a high of 761, with Joe Day bringing in 129 and Bill Hamilton, 125, and David McCray with 123.

Pennell had been praying about reaching his city when the manager of radio station WKPT phoned and said he had time available at 12:45 each day for a "Talk with the Pastor" program, telling what God was doing in the church, reading the hospital list and announcing meetings. As Pennell watched cable TV, he noted the cameras spanning time, temperature, and wind direction. He called the manager. "The camera can televise me as easily as the clock," and he began "The Pastor's TV Bible Class." Pennell is probably the first pastor in America to begin a daily 30-minute broadcast. The same manager who had put him on radio called and said, "I will put you on Channel 19 at an unbelievable cost." He has been on a year and a half. During the first year 51 persons phoned to indicate their finding Christ as Saviour through the TV ministry.

Temple Baptist Church is characterized as the largest Sunday School in the city, which has grown the fastest, with the youngest preacher. Pennell was only 21 when called to the church. The people didn't know what to call him. He felt "Pastor" was too dignified and suggested "Preacher Bill," which has stuck to this day. At first he was conscious of his age and never wore sports clothes in the pulpit, indicating his attire was overly conservative, to portray stability. To this day, Pennell wears conservative clothes, out of habit and in respect for the ministry.

But in spite of his youth Pennell has been called "a Hell-fire preacher who yells, pounds the pulpit, cries, and pleads for people to come forward during the invitation." When asked why, he explained, "Because people are dying and going to Hell, and they must be reached," which is not a flippant answer. He preaches with tears in his eyes and pathos in his voice.

Church members visit three times a week: Monday night, Thursday morning and Saturday afternoon. The city is divided into 17 sections, a field captain over each area, with five or six visitors in each area, the same ones working together each week in the same area. They pray together before they go out to make calls in homes. The church receives the newcomers list, plus prospects channeled by a secretary to the field captain.

Thursday morning visitation takes the form of survey work, house to house, entering a home to give the plan of salvation wherever possible. On Saturday evening, the youth go into shopping centers or to street corners, passing out tracts. They led 49 to the Lord this past fall.

Many years ago the Training Union took a decided shift from the Southern Baptist philosophy into a specialized preparation, so that today there are classes for newcomers and new converts, grounding them in the Christian faith. Also, there specialized classes in music, sign language, bus ministry, soul winning and Scripture memorization. In addition, the pastor conducts an auditorium Bible class each Sunday evening. The Sunday School teachers and officers meet in their regular weekly meeting during Training Union.

Next month Temple Baptist Church moves into a new 1500-seat auditorium constructed for old-fashioned Bible preaching. The first bids were \$800,000, but after much prayer and shopping around, they found a contractor who would construct the building for \$414,000. Several banks in town turned down the loan, thinking that the group at Temple Baptist Church were only poor "Pentecostal Baptists." The church voted to sell its own bonds and, through Ambassador Church Finance, Nashville, Tennessee, broke all preceding records by selling

\$600,000 in three days. They had previously decided to sell \$300,000 in the fall and another \$300,000 in this spring, but the response to the bonds brought revival to the church. Members participated by buying bonds and then selling to their friends. The people were enthusiastic, and phone calls poured into the church. Asked why they had such a reception, the pastor indicated, "Our people knew we were ready to expand; we had had chairs down the aisle for three years, both morning and evening."

The new building can be expanded to house attendance of 2,000, with chairs, including 80 in the choir. It is equipped with lighting and wires for TV and will have a large printing facility and offices. Pennell wanted a building where the rich were not embarrassed by a "cheap structure" nor the poor made uneasy by liturgical elegance. He simply wanted a building to be called the house of God.

The Food and Clothing Ministry of Temple Baptist Church is one of the most unique in America, offering not just welfare, but charity in the name of Jesus. The people must attend church in order to receive help, or at least promise they will come to church after they receive clothes or food. The buses stop next to the clothes room, where children can be fitted for shoes, coats or dresses. The name and article of clothing is recorded. In the last two years 1,020 people have been helped in this way through articles supplied by the charity of the people; the church has spent only \$31.00 on this ministry. Pennell says to the folks, "When you go to the store, pick up a little extra food." Dry cleaners in the area give them unclaimed merchandise, and individuals bring money to buy new shoes for children.

Many who ride the buses are poor, and all the children get off the bus and go into Fellowship Hall, where they are given chocolate milk and doughnuts before Sunday School.

Two years ago the 173 adults moved into the pastor's auditorium Bible class to give space for growth. Now the class has doubled under Pennell's teaching. However, the pastor realizes need for small-group teaching; when the new auditorium is completed, there will be six adult classes, three for men and three for women, plus the auditorium Bible class.

When Dr. R. G. Lee preached in Temple church, the choir sang his favorite, "What a Lovely Name." He reached over and whispered to Choir Director Vernon McCray, "Can you sing another verse?" The choir is outstanding for a middle-sized church, and Lee confided to young Pennell, "I'd like for that choir to sing at my wife's funeral."

One of the church's greatest victories was when Sunday School enrollment first went over 500, because a mental barrier was broken. Many didn't think the church could do it; others didn't want it to grow that large. The pastor's wife cried. Breaking the 500 barrier showed the church no longer had a small country atmosphere.

A second victory involved renting the city auditorium for church two years ago. Many people said it was foolish to get the large city auditorium, but the Sunday School filled a building with over 1,000 in attendance. It became evident to the city that the church was growing, and the congregation was not pessimistic. From then on there has been a positive attitude from the business community toward Preacher Bill and the growing Temple Baptist Church.

Another factor that changed Pennell's life was reading *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools* by this author. He indicated, "After I read the book, I got on my knees and repented for having such a small vision." Then, after reading *America's Fastest Growing Churches* by this author, he determined that "If they can do it, so can I. I'll build one of the greatest churches in America."

Temple Baptist has been a little church on the hillside overlooking Kingsport. Now, Pennell indicates it's going to be one of the largest in America: "It's not a matter of *should* we do it, we *must* do it." He adds, "Let's not be pessimistic about reaching our town for Christ; we've done great things in the past, which means we can do greater things in the future."

## Chapter Seventeen

### ***Reimer Road Baptist Church, Wadsworth, Ohio John Powell, Pastor***

#### **"Where Everybody Is Somebody"**

A two-tone green bus lumbered along the country road, turning north into the parking lot of Reimer Road Baptist Church, out in the country some 17 miles from Akron, Ohio. Lettered across each of the 15 buses is "Where Everybody Is Somebody"—more than a motto to this congregation. The church has an ordinary man, Reverend John Powell, as pastor, and the congregation is filled with average people. John Powell doesn't have the best training, he doesn't use the best English, he doesn't have the best pulpit polish, but the people of the church believe he is the best pastor in America. The hundreds he has led to Christ know he is the best soul-winner in America. The rapid growth of the church attests to the fact that God has called him to pastor the congregation.

By all odds, the church shouldn't be growing, because it is out in the country. The church ministers in the shadow of large Akron Baptist Temple, yet keeps winning people to Jesus Christ. Neighborhood officials have passed laws to limit the church's growth, yet the parking lot keeps filling up each Sunday and multitudes keep coming. The power of the gospel is the only explanation for the expansion of the church. If a group of people ever depended on God for growth, this congregation does.

John Powell was born in West Virginia and, at age 14, accepted Christ in the Sand Ridge Methodist Church. He had heard about God, but never had been brought to a decision. During a revival meeting, Hollis Higginbotham put his arm around young John and said, "If you'll go forward, I'll go with you." Powell testifies that Higginbotham is his spiritual father to this day.

John Powell was out of the will of God until after he was married, had three children and was working in a chemical factory in Barberton, Ohio. A friend invited him to the Norton Baptist Church, where Dr. Jack Downs was then pastor. His wife wanted to go forward, but he stood at the end of the pew and wouldn't let her out. He admits, "That's how far backslidden I was." Next Sunday, both went forward to rededicate their lives. Immediately, Powell became assistant in the junior department to Harold Swafford (who later became his assistant pastor at Reimer Road).

A year later, God spoke to Powell about the ministry. A missionary speaker didn't show up and Downs brought a message on "Being a Missionary at Home." Powell testifies, "During the invitation hymn, God told me to go forward, but I was afraid." When he got to the front of the church, he told Pastor Downs, "I *think* God has called me to preach." The pastor announced boldly to the congregation, "John has surrendered for the ministry." God had been dealing with his wife, Mary Lou, in another part of the auditorium and, completely unknown to him, she came forward for rededication. Neither knew the other had been called of God.

John Powell began preaching in homes for the aged and youth meetings, and attending evening school at Akron Bible Institute.

He learned at school that a church was opening on Reimer Road in Wadsworth, Ohio (population 12,000). Someone told Powell he could get preaching experience there. He called Doyle Ballengee and asked, "Could I be a candidate?" Powell's name was turned in, along with five others, and when the field was narrowed down to two candidates, Powell got five votes and the other fellow, four.

His professors at evening school told him not to take the church on a split vote, but he testifies, "I didn't have anything to lose, so I took the church." There was no salary, and he continued working in the factory and attending evening school for the next three years.

On that first Sunday there were 23 who met Powell, including 5 from his own family. Powell testifies, "I didn't know how to organize, promote, finance, or preach—I just stood up and gave them the Word of God."

That first Sunday, Powell sat the people all on one side of the auditorium; he only turned on one set of lights because the church was so poor.

A friend sent *The Sword of the Lord* as a gift, and when Powell saw announcement of a preachers' week at the Bill Rice Ranch for only \$15.00, he figured, "I can afford that," loaded up everything in his Volkswagen and headed for Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Dr. Jack Hyles taught him how to organize his Sunday School; Dr. John R. Rice taught him how to prepare sermons; Dr. Bill Rice gave him lessons on pastoral duties.

Powell came home from that conference with a challenge to build a great church of 100. It took three months to reach that goal; now he testifies, "We have been setting a higher goal each year ever since."

The church had been founded by Rev. Adrian Wilmoth in 1960 in a "chicken coop" which was nothing more than a wooden building that would seat about 40 people. The church had built a concrete-block building seating 150. That was the auditorium to which Powell came. Eighteen months after he arrived, he built a Sunday School wing; two years later he added to the auditorium, put on a second Sunday School wing and bricked the building.

Two years after that, two houses were converted into Sunday School rooms, and in 1971-72 the church constructed a \$300,000 auditorium that seats 800.

When Powell wanted to build the church, he went to the local bank and asked to borrow \$100,000. When he explained to the banker that the building would take \$150,000, Powell explained that he would raise \$20,000 immediately, gather \$10,000 during the building process, and raise the final \$20,000 when they occupied the building. The banker replied that when Powell walked in with his check for \$20,000 he could have the loan. That's the way it happened.

When the church got ready to build, Powell decided to put in a basement which would cost an extra \$15,000. The bank wouldn't loan him the extra money. He got 15 men of the congregation to go and borrow \$1,000 each. Next he signed up 125 families in the "100 Club." Each of these gave \$1.00 a week, making payments of \$439.00 a month for the basement. Powell sees this as a miracle of God, inasmuch as over three to four hundred children are housed in the basement each Sunday.

The church has never had spectacular growth, just steady growth, increasing by 50 to 200 each year. Last year, the church averaged 1,000. Powell plans to average 1111 during his spring campaign that will last 11 weeks. The church has 15 bus routes, bringing about 50 percent of the attendance in; 1,457 attended on the largest day, when the church had an ox roast, in September, 1972. They baptized 218 in 1972 and 180 the year before.

Powell testifies he wants poor kids on his buses, as well as those from middle-class homes. He wants a church where all can feel at home. He said, "We have Sunday School teachers on welfare, as well as those drawing large salaries."

The strength of Reimer Road Baptist Church is people, common people. They have no unusual ministry, just a steady stream of souls being won to Jesus Christ. When asked what their special talents are, the pastor replied, "The congregation rallies around the staff to serve God." Powell testifies that there are no greatly talented leaders in the church, just average people with a mind to work and a heart to pray.

The church has sponsored Sword of the Lord Conferences, in addition to having revivals with Dr. John R. Rice, Tom Wallace, and Dr. Lee Roberson. At present six students from there are studying in Tennessee Temple Schools. The church does not have a radio program, no television, and does not use newspaper advertising. Powell states that he just encourages people to bring lost people to the services, where they win them to Jesus Christ.

Powell spends his days among his people. A nurse from the Akron hospital phoned him to say that a terminal cancer patient was calling out, "Lord! Lord!" The nurse said over the phone, "This is the kind of man that you can help."

The church has experienced opposition from the neighborhood. Powell indicates that there are a group of neighbors who constantly harass the church about its buses. At a hearing in the township, one neighbor protested, "This church is too big and has too much activity; it has more activity than the average factory." Before the Zoning Board of Appeals would allow them to occupy the new building, they made the church sign an agreement not to purchase more than 16 buses, to tear down a house on the property that is used for Sunday School, and make other improvements on the property. One board member stated, "We've got to stop this church from

growing.” The neighbors object to the fact that within 15 minutes every Sunday morning, over 200 cars come down their road.

Early in the church’s ministry, they needed land for expansion, and one morning, arriving at church, found the neighbor had blocked off his driveway so they couldn’t get to their parking lot. The church was using the neighbor’s drive at the time. Powell went to see the man and tried to buy his property. He said no. The people prayed, and 30 days later the man called and sold the house cheaper than Powell originally prepared to offer. The church has also been criticized because it stands against “Key ‘73,” being alienated from others he thought were Christians in the neighborhood.

The church has a Bible Institute under the direction of Ken Amsler, dean. There are 66 part-time students on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, Monday and Friday nights. Powell plans to make the institute into a full-time school.

Recently, when Dr. Jack Hyles spoke in the church, a visitor bought his book, *Satan’s Bid for Your Child*. When the visitor took the book to his pastor, that minister criticized Hyles. The man quit and came to Reimer Road Baptist Church. The bus workers were praying for \$5,000 for buses. This man gave the \$5,000. A couple of months later, Powell went to Southern Ohio and bought six buses for \$6,150. When he asked his people to pray for this money, the man once again gave the total amount.

The men of the church helped build the new building and, according to Powell, “God sent us Fred Butcher, who was an excavator.” Powell led Butcher to the Lord and later Butcher’s company did all the digging, supplied the steel work and prepared the parking lot for the hardtop. The building that cost the church \$160,000 has been appraised by the bank at \$300,000.

Every morning at 8:00 a.m. a number of men join Powell to pray for the general needs of the church. Especially do they pray for men who have lost their jobs; they hold these men up to God.

The church does not have a janitor; the men and women keep it clean and also do the maintenance on the buses. Paul Bunell worked all week; he asked God to help him get off on Saturday so he could work around church. When he was off on Saturday, he told his wife this was God’s day and he would serve Jesus at the church, leaving his chores for during the week. He works from 8:00 to 4:00 doing odd jobs.

Mr. Gilbertson, a visitor from West Virginia, was driving in the area when one of the church buses backed into his car. The church’s insurance company would not give Mr. Gilbertson a new door, only pound out the dent, so the deacon board offered to pay the difference. Gilbertson didn’t want the church to bear the extra expense and was so impressed by their testimony that later, when he moved to the area, he joined the church and gives many hours each week serving Christ around the buildings.

A man came forward for salvation during a regular service. The people knew him and when Powell introduced him to the congregation, Powell said, “You’ve been a rotten father.”



“Yes, sir.”

“You’ve been a rotten husband.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Will you promise God to serve Him, treat your wife and children properly?”

“Yes,” Smith said.

The people in the church understand Powell’s straightforward approach in dealing with people.

## THE FUTURE

Next year, Powell plans to start a Christian grade school, beginning with kindergarten and adding as many classes as the need demands. He plans to make the Christian Bible Institute into a Bible College full-time, preparing young men for the ministry. The Akron Bible Institute went out of existence, so Powell feels that, since there is now no place in the area to train young men for the ministry, he should do it.

He plans to add a youth director in the near future to minister to his young people.

Powell wants to build an auditorium for 1500, turning his present building to a gym to use with his Christian schools. He has announced that by 1974, he will be listed among the 100 largest Sunday Schools in America. He feels the Sunday School will average 1,500, have a high day of over 2,000 and he will baptize 300 next year.

## Chapter Eighteen

### ***Central Baptist Church, Huntington Beach, California Thomas Ray, Pastor***

#### **“The Church of Boundless Vision. . .Boundless Energy. . .and Boundless Outreach”**

The Central Baptist Temple of Huntington Beach, California, has no human reason to explain its explosive growth from 97 in Sunday School three years ago to an average of 1335 this fall, with a high day of 3237 on October 8. The church facilities had space for only 500. Four years ago the church’s future was doubtful; before calling Thomas Ray as pastor, a group of the members met to decide if the church should continue or disband. Today, Pastor Thomas Ray sees no reason why the church should not have unlimited outreach. He demonstrated the possibilities when last Easter he distributed 40,000 tickets and over 10,000 came to the city park for one of the largest Easter egg hunts in the city’s history. The congregation expected 2,000 for its annual Roundup Day this fall, yet had the staggering attendance of 3237; according to the report of

ushers, hundreds would not even attempt to get into the building because there was no space left to stand, either in the children's department or in the main auditorium.

The church was originally sponsored by the Central Baptist Church of\* Anaheim, California, when Dr. Robert Wells had a vision to reach Huntington Beach, where there was no Independent Baptist church. The congregation first met in a school and was pastored by staff members of the Anaheim church, which also paid the bills and in 1966 bought two portable buildings and placed them on the present location at 7661 Warner Avenue.

The young congregation disassociated from their founding organization in June, 1968; in the next few months Maynard Nutting, the first full-time pastor, resigned. The young congregation went through financial difficulties. A friend phoned Thomas Ray, then pastor of Crestview Baptist Church in Irving, Texas, to ask if he were interested in the church. From his first Sunday with them, the Huntington Beach congregation has been off and growing.

Thomas Ray grew up in Dallas, Texas, and as a thirteen-year-old boy went forward in a Southern Baptist church. He was asked the right questions about salvation, to which he gave the right answers, but was not converted. Ray did not attend church for the next eight years. A used car salesman, Ray was persuaded by a friend to get involved in Christian service. He attended Miller Road Baptist Church, Garland, Texas, for about 90 days before the pastor sent him to Tennessee Temple Schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Ray had been super-active in church, but at school he studied the Word and had no opportunity to serve. He became plagued with doubts about his salvation. One minister told him, "The Devil's bothering you," and another remarked, "You ought to be rebaptized."

When Dr. Bob Gray of Trinity Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, held a Bible conference at TTS in 1961, Thomas Ray went forward on June 28, determining, "I am going to get peace or chuck the whole thing." Dr. Lee Roberson dealt with him at the altar and quoted a number of familiar verses which did not affect Ray. Finally, Roberson asked, "Are you willing to forget the past and receive Jesus Christ?" The answer was yes. They knelt together, and Thomas Ray received Jesus Christ.

Ray shortly thereafter transferred to Garland Bible College, a new school in the Miller Road Baptist Church, and graduated as valedictorian of its first class. He pastored the College Avenue Baptist Church in Denison, Texas, and a year later went to Irving, Texas, to the Crestview Baptist Church, with 25 people meeting in a home. Five years later there were 600 in Sunday School.

Pastor Ray had no peace about staying in Irving; there were 35 Southern Baptist and 11 Independent Baptist churches in the town of 100,000. He testified, "I wanted to reach people who needed the gospel and was burdened for Buffalo, New York." He testified that people moving into Irving, Texas, got 12 to 15 visits from gospel-preaching churches, and he was concerned about communities that had no testimony. One Saturday morning in his office Ray had just prayed, "Lord, I'll go anywhere," when the phone call came concerning Huntington Beach. God had prepared his heart to take this struggling church.

First Ray met individually with the Sunday School teachers and then organized a weekly teachers meeting, impressing upon them their responsibility to visit every absentee. He found in Central Baptist Temple a church of good people who loved God and wanted to serve Jesus Christ. Ray's second task was to salvage those who had drifted away from the church during the congregation's several months without a pastor. The church had had a high attendance of 276 in the past, so he immediately started a campaign to break that record and reached 345 within 90 days of his coming, convincing the people that the church was not dead. Ray testified, "We started following up prospects and leading people to Christ." On Roundup Day, 1971, the church reached 725 in two small buildings, 40' x 60'. Many classes met outside on buses. Ray preached to his people, "Nothing can keep us from growing. . .nothing." The following year Roundup Day reached 1556, and this year 3237.

## OUTREACH

Ray testifies that the only way to grow is by unlimited outreach into the community. This past summer he mailed a letter, tract, and an offer of a free Bible study course to 5,000 homes in the area. The list was purchased from a computer organization and the homes were followed up by college students going door to door taking a survey of the folks interested in a Bible correspondence course.

One of the first items Ray purchased for the church was a complete print shop, securing \$10,000 worth of equipment for under \$5,000. He indicated that, in addition to printing tracts, correspondence courses, and literature, the church was going to furnish free tracts to every new Independent Baptist church. Ray testifies, "I remember when I couldn't get tracts because I didn't have the money." Also, the church is going to allow other churches to use its correspondence course.

Ray toured the ten largest Sunday Schools in America to learn everything he could about building a great Sunday School. He indicated, "Temple Baptist Church, Detroit, Michigan, impressed me most because the people sacrificed the most."

Ray believed in a ministry of mailing the gospel. An automatic typewriter was purchased. There are 27 letters; each one can be personalized and sent out as follow-up, contact, or outreach into the community. Every new resident in Huntington Beach gets a personal letter from Ray, a tract, information about their school, and an offer of a free Bible correspondence course. Thomas Ray indicated his goal was to get the gospel to every person in Orange County, and since he couldn't yet afford television, the only way he could reach them was through the postman.

Even when the work was still small, Ray began ministry among the deaf, who now average over 20 in attendance each week. Their largest ministry reached 58 on Roundup Day. Also, the church is starting a ministry to the mentally retarded that is guided by two nurses. The "Jolly 60's," a group of senior citizens, meet each Thursday for Bible study, programs of fellowship, and a once-a-month outing to promote friendship and cultural growth. Last month 77 retirees visited Sea World in San Diego.

The church's 10 buses average 400 riders each week. On Roundup Sunday 1534 were brought in on 14 buses, and Gary Henion had 387 riders, a world's record. The previous record

had first been held by “Slick” Goodman of Beth Haven Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky, who brought 334 riders; later a young boy in First Baptist Church, Hammond, Indiana, brought 351 from one route on one Sunday. Henion worked several weeks to pack his buses, and when space ran out he began asking adults in the homes if they would follow his bus to Sunday School; the 29 who came in cars were not counted in this record attendance of 387. On Roundup Day four routes averaged 200 riders or more, also noteworthy of record.

Four hundred and ninety teens met at the high school a few blocks away. Last Easter 40,000 Easter eggs were distributed in a city park. A huge speaker system was installed; the mayor and members of the city council were present, and police helicopters dropped the candied eggs on the clusters of children throughout the park. Over 5,000 tracts were distributed and the gospel was preached to the 10,000 who gathered.

On another occasion, workers from the church handed out 40,000 tickets inviting people to “the world’s largest banana split,” a 520-foot-long banana split.

Markets donated hundreds of pounds of bananas and Ferrell’s Ice Cream Stores donated 140 gallons of ice cream.

At other times, Ray has had an elephant, Gentle Ben the Bear, of television fame, and pony rides to promote church attendance. When criticized, he simply replied, “The generation of this world is wiser than the children of light.” He went on to indicate, “We never take away from the gospel, and the promotion always takes place after Sunday School.” He went on to comment, “Children ought to have a good attitude about Sunday School, and if we can’t win them to Christ, then someone else down the road might reach them with the gospel.”

Last Easter, Ray sponsored a drive-in church at a local drive-in theater and over 1,000 attended, who were not in his usual Sunday morning congregation.

On Family Day, a color photograph was taken of every family present by a commercial photographer, who set up three cameras after the morning service to photograph all the church families, who had to return the following week to get the free photograph. The project only cost the church \$200.00. Promotion involved four letters to the families, before and after the outreach. According to Ray over 200 new families were reached with the gospel.

On Marriage Reaffirmation Day all who were saved or rededicated since their salvation were asked to stand before the church and to reaffirm their marriage vows in a Christian ceremony—to the glory of God; over 60 individuals participated in the service.

On Perfect Church Sunday a large picture of a church was cut into segments and sent to people in the Sunday School with the exhortation, “Attend so the church will be complete with your part of the puzzle. Make it your church home.”

On Policeman Appreciation Day over 200 policemen and their families attended. A personal letter of invitation was sent to every police officer in Orange County. Ray had secured the signature of Governor Ronald Reagan for a certificate of appreciation to the policemen. The certificate, on fine linen paper, was printed in the church’s print shop.

On Safari Sunday an elephant was brought to the church and Ray rode him around the parking lot, as did his evangelist, Jack Garner, who that day concluded a successful meeting. Ray has also used the Treasure Chest and Friend Day to reach thousands in Huntington Beach who have no church affiliation.

Visitors to the church note that kids are all over the place: in the buses, in the kitchen—everywhere. Some rooms are too crowded for chairs to be used, so pupils sit on the floor. Classes meet in the hallways, outside on the playgrounds, and on the buses. It is hard to get from one building to another because hundreds of kids are scattered over the walks. If a growing church is made up of people, then Central Baptist Temple is one of the most dynamic in America because *people* are what the church has plenty of. Visitors are not impressed with its buildings. When a teacher came to Ray and said, “Where’s my class going to meet?” he answered, “How about a bus?” The teacher said, “We can’t meet on a bus,” but the pastor replied, “Yes, you can,” and they did.

It is a simple auditorium with folding chairs, no pulpit furniture or padded pews; even though the building holds only 400, there have been 658 adults on a high day.

All of the ushers wear a red blazer and black pants and stand at the sidewalk greeting visitors as they approach the building.

A dynamically growing Sunday School needs teachers, and Ray announced, “Since you haven’t volunteered, we’ll just draft you; the work of God must go forward.” Ray makes his people feel more important and successful than some other pastors do. He points out to his Sunday School workers that “you are reaching more people than most pastors and you bus workers bring more people to Sunday School than many pastors reach in an entire week.” Then, with people standing around the walls, he announces to his congregation, “We’ve got to double our attendance, double our buses, double our facilities, double our staff; but it will all cost money—we’ve got to double our giving.” If any disagree at first, they shout out Amen when he concludes, “But reaching lost people is worth the money.”

## THE FUTURE

Many years ago Dr. Walter Meier, world-famous preacher on the Lutheran Hour, knelt on the property and dedicated it to the Lord; the site had been offered to the Lutherans. Later, when they didn’t take it, it was sold to the Baptist church.

During the early days of Ray’s ministry he walked out one day and found a “For Sale” sign in the middle of his parking lot. Through an oversight, six lots had not been included in the original purchase. Ray phoned the number listed on the sign and found out they wanted \$15,000. At the time he was running 150 in Sunday School and didn’t have 15 cents. He responded, “Tell the owner to give it to us and I’ll pay you the realtors’ fees.” A few days later he received a letter offering the property to the church, another sign of God’s hand of blessing on the ministry.

Ray testifies, “When I came to Huntington Beach, I wanted to be the biggest church in town; now I want to be the biggest in Orange County.” (There are two larger in the county.) After that, Ray testifies, “Finally, I want to be the largest church in California and perhaps one

day the largest in America.” When asked if this was an egotistical goal, he responded, “Not just to build the biggest church in America—I want to reach every person possible and bigness will be the by-product.”

## Chapter Nineteen

**Franklin Road Baptist Church,  
Murfreesboro, Tennessee**

**Bob Kelley, Pastor “In the Shadow of the Giants”**

### I. IN THE SHADOW OF GIANTS

The Franklin Road Baptist Church might be one of the hardest churches in America to pastor. Can you imagine having to prepare sermons, knowing that John R. Rice will sit in your audience? About 150 staff and family members from the Sword of the Lord attend this church; another 50 come from the Bill Rice Ranch. According to the pastor, he has a higher percentage of college graduates than almost any other church in America. Then, each year some of America’s greatest preachers preach at the Sword of the Lord conferences. Pastor Bob Kelley is God’s man, preaching in the shadow of giants. Yet, Kelley has been used in Sword of the Lord conferences (musically only); God is helping him make his own high-water mark. When he came to the church in 1969, it was running 230 in Sunday School; last February it averaged 658. They had a high day of 976 in Sunday School, 1,025 in one church service during Round-Up Sunday, August 1972.

Kelley indicates that the people from the Sword of the Lord and the Bill Rice Ranch have been a blessing to the church. During the summer the church draws up to 40 visitors a week from the conferences. Kelley added that “some of the best Bible scholars and teachers in America work for these organizations and serve faithfully in the church.” But, most important, Kelley sees the financially sacrificial giving of all his people as the backbone of his church. In a low income area the church averages \$2,500 a week.

But the congregation is much larger than the staff of the Sword of the Lord. Miss Fairy Shappard, advertising manager of the Sword of the Lord, indicates that the Christians in the church are some of the most devout and hard-working to be found in any church in America. Each member, no matter what his background, joins to serve God in this fast-growing, doctrinally-grounded church.

The congregation is not a shouting, highly emotional church; it tends to seek a very serious but happy atmosphere. For instance, a man like Dr. John R. Rice will say Amen, but is selective rather than superficial. The workers are known as plodders—steady, strong, emphasizing biblical standards, grounded in the fundamentals. With a good balance between outward zeal and inner assurance, the church is dedicated to soul-winning and Bible doctrine.

## II. THE CONVERSION OF BOB KELLEY

Bob Kelley grew up ten blocks from Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga. As a boy, he knew the soul-winning zeal of the church and wouldn't ride his bicycle past the church for fear someone would witness to him. He refused to attend Camp Joy, knowing that someone would try to get him saved. When he thinks back on the Church of the Green Light, Kelley testifies, "It flashed at me." He remembers that Walter Wendelken came to a pool hall and nabbed him as an eighth grade boy and tried to win him to Christ. He also remembers Dr. Aubrey Martin, the blind Tennessee Temple theologian, witnessing to him as a 15-year-old lad.

A bus pastor at Highland Park Church, Tommy Tillman, once a football player with the reputation "Tiny Terrible Tommy Tillman," reached Kelley when he was playing college football in 1959. Kelley went with Tillman to church on condition that Tillman "wouldn't let anybody corner me." After church, Tillman led Kelley to the Lord in his home, kneeling beside a couch. Kelley went forward in public profession at a Lester Roloff revival meeting; everyone in the church knew he was a football player and rejoiced at his salvation.

Bob was called "Hoss" Kelley in those days. Three nights after his salvation, six guys in a car pulled up in front of his house and honked. His former buddies cursed, mocked and finally, one of his friends, a young man who kicked the longest field goal in University of Tennessee history, said, "I'll give you three months and you'll be back with us." Kelley testifies, "It's been 13 years, the happiest of my life."

Even to this day Kelley uses football terminology in his sermons and refers to his past sports experiences for illustrations.

When Kelley was putting on his baptismal robe, getting ready to be baptized, Dr. Lee Roberson said, "I believe that boy will preach some day." Young Kelley was never able to get over Dr. Roberson's remark. Three years later at a John Tierney revival meeting, Kelley felt the call to preach the gospel. Kelley walked away from his grant-in-aid scholarship and enrolled in Tennessee Temple Schools, 1960.

He graduated with a B.A. from the college and attended seminary two years. During that time he preached at Fairview Baptist Church, and afterwards went to Mount Olivet Baptist Church in Charleston, West Virginia, where he stayed for two years. His wife became very sick with dreaded Multiple Sclerosis and the physician recommended returning to a southern climate. Kelley left Charleston, claimed healing from God for his wife, and she was completely healed.

## III. HOW TO DO IT IN THE COUNTRY

The Franklin Road Baptist Church is situated 3 miles from Murfreesboro, Tennessee, city limits. Buses have been sent out 15 miles in each direction. When Dr. Jack Hyles saw the growth in the remote area, he said, "I don't see how you've done it." Kelley offers the following suggestions for building a church in the country.

1. *Never admit it's only a country church.* He indicates that all churches-urban or rural-are built in the same manner, following the book of Acts.

2. *Solid Bible preaching.* He tries to preach on issues, giving people a reason for driving long distances to church. Kelley indicates that ministering to some of the greatest Bible scholars in the country causes him to keep his nose in the Bible. He stated that he has grown as a preacher because of the challenge of his dedicated people.

3. *Door-to-door visitation.* Kelley indicates that soul-winning works in the country as well as in the city. The most exciting thing about his ministry at Franklin Road has been winning hardened sinners to Jesus Christ. One owner of a large farm had rejected every pastor who had tried to ..lead him to the Lord. When the farmer became hospitalized, he told Kelley, “God wouldn’t have me,” but young Kelley was able to lead him to the Lord. Mrs. John R. Rice, one of brother Kelley’s best soul winners, recently led a hardened sinner to Christ that people had almost given up. The church had prayed for the man two years. He didn’t miss a service but he would not be saved. Mrs. Rice brought him to Jesus.

Kelley indicates that soul winning is kept in focus at services. He focuses personal evangelism in his church newspaper and from the pulpit; when somebody receives the Lord, he lets the personal workers know his appreciation for soul winning by recognizing and rejoicing with them in the service.

4. *Strong emphasis on Sunday evening and Wednesday prayer meeting attendance.* Out of 650 in Sunday School, approximately 500 come back Sunday evening and 400 on Wednesday night. Kelley emphasizes that strong ministry to the home, graded choirs, and Bible preaching bring people back for the services.

The church has an effective follow-up program, baptizing 75 percent of its converts. Assistant Pastor Ed Whiting visits in the home of every person who comes forward, explaining salvation. If people come for membership, Whiting explains the church’s stand, gives them booklets, offering envelopes, bumper stickers on the church, and explains what the church expects of them.

Kelley preaches on controversial issues, taking a stand in the community. His Sunday night and Wednesday night messages are strong Bible exposition, which helps to draw big crowds to those meetings.

5. *Put the country church on the map.* Kelley advertises in the local newspapers; he has a live daily radio broadcast at 6:45 a.m., telling the community what God is doing in the church.

6. *Make all the country your parish.* Whereas many rural churches look to the few around them, Kelley considers the 66,000 people in Rutherford County as his “Jerusalem.”

#### **IV. A FAMILY CHURCH**

One of the first things Kelley realized he needed was a large nursery, to attract young couples through the convenient care of their children. He told the deacons that they would fill it, and they did. In the past four years, approximately 50 babies have been born to members of the church. Kelley testifies that he learned the importance of a good nursery at the Jack Hyles Pastors’ School.



When Kelley first came, he took the young couples' class, emphasizing young families. The class grew from 20 to 120, in addition to numbers of the young people are now teaching classes or away at Bible college. The church has 20 students at Tennessee Temple Schools, Bob Jones University, and Hyles-Anderson College.

One of the strong factors of Franklin Road Baptist Church is its emphasis on the Christian home. Kelley goes into the home and shows the people how to have a family altar. He has a strong emphasis that the father should be the head of the home; along with this, he teaches that mothers should be "keepers at home," rather than full-time workers in the community.

The church has a number of solid families whose children give themselves to study, learn to play musical instruments, and are willing to serve the Lord. Kelley testifies that most parents enforce biblical standards, so the church doesn't have as much trouble on matters of separation as the average congregation. The workers have biblical standards: no shorts or slacks on the ladies, dresses to the top of the knees, short hair on the men, no Hollywood movies, alcoholic drinks or dancing. Bro. Wayne Haston, youth director, using heart-felt love and strong discipline, enforces Pastor Kelley's convictions in the youth group. The teens have tripled under his ministry.

The church uses General Association of Regular Baptists Sunday School literature among its children. Inasmuch as the youth and adult teachers are Bible students, trained in Bible colleges, Pastor Kelley lets each teacher choose his curriculum in consultation with him. This way each teacher is able to emphasize his strengths yet maintain some control in the curriculum. Layman Gerald Alsup is a great aid to Sunday School growth as well as helping with the curriculum. He has worked as Sunday School superintendent from the very beginning of Kelley's ministry.

## **V. THE FOUNDATION AND THE FUTURE**

The church began when Ken Chapman, foreman at the Bill Rice Ranch, held a revival meeting in the summer of 1955, at Kingwood schoolhouse, a building no longer in existence. The broken windows in the abandoned building were plugged with cardboard. The church was organized with five families and met in the schoolhouse until cold weather forced the congregation to move into the Chapman's spacious parlor in the old ranch house.

Chapman realized they needed to locate, and for \$2,000 secured two acres at the present site of the church; a bank agreed to loan the residue when the church had raised as much money as possible. The total amount was raised in three Sundays, one couple giving all the money they had saved for funeral expenses. A contractor built a small \$28,000 concrete-block building and carried the loan so the infant congregation could be in its own building. The church paid him off in two years. When the church occupied the building with a revival meeting, that contractor was among those saved.

When Kelley had been at Franklin Road one year, a fire completely ruined the auditorium; the church moved into the auditorium of the Sword of the Lord building. At that time they were without Sunday School, yet continued to grow. When, after 3 months, the insurance company had still not made a settlement, the church built on their property in two

weeks a 500-seat steel building and moved into it until the auditorium was restored. The steel building today is used for Sunday School.

In the future, the church is going to add a balcony to its auditorium, making it possible to seat 1,100.

Next, they plan a large Sunday School building that will enable them to move into a day school ministry. The church expects to begin kindergarten this fall, then add two years the following fall, gradually moving up through the entire grade school.

Kelley hopes to go on TV in the future out of Nashville. He does not want to televise the Sunday morning service but to present the gospel through the church music groups and the preached ministry of the Word of God.

This Easter the church plans to reach 1,201 in Sunday School, which would break a record, and then to continue its growth in every area of ministry.

## Chapter Twenty

### **The Call to the Ministry**

The ministry is more than an occupation or a job, it is a call from God. The salary is lower than any other position of equal responsibility. The demands are great, the hours are long, the burdens are almost unbearable. Ministers are gossiped about and lied about. They are criticized to their faces, and carnal church members connive behind their backs. The pastorate is one of the most demanding positions and no one man could remain as pastor without the inner assurance that the Almighty God has called him to that office.

What makes a preacher get on his knees and pray till tears come? the call of God. What motivates a preacher to spend all day knocking on doors instead of getting a better-paying job, when he knows his family doesn't have as nice clothes as the neighbors or his house is old and run down? the call of God. What grips a man's heart to lay brick on a church, to paint old pews, to run a mimeograph, to get on the radio and preach the gospel? the call of God.

When considering the reasons for the growth of a church, we must begin at God's call. A man at the assembly line hears something none others perceive—it is God's call. He begins to march to a different drumbeat: it is God's command to go and build a church, even when his friends think he is crazy. A man attempts to do what seems impossible. He speaks in public when his grammar is shoddy; he knocks on doors, knowing he cannot sell. He attempts to teach the Bible when he has little formal education. He tried to build huge auditoriums, not knowing construction or architecture. He manages a large corporation, though ignorant of financing or advertising. Why does a man dream the unthinkable and attempt the impossible? He feels God has called him and all he can do is to obey. This minister knows that with God's calling is God's enablement and that if God has called him, he can build a great church.

Great churches are built by great men; therefore, this chapter explores what transforms average men into men of God. The first step in the making of a pastor is *the call of God*.

The ministry is not something a man chooses. A young man does not look through the want ads and, not finding a position, turn to the pastorate. The New Testament church begins with a God-called man who is willing to make any sacrifice, to pay any price, to forsake all and build a church in the name and after the pattern of Jesus Christ who said, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18).

One of the questions I always ask the candidate at an ordination service is: “What is the call of God and how do you know God has called you?” If a candidate for the ministry cannot answer these questions I have serious reservations concerning his readiness for ordination. In preparing this manuscript, I searched diligently for any material on the call of God and found that comparatively little had been said in previous years about God’s call to full-time Christian service. Therefore, in interviewing each pastor whose church is included in this book, I asked him to tell me how he was called of God into the ministry. Those experiences were reflected against the Scripture, giving rise to this chapter. There are three calls of God noted in Scripture. Some confuse them, with consequent frustration to pastors.

1. *The call of God to repent of sin unto salvation*.—The first call of God is to salvation. God calls men to Himself, just as Jesus verbally invited, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

Jesus was pictured as a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine safely in the fold and goes out into the wilderness, calling His one lost sheep. The call of God is reflected in the words of the hymn: “Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling. . .calling today.” Every time a minister ends his sermon and begins the invitation, he is calling men to repentance; he is calling men to Jesus Christ.

The minister’s call to salvation has scriptural precedent. Jesus called Zacchaeus down from a tree. Jesus told the woman at the well, “Go, call thy husband”—symbolic of bringing him to salvation. Many fundamental churches entitle their visitation program “Calling.” Even though they mean ringing doorbells, it is symbolic of the call that every sinner should be called to salvation.

Paul prayed for the Ephesians, “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling” (Eph. 1:18). They were called in hope, then they became partakers of the heavenly calling of God (Heb. 3:1). This calling extends to all people. Paul specifies that everyone is called to salvation, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (I Cor. 1:26). The soul-winning churches in this book reflect the call to salvation, most of them crossing socioeconomic barriers to bring the rich and poor to church. In them, hillbillies who stomp on the Queen’s English sit next to sophisticated college graduates. The gospel is the catalyst that draws them all to one church. When a church only ministers to the listeners’ intellects, that head belief divides men; however, when the gospel reaches the hearts, all men are drawn to its message. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye

should show forth the praises of him who hath *called* you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9).

2. *The call of God to service.*—The second call of God is to serve Jesus Christ. This call to service is extended to *all* men, and *everyone* who knows Jesus Christ should serve Him.

Recently at an ordination council a young man said, “The spiritual need and the command to go constitute the call to the ministry.” I was horrified at this response. The need and the command do not constitute a call to full-time Christian service; the call of God to full-time ministry is felt in the heart. However, every full-time servant must respond to the need and be obedient to the command, even as all Christians must respond.

The need is lost men going to Hell. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) and “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). What motivated Bill Monroe to give up a job and move to Florence, South Carolina, without a guaranteed salary? Surely his desire to preach did not move him 800 miles. There were plenty of lost souls in Indianapolis, Indiana. An internal call to start a church sent him to Florence, South Carolina.

What motivated Jack Dinsbeer to begin preaching without a salary? He wanted to do more than present his sermons each Sunday morning. He felt the internal call of God to preach. The men in this book believe that every human being without Jesus Christ is lost and going to Hell. Bob Gray said, “We have 55 Sunday School buses because we are not content to let people go to Hell without trying to reach them with the gospel.” Jesus went through the towns and villages of Galilee preaching the gospel. When He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion. Based upon Christ’s observation of human need, which was more than their socioeconomic need, He immediately called His disciples. The need of men prompted their call to discipleship. “And when he had called unto him his twelve” (Matt. 10:1). Today, every Christian is called to be a disciple.

The need among the world is the first step in the call of God to service, but the call of God to full-time Christian service is deeper than just knowing men are lost.

The command of Jesus Christ to “Go” is the second step in the call of God to service. The Great Commission is still the marching orders of the church. Before He ascended back into heaven, Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). This command was not limited to the eleven apostles who heard Him; all Christians are obligated to carry out this command. But the call to full-time service is deeper than just obedience to God’s command.

New Testament churches begin when the man of God goes. Jerry Falwell went to Lynchburg, Virginia, to start a church; Tom Malone went to Pontiac, Michigan, to start a church, Jewell Smith went to Orlando, Florida, to start a church. After these men go, then they send their members out on Sunday School buses, “going into the highways and the byways to bring children to Sunday School.” They send their soul winners out in organized visitation to win men and women to Jesus Christ in homes and shops. The command to “go” extends to all Christians.

All those who *go* are carrying out the Great Commission; yet the call to full-time Christian service is more than *going* even though it includes going. All Christians should *know*

that men are lost—yet the call to full-time Christian service includes more than the knowledge of men's need, even though it includes that.

3. *The high calling of God to full-time Christian service.*—Every preacher who serves Jesus Christ as a pastor knows in his heart that he has been called to the pastorate. Sometimes this call comes later in life, sometimes early. With Lonnie Graves, pastor, Fellowship Baptist Church, Durham, North Carolina, the call into the ministry came after he was married and had a family.

After this converted gypsy was saved at approximately 26 years of age, he began to get invitations to speak to churches, telling of his gypsy life and his salvation experience. Shortly thereafter, he told his pastor, "I believe God is calling me to preach." Graves had been to school three days in his life and could barely read. He was distressed to be told that he must go to college if he expected to be a preacher; he knew it would be impossible. The next pastor in that church advised the gypsy to "go through any door that God opens." Graves began by holding cottage prayer meetings. Step by step God led into starting a church. The call of God into full-time service came slowly but surely.

All the pastors included in this book testify that the call into full-time Christian service is an inner invitation from God. The call of God to full-time Christian service is made up of three aspects: (1) an inner assurance that God has set a man aside for the ministry, (2) a burden to preach the gospel and (3) a desire to pastor a church. These three qualities cannot be put in a test tube and measured; they are internal. A man can testify of the call to preach but cannot explain it. Like the inner feeling of love, the call of God defies a mathematical formula or a logical explanation. If you have ever been in love, you know it but have difficulty putting it in words.

Before the burning bush, Moses received the call of God to go to Egypt. He saw the bush burning with fire, he felt the radiant heat on his forehead, and he heard the voice of God speaking. The call of God was a literal call to service. Pastors today have a call, just as real, although they don't hear voices or see visions. God's call is real and pastors respond.

Deeply convicted during a Sunday evening church service, Tom Berry went home unsaved. Alone with his Bible at home later, on his knees he prayed, "Lord, if You will save me, You can have all of me." He knew if he was to be saved, Christ would have to do the saving. Later in Canton, Texas, while milking a cow, he felt in his heart that God was calling him to preach. He went in the house and announced his decision to his mother, who was shocked; young Tom had been a jokester in school. But God sometimes uses other men to help confirm a call to the ministry. Tom Berry spent a Saturday night at the Texas State Fair in Dallas carousing around. When he got home he was burdened and he felt God telling him, "I've called you to preach and here you are messing around with sin." About 2:30 a.m. he made a complete surrender. As he reached the parking lot of the church, his pastor said, "Tom, what are you going to do with your life?" Three weeks later he was in college preparing for the ministry.

Saved as a teenager, John Powell, pastor of Reimer Road Baptist Church, Wadsworth, Ohio, was out of the will of God for a number of years. After his rededication as a young husband and father, he began to teach in the Sunday School. A year later, he felt God was calling him into the ministry. One Sunday when a missionary speaker did not show up, his pastor spoke

on “Being a Missionary at Home.” At the invitation, Powell wanted to go forward but was afraid. Finally, he went forward in surrender to the ministry, and found that God had been speaking to his wife in another section of the church-she too had come forward. Powell told the pastor, “I *think* God is calling me into the ministry.” The pastor boldly announced, “John has surrendered for the ministry.”

Bruce Cummons, of the Massillon Baptist Temple, was a diligent young man, serving God in the Akron Baptist Temple after his return from the service. One evening he was so burdened that he went walking by Lake Erie, stretching himself out on the grass to pray. The burden would not leave. Finally, he said in desperation, “Lord, I’ll do anything. . .I’ll preach the gospel if you want me to.” Immediately the burden lifted and Bruce knew that God had called him to preach the gospel. Until that time he was not aware that God was speaking to him about the ministry. Young Samuel in the tabernacle heard the audible voice of God in the night. God had to call three times before Eli recognized it was God and told the young boy to say, “Speak. . .for thy servant heareth” (I Sam. 3:10). It was not until Samuel responded correctly that he knew God was calling him.

Many times God calls through another person. As the elderly prophet, Elijah, stood before God in Mt. Sinai, God called him to go and anoint his successor, Elisha. We have the record in I Kings 19:19-21 of the old man throwing his mantle across young Elisha’s shoulders as he plowed. God uses his servants to extend a call to young men. Ed Nelson, pastor, South Sheridan Baptist Church, had led singing for a revival by Dr. Bob Jones, Jr. It was during the war years and most of the young men were in service. He confessed he was not a good song leader but did the best he could; there was no one else available. An elderly lady came to the platform and looked up at young Ed as he squatted to speak to her. “Ed, I believe God is calling you to the ministry.” He slapped his knee and exclaimed, “That’s the funniest thing I have ever heard!” Several in the auditorium heard his loud response but the lady got him to promise to pray about it. Eight days later, he was plowing sugar beets before the sun came up on a Monday morning; the burden of God was driving him to desperation. Ed Nelson got off the tractor and knelt in the wet sod, surrendering for the ministry. God had used a saintly grandmother to reach his heart.

Led to Jesus Christ in the home of a soul winner of Highland Park Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Bob Kelley made his public profession in a Lester Roloff revival meeting. His pastor, Dr. Lee Roberson, said as Kelley prepared for baptism, “I believe that boy will preach some day.” Bob Kelley never escaped Dr. Roberson’s comment. Three years later in a revival meeting he felt the call to preach the gospel. Kelley gave up a grant-in-aid athletic scholarship and transferred to Tennessee Temple Schools to prepare for the ministry.

A hundred and thirty-two young men have gone into full-time Christian service from Trinity Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida. The powerful preaching of Bob Gray won many of these young boys and they were eventually called to full-time service. Just as Gray’s preaching produced young preacher boys, so Paul reminds Timothy, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy” (I Tim. 4:14), indicating that the gift to serve God came as Paul used his gift of prophecy, which was preaching the gospel. When Paul preached, young men were called to preach the gospel. With the calling comes the enablement (spiritual gifts) to serve God. I believe that if a church is effectively preaching the gospel and teaching the Word of God, then young men will be called into full-time Christian service. If a church doesn’t have young

people going into the Lord's service, then something is wrong with its ministry. If a church has not had a young man surrender to preach in the past ten years, then perhaps God has removed the candlestick from that church.

"The call of God was permission to me" testified Don Young, Bible Baptist Church, Paducah, Kentucky. Young had been in college and had thought of becoming a pastor, yet was not rebellious to the Lord. He testified, "When God said preach, I did not take it as a command, but as His willingness to allow me to serve Him. . .it was His permission." Young described the great relief and joy that came to his heart with the call of God. He replied, "I will preach, I just wanted to preach anywhere, anytime that God gave me a great desire to preach His Word."

## **CONCLUSION**

The call of God into full-time ministry is not the call to salvation, although it includes that. The call into full-time ministry is not the Great Commission to go into all the world, although it includes that. The call of God into full-time ministry is not the knowledge that all men are lost and need salvation, although it includes that.

The call of God into full-time ministry is exactly that. It is God calling a young man to win souls, build churches, teach the Bible and serve Jesus Christ. A man knows he is called because of the burden God gives him to reach the lost. He knows God has given him a desire to preach. He has the inner assurance that he is to serve God. Just as he knows the fire is hot and up is up, so he knows God has called him to preach the gospel and build a church. He responds as did Isaiah, "Here am I, send me."

## **Chapter Twenty One**

### **Great Soul Winners Build Great Churches**

Often I am asked if there is a key to building a great church. I had a sermon, "The Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What Made Them Grow," that I have preached over 350 times. Many pastors have come to hear this message with tape recorders, attempting to find some secret key to help them build a large church. Often I am asked what is the key to building a great church. The questioner thinks I know something that has been hitherto unknown. My answer is always the same, "Obedience to the New Testament is the key to successful church growth."

This chapter simply shows that great soul winners build great soul-winning churches. If a pastor devotes his life to scholarship, he will have a ministry to scholars. And if a pastor devotes his life to Bible conference ministries, he will build up the believers in the knowledge of the Word of God. Both of these ministries are good but is not the prime motivation for building a church. Soul winning is the marching orders for the church of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19,20). Many churches have stopped growing because they have lost a vision of reaching their community for Jesus Christ. Both scholarship and Bible conference ministry are important but are not the basis of building a great church.

This chapter deals with the spiritual qualities that a pastor needs to build an aggressive growing church. In my book, *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools*, I pointed out the principles that were necessary to build a church. I believe those principles are grounded on Scripture. Some scoundrels have attempted to follow those principles to build a large church, but their efforts fail because they have denied the spiritual dynamic, without which a church fails. I wrote a second book, *America's Fastest Growing Churches*. Once again, I described ten churches growing super-fast according to American standards. At the end of that book, I talked about attitudes and philosophy. Once again, I realized something was missing. It's possible for a pastor to have the right attitude and philosophy and still fail in God's work. A pastor needs the spiritual power of God to build a soul-winning church. In this book, *Great Soul Winning Churches*, I have described nineteen outstanding churches, each growing in its own way. The pastors are godly men and one of the reasons for their growth is the spiritual zeal and maturity of these leaders. These churches are growing because of the pastors' spirituality.

I do not claim that these men are perfect; and each of them would be the first to confess to his own lack, each man has his own faults. But like the lonely pine that rises above the forest, its strength enables it to stand against the storms. So these pastors have grown strong in spiritual leadership because they have risen above mediocrity.

The following principles are an attempt to characterize the spiritual life of these pastors. I tried to be as broad as possible, but to fully characterize the spiritual principles necessary to be a great pastor one would have to be as broad as the New Testament. If I wanted to keep this section short, I could have used the command of Jesus Christ, "Follow me" and said they have done that. This section is written in outline form as a profile on what is needed in the personal life of a minister.

1. *Desire coinciding with God's will.*—Many men desire to build a large church for the wrong reasons. Some desire a growing church to bolster their ego; others desire to build a great church for financial security; while some pastors have been conditioned as children to seek success. They simply attempt to build a large church because their nature demands that they be successful.

Deep within the heart of a successful pastor is a desire to do God's will. "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Ps. 37:4). A minister must submit his desires to God so that, through prayer, Scripture reading and fellowship with Christians, God's desires become his yearning. The psalmist writes, "Lord, all my desire is before thee" (Ps. 38:9). Paul expressed that he had "great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" (Rom. 9:2). This desire was bent towards soul winning: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1).

A great church begins in the heart of God's servant, and it begins with a deep wish to reach lost people for Jesus Christ. The desire to build a great church is more than a passing fancy; it springs from deep love and compassion. These men have identified with Jesus Christ their Master who "went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel. . . But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them" (Matt. 9:35,36). Bob Gray, of Trinity Baptist Church, Jacksonville, expressed the words, "We can't let people go to Hell."



The words of George Mueller are applicable when building a church: “Nine-tenths of the difficulty is overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord’s will, whatsoever it may be. The difficulty rises when we ask God to reveal His will before we are ready to do it unreservedly.”

2. *Ability to know God’s will for Christian service.*—There are many orthodox preachers who have failed in their Christian service. A minister may know the Word of God and adhere to its conservative beliefs, yet miss God’s will for Christian service. Some men who believe in God’s Word are swept into small-group dynamics, others follow the thinking of evangelicals from Wheaton and drift into mod music, relevance-oriented ideas, or they incorporate methods from the world. The pastors in this book know the will of God and how to discern it for their lives. They are students of the Word of God and here find the will of God for Christian service. They are able to match their own desires and circumstances to the power of God, resulting in a large church.

These men are able to detect what up-to-date technique to use and what to reject. They use streamlined accounting procedures, computers, the latest media techniques and will incorporate any new invention to save money in building additional facilities. Some buildings resemble the new architecture; other auditoriums look like factories from the outside. Yet all of their buildings have a practical function—they are built to preach the Word of God, not as liturgical monuments.

Many preachers wear the latest fashions, including flare trousers, white-collar double-knit suits, and drive a late-model automobile. Yet the same minister realizes that smoking harms his testimony, X-rated movies pollute his mind, rock gospel music is a compromise with the world, and alcohol is wrong no matter in what form it is served.

These men are successful because they have the wisdom to know what up-to-date techniques can be used to build a great soul-winning church. At the same time, they recognize adverse influence of compromise with the world. Then they have the determination to not compromise but to follow God’s will.

3. *Mature leadership.*—Spirituality can be gained overnight by letting the Holy Spirit control one’s life. The ignorant carpenter can be saved, surrender to God and be spiritual, simply because he is controlled by the Holy Spirit; however, he is not instantly a mature leader. Maturity takes time whereby the man of God is faithful to the many commands of Scripture and develops a pattern of godliness and a reservoir of wisdom upon which to base his decisions.

Mature leaders have learned to overcome the simplest form of temptations. Their continued walk with God makes them mature and qualifies them for leadership of a large church. But this does not mean that these men are perfect.

A leader has learned to overcome criticism by rejecting that which is false and listening to that which is wise. Also, he is wise enough to recognize his ignorance and to educate himself, either by attending college, reading, attending seminars or counseling with mature friends.

The pastors in this book have keen understanding with ability to overcome problems that choke smaller churches. An old Italian proverb, “Clear understandings develop long

friendships,” apply to these men. Their God-given wisdom has enabled them to remain long years in their pastorates.

4. *Patience.*—The average pastor is guilty of “green-grass, low-fence mentality.” He preaches for three years, then when things get rough he transfers to the next pastorate where he duplicates another three-year ministry. The pastors in this book have settled down to spend their life at one church. One minister testified that his greatest growth came at the end of his sixth year.

These men have faced the same pressures in the pastorate as others, only they were able to “bear and forebear.” God rewarded their patience with growth and prosperity. Bruce Cummons, Massillon Baptist Temple, began the church and it grew slowly in the first years. If there were opportunities to go to larger churches, he does not discuss them, for God called him to Massillon and he had patience to abide in the place where God called him.

5. *Ability to show appreciation to others.*—Selfish men take glory to themselves, while a great man shares his leadership with others, showing appreciation for the things their staff have done. In an interview with Dr. Bob Gray for this book, he specifically noted that the men on his staff should be recognized for the great job they had done at Trinity Baptist Church. One pastor, who was interviewed but not included in the book, stated, “I do not want the name or quotations from any of the members of my staff; it might make them jealous of each other.” I wondered if he were not the jealous one.

These pastors have the ability to express appreciation to their lay members—such as a bouquet of roses for a faithful nursery worker, a plaque for faithful service, or gracious words of appreciation from the pulpit for small jobs yet faithfully performed. Dr. George Crane says, “Appreciative words are the most powerful force for goodwill on earth.”

Sometimes the pastors of fundamental churches are criticized because their people are beneficent toward them, giving them automobiles, suits, vacations; at the same time pastors of liberal churches are not so favored by their people. Fundamental pastors are usually gracious individuals who show appreciation to individuals, and the congregation reciprocates. There is a greater degree of affection between pastor and flock in the fundamentalist church, since a liberal cannot have the love of God in him “because he knows not God.” He cannot have this high degree of supernatural love for his flock, even though he may have natural affection. He has a technical relationship, not one of affection and admiration.

6. *Singlemindedness and purpose.*—Only the deep conviction that God is calling a minister will make him sacrifice salary and go door-to-door inviting people to come to a church that he is starting. This deep conviction is born in his heart from God. It is nurtured daily through prayer and the study of the Word of God. Some of these pastors relinquish positions in the world and give themselves totally to the ministry. John Wanamaker is quoted as saying, “A man is not doing much until the cause he works for possesses all there is of him.”

7. *Ability to deal with fear.*—There are many fears in building a great church; the greatest is fear of failure. A pastor who begins a church wonders if anyone will attend, especially to hear him preach the Word of God. The psalmist said, “I sought the Lord and he heard me and

delivered me from all my fears” (Ps. 34:4). These men have attempted the impossible, have thought the unthinkable. *Fearlessly* they have built buildings and employed people when there was no money and gone on television not knowing how they would pay the bills. Fearlessly, these men attack human problems with nothing but the gospel. They shun group dynamics to help people’s social problems, knowing that the gospel is the key to man’s problems. They shun counseling therapy to restore broken families, knowing that only the Word of God which changes the heart can put a home back together. These pastors fearlessly will take the Bible into any home, for they deeply believe that the narcotic habit can be broken, a bitter wife can forgive and forget, a rebellious teenager can repent, a hippy can be restored to society, or that estranged couple can be reconciled through Christ.

8. *Victory over pride, bitterness, guilt and doubt.*—Many a fundamentalist pastor is portrayed as proud and arrogant, simply because he fulfills the role of strong leadership in the church. We must not confuse his personality with his role. The role of “church overseer” (bishop) demands that he be an example, make decisions, and rebuke those who are in sin. To the outsider he may appear dictatorial, while the pastor may be in reality so sensitive to individuals that he has difficulty in his supervisory role; yet loyalty to Jesus Christ forces him to speak as he does. God’s man has learned that pride will sap the spirituality from his ministry; therefore, he gives all the glory to God. Pride is claiming to be more than what you are, the twelve-talent man claiming to have more than his dozen abilities. Yet God’s man recognizes the gift he has, and out of a strong self-identification leads his congregation as God has commanded. The successful pastor has learned victory over false humility and arrogant pride, realizing that both extremes will sap his effectiveness for God.

At the same time he has victory over guilt and self-doubt. People may accuse the super-aggressive pastor of being after money. God’s man does not make policy based on neighborhood criticism; he boldly takes an offering and asks people to sacrifice, knowing God commands His people to give financially. When a widow sacrifices her newspaper money, the average pastor with guilt would have second thoughts about taking her “widow’s mite.” The successful pastor will realize that she is giving to God, not to him or the church. He has conquered any self-doubt, knowing that her sacrifice will not go unrewarded. God has more money to give that widow than the pastor could ever contribute, even if he were to tell her to keep her money.

The successful pastor must conquer any self-doubts about his position. Some young men in the ministry will work seven days a week and feel guilty about going home to be with his family. As a result, every time somebody is at the church working, he is there also-but not out of the right motives. He is motivated by guilt.

The pastors of these churches exude confidence in leading their flocks; they know that God will bless them. Even when meeting in a small store front, they talk of building the largest Sunday School in town and reaching every man in the community with the gospel. This is not wishful thinking; these men have no doubts about what God has called them to do. They have conquered doubts and fully expect to build a great church to the glory of God.

9. *Infilling of the Holy Spirit.*—I have had the great privilege of interviewing many pastors of America’s largest and fastest growing churches. Each of these men were asked, “Can you point to a specific experience where you were endued with extraordinary power or a spiritual

experience that enabled you to build a church, faster than the average pastor or larger than other men?" I went on to explain to each man I was not looking for a specific work of grace in his heart such as claimed by Pentecostals who seek the baptism of the Holy Ghost, or the Wesleyans who seek entire sanctification. The answer has always been the same, "No." These pastors feel that there was no extraordinary work of God which qualified them as soul winners or pastors of great churches. Most of the men indicated that hard work, in fulfillment of biblical directives, enabled them to build a large church. At the same time, these men were not taking personal credit, claiming that they built the church by the sweat of their brow. Each man indicates that the work of the church is spiritual, and that the dynamic of the Holy Spirit working in their hearts was the secret of their power. These men cooperated with the power of God.

Rather than speaking of a Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost or a Wesleyan sanctification, these men indicated that a pastor must be filled with the Holy Spirit to build a great church. God sends the Holy Spirit to indwell the heart of each believer at the moment of salvation. He implants a new nature in every Christian, causing him to be born again into God's family. This is the act of regeneration, the Holy Spirit bringing eternal life and dwelling in the heart of each new believer. Therefore, the filling of the Holy Spirit is an endowment for power; a Christian must yield himself to God and allow the Holy Spirit to flow through him. The filling of the Holy Spirit is connected with soul winning. God fills a man to use him to reach others. These pastors indicate that they have completely dedicated themselves, God has filled them with His Spirit and used them to win souls, and build a great church.

Some American churches use many contests and gimmicks. It is possible to draw a crowd and attract a weekly congregation through external rewards. However, building a New Testament church requires salvation and regeneration; this only comes through great soul winners who are filled with the Holy Spirit. When Jack Hyles preaches, the audience is gripped with the realization this man is controlled by God's Spirit and filled with His power. The number of souls brought to Jesus Christ testifies that Hyles is filled with the Holy Spirit.

10. *Great self-denial.*—A great church does not just happen, some man of God sacrificed, worked hard, expressed faith, and built the church. There are no coincidences in God's work, just as there is no automatic progress. These great soul-winning churches didn't just grow. A leader desired to reach a community, planned for a city-wide outreach and sacrificed to accomplish that goal. Self-denial is one of the basic foundations for building a great soul-winning church. A leader must follow the commands of Christ, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Quite often pastors are told, "Don't burn the wick at both ends," but the men that build great churches sacrifice their health through long hours of prayer, study of the Word of God, and diligence in door-to-door visitation; come sunshine, rain or snow.

Many faithful preachers' wives have sacrificed time with their husband, so that he might build a church of God. No wife likes to have her husband away from home. The traveling salesman, the soldier and the preacher desire to be home more, but their job demands that they devote themselves to their work. Often preachers are criticized for not spending more time with their families. Since familyhood is revered in American society, the pastor who sacrifices family time for the work of God is immediately criticized. However, on the other side of the coin, the work of God demands time, and many pastors do not spend as much time with their family as the

average husband. However, he should spend some time each week with his children; and even though he can't spend as much as the average father, God will bless and use that time he does invest in the future of his children.

The pastors who have built these churches have spent long hours at visitation. When Gerald Fleming first came to Dayton Baptist Temple, he spent all waking hours in soul winning. Some of these men look physically old before their time, because they have worked daily, out of devotion to Jesus Christ and urgency to reach lost men, until they drop exhausted into bed at night.

11. *Faithful supporting wives.*—No great church is built without a godly wife and mother who stands behind the pastor. Just as the father must make sacrifices of his time at home, the mother fills the gap, many times taking the place of father. Often a minister's life is ruined because of the "PK" image that his children portray. A faithful wife is the extension of the husband into the family, rearing her children properly, so that they are a testimony to the father's pulpit rather than a detriment. I have met the wives of the pastors in this book and without question they are some of the finest women, and I believe, like Sarah, they live "by faith." The spiritual stature of their husbands and the success of the churches prove that God has called the wives into their place of ministry, just as He called the husbands.

12. *Faith for material needs.*—The Bible commands that all Christians should live by faith (Rom. 1:17). The average Christian interprets this phrase to mean "thinking that God exists in his life." When these pastors build a church by faith, it is more than recognizing God's existence; they count on God's ability to save souls, encourage Christians, provide finances, solve problems and keep the work going. It takes faith to build a growing New Testament church. When Bill Monroe, in Florence Baptist Temple, was averaging \$500 a week in offerings, he issued \$200,000 in bonds, knowing full well that the weekly giving could not pay off the monthly indebtedness. However, Monroe had faith in God. He knew the Lord had called him to build a church in Florence, South Carolina; therefore, God would provide the spiritual power to win souls; these new Christians could be taught to tithe; and, as the congregation grew, they could pay the increased monthly indebtedness. Monroe did not have blind faith; he did not pray and wait for God to give him the extra money each month. Rather, his faith was active, obeying the commands of Scripture to be a soul winner, resulting in an expanded budget. Faith is simply believing that what God says in His Word, He will do. Therefore, these preachers have great faith because they obey the Word of God in its entirety.

Jewell Smith, at Orlando Baptist Temple, took a great step of faith building a beautiful 2500-seat auditorium. He knew God would supply his need. When Smith borrowed \$425,000 to build "Central Florida's largest auditorium," it was not a leap into the dark. Smith was willing to obey God's Word in its entirety, knowing that correct church building would lead to financial answers to prayer.

13. *Concern for the poor.* Jesus recognized the poor. He said, "For ye have the poor always with you" (Matt. 26:11); and he recognized them as a greater group to seek for salvation as opposed to the rich. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). These pastors have a warm spot in their

hearts for the poor; many of the churches are made up of members who are on the lower economic side of the social register.

John Powell, at Reimer Road Baptist Church, Wadsworth, Ohio, was proud of the fact he had attracted a number of poor, stating, “These are the best people in the world.” Powell himself was reared poor, yet has a ministry to both the rich and college graduates who attend his church.

Bill Pennell, Temple Baptist Church, Kingsport, Tennessee, has three rooms of clothing, shoes and canned goods that are given to the poor in his city. The church has been able to reach many homes in the name of the Lord simply because they minister to bodily needs. Pennell quoted the old proverb, “He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord.” Yet no one would accuse the church of social action, for all of the ministry to the poor is centered in soul winning.

Many contemporary Americans are callous to the needs of the poor, willing only to throw pocket change into the Salvation Army kettle at Christmas. The churches here reviewed go the extra mile; they not only supply the poor with physical needs, they invite them into their churches, sit with them in their pews and, when they win them to Christ, make them a part of the church. By giving of themselves, they fulfill the compassion of Christ.

14. *Faithfulness in small details.*—One primary criterion for greatness is that a man must be faithful to small things. These pastors have qualified for God’s promotion by their diligence to details, such as in separation from seemingly small sin, perfecting business details in the church or follow-up of Sunday School absentees.

God spoke to Bob Gray that if he wanted the Columbus Drew building downtown for the rescue mission, he must be willing to go and kneel on the sidewalk and pray in public. Gray thought a compromise would get the building, so he went and leaned against it in prayer late one evening. He didn’t get the building. A year later, when he obeyed God in a small detail, God gave him the building.

Gary Coleman, Lavon Drive Baptist Church, Garland, Texas, mimeographs a list of every check written by the church and distributes it to every individual including his own salary check. Coleman believes that if his people are aware of every small detail, they will have more confidence in his leadership. His growth indicates that he is right.

15. *In seeking godly counselors.*—The book of Proverbs goes at length to tell a young man to seek godly counselors for prosperity. The pastors in these churches are characterized first “by their ability to listen.” As I interviewed all of the pastors in this series, I was amazed at the influence of Dr. Jack Hyles, through his pastors’ conferences, preaching in churches, and books<sup>1</sup>. These pastors travel to pastors’ conferences, learning from the great ministers of America, returning home to incorporate successful church principles from those who are getting the job

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Jack Hyles has done more than perhaps any other man to further the cause of Christ in the United States. Some might point to a great evangelist or Billy Graham, indicating they have won thousands to the Lord and through their crusades won more than Dr. Jack Hyles has won at the First Baptist Church in Hammond. However, the evangelist only gets professions of faith at an altar. The true criterion of success in God’s work is measured by permanence. Dr. Hyles has influenced hundreds of young preachers who have won thousands of souls on their way to building large churches. The corporate influence of Hyles on these preachers on a weekly basis is greater than the corporate influence of any one evangelist.

done. They are leery of accepting advice from college professors and other “experts” who deal with theory only.

Also, I was amazed at the number of these pastors who had read *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools* (by the author) and then traveled to these churches to view them and discover the reasons why God had prospered these large churches. Because these pastors were willing to learn from godly men, God has blessed them.

16. *Strength of solitude*.—These pastors have learned the necessity of getting alone with God, spending time in the Scriptures and giving themselves to intercessory prayer. Many of the world’s religions place priority on solitude and meditation. The Christian minister does more than gain strength through reflection and self-interrogation; he communes face to face with the living God; and, in that divine interview, the minister is transformed into the likeness of the God whom he serves (II Cor. 3:18). In these times of solitude, the pastor prays for souls. Thumbing through the pages of Dr. Bob Gray’s Bible, I noticed a number of watermarks throughout the pages. His tear-stained Bible is a vivid reflection of one of his favorite verses: “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:6). But Gray is not the only one who prays for lost people; these pastors have built their churches through prayer and pleading with God to save lost people through their preaching and soul winning.

17. *Strong emotional stability*.—The very fact that these pastors remained in a church over a long period of time shows stability. They have kept their desires in check, serving God where He found them. The pastors are able to weep with them that weep, shedding tears behind the pulpit. At a funeral they are able to identify with the bereaved; when they marry children from their church, they rejoice with their young people at the highest moment of pleasure.

Only the pastor who can discipline his emotions, can preach *hard*, then deal with those who are emotionally broken at the altar. When one of the men discovered a deacon guilty of adultery, he did not vent his emotional anger but rather was burdened that a layman who had stood with him, was fallen from the ranks.

18. *Spirituality*.—True spirituality will build a church where false spirituality will hurt congregational growth. Some pastors are so hyper-spiritual, all they do is pray for God’s blessing; they are not willing to get out and work long hours for success. Other pastors express false spirituality through legalism, by which they hope God will bless them because they have given up some particular sin or bit or worldliness. Purity by itself will not cause church growth. These pastors have learned that God does not bless them because of what they do. God has blessed them because of grace; which means God will bless the work because of Himself. Legalism has never “called forth” the blessing of God; however, when the minister repents from sin, obeys the Word of God and yields himself to the will of God, he has placed himself in a position where God can use him, thus has the blessing of God upon his life.

Grace is the key to the Christian life. We are saved by grace and we live by grace (Eph. 2:8,9). Grace is the key to the ministry of these pastors. These pastors recognize there is nothing in themselves that would attract the attention of God. They do not have the best formal education, but the wisdom of God has enabled them to stand as tall as professors at a university.

They do not have great oratorical abilities, but the power of God upon their sermons has moved the multitudes to salvation. They do not have the greatest business minds in the world, but the Chief Controller of the church has given them the planning of a Wall Street financier. They do not have the promotional expertise of a Madison Avenue advertising executive, but their burning desire to reach the multitudes has attracted multitudes. God's blessing is the secret of these churches; He bestows it through His grace.