

# AN OPEN DOOR

*a story of the restoration of the local church*

*by Ron Simpkins*

*Revelations 3:8 – I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut ...*

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**Prescott, Arizona**

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In a little town in Arizona, God chose to unleash a spiritual revolution. A struggling pastor got tired of “religion as usual” and was bold enough to step put on the word of god. Step by step God brought them back to the Bible principles that caused the New Testament church to shake its world.

Birthered out of the Jesus People movement, the Prescott church took those early concepts of radical street evangelism and harnessed them to the church. Struggling to obey, the congregation learned about discipleship, church planting and the power of the indigenous church.

The result has been the launching of hundreds of churches, the raising up of powerful crusade and conference ministries, and above all; obedience to the gospel command, “Go ye into all the world”. This is that story.

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## INTRODUCTION

Phoenix, Arizona in the summer is so hot that Hell doesn't scare anybody. It was there, on a Sunday morning in 1955, that the fire of God was sparked in a young man's heart and swept beyond the Arizona desert, igniting hearts in barren cities around the world. As Wayman Mitchell prepared for church that Sunday morning he seemed like the most unlikely man on planet Earth to spread the gospel. In that distant past, he had all the marks of a nobody. But, by the mid '80's the fire in his heart had spread to many thousands across the U.S. and into 13 countries on 5 continents. If he could be used in such a powerful way; there was hope for many more like him.

It's not hard to take an intelligent, smooth, aggressive, winner and turn him into a "preacher". Yet Christianity, using this caliber of candidate, has made little impact in our day. One third of the churches in America have less than 45 attending on Sunday morning, and two thirds have less than 75. Yet Mitchell, who was always labeled a loser, would gather around him the quitters, the addicted, the insane and the hopeless and see God transform them into powerful preachers who would be released into ministry to reach hundreds, and even thousands.

True greatness has always been the ability to take the average and cause it to be stretched into something more than it ever could have been if left alone. It happened with David and his mighty men. It's always been

the foundation of revival, from Jesus taking twelve rejects, to John Wesley and the explosion of the Methodist revival. Out of Prescott, Arizona that same transformation took place. Wayman Mitchell took those destined to be dishwashers, gas jockeys and Taco Bell raiders and has seen them become powerful men of God.

That morning in 1955, when God touched him, there was no way to see the powerful forces that were being released in the man's life. As this book is being written, a tidal wave of revival is beginning to break. Hundreds of churches have been started that are reaching out to every continent on Earth. Men by the hundreds are responding to the call and pressing in to be used by God. Meetings in the States are seeing tremendous miracles and huge crowds are filling large auditoriums. Over-seas, the response has been even greater.

In 1984 crusades were held in the Philippines that were New Testament-like in their impact. In Romblon, Larry Huch was scheduled to preach a small crusade, but 10,000 people showed up. Never had there been a crowd that large in the small city park. The people's excitement mounted to the point where they were climbing the trees just to catch a view of the preacher. The mayor of the city was afraid for the park and made them leave, so they moved over to the church.

The people packed into the church. In the Philippines, to say people "pack in" is to talk of something Americans can't comprehend. A "jeepney" (a taxi made out of a jeep) that, to us, could hold ten at the most, in Manila is considered empty without 30 people. They pile in until they're stacked three high. The building was so crammed with bodies that it literally began to bulge, breathing was almost impossible. When no more could get in, others, desperate to hear, began to hang from the windows and finally began to tear the back of the church off.

On another occasion, Tommy Alvarez was preaching a simple sermon on the baptism of the Holy Spirit at a pastor's conference in the Philippines. At the halfway point it became obvious that a majority of the Pentecostal pastors and workers present had never received the baptism. After Alvarez made an altar call, over 150 came forward for a mass prayer and Pentecostal power fell.

In Mexico, Jack Harris has seen some of the most powerful meetings to date. In the small border town of Nogales, a recent crusade saw over 4,000 people cram into a small bullring. There, amid the pools of dried blood on the ground and smells of violence, Jesus' blood set countless Mexicans free. Tumors disappeared, a boy with a blind eye was instantly healed, and a girl with a huge goiter brought screams of shock from those

near her as they watched it melt away.

In previous crusades, newspapers have run false stories and accusations, branding Harris with every evil label imaginable. Their goal was to discredit the meetings and discourage people from responding. What a shock it was when, at this crusade, the T.V. station came to broadcast the services. A mother and her little girl stood and told how watching the program on T.V. the night before, they had prayed and taken the braces off her legs. Now they both came walking, wanting to worship God. At the next Sunday morning service the church had doubled as hundreds of visitors came out to hear the good news of the gospel.

These are only a few of the miracles that happened as a result of one man's commitment to God. But for young Mitchell, in `55 these things were years in the future. To him, God pouring out his Spirit in nation after nation seemed to belong only in a world of fantasy.

## CHAPTER ONE

### God's Plan

Wayman Mitchell was born on October 9, 1929 into a world about to collapse into depression. It was a time of chaos and change, and he was a man born to bring revolution and challenge into a collapsing spiritual world. There was no doubt that great parts of the church were falling away. Other parts of the church had already drifted so far from their roots as to not even resemble Christ, but this was only prophetic fulfillment. There were other prophesies to fulfill and God was preparing His real church for unprecedented revival.

Mitchell's being born on the same day as Christopher Columbus, is one of those interesting small touches of God. Columbus was an explorer, dreamer and visionary who refused to follow the accepted limitations of his day, but moved by vision launched out into uncharted paths.

Wayman is an explorer, too. Not of new lands, but of ways to reach the hearts of those locked in darkness. Like Columbus, when his heart told him there was a better way, he refused to accept old and hackneyed methods that wouldn't work.

History showed the church starting as an explosion of life. Hand-crafted by Christ it shook and changed the world. Breaking down cultural and national barriers, it seemed unstoppable, but slowly it lost its life under the weight of compromise. The degeneration went so far that the light was almost extinguished. But God said He would always have a remnant, and a remnant arose. It began with Luther and the rediscovery of the Bible as the rule to guide men's lives. The disease in the church ran so deep that the restoration wouldn't come in a year or two but over centuries. Slowly, God put the pieces back together. Wesley would bring a greater understanding of the miracle of salvation and its availability to all who would ask.

Men like William Carrie, Hudson Taylor, and Adoniram Judson would bring a desire to reach untouched countries and peoples. God raised up men like Whitefield, Finney, and Moody to revive evangelism and reach the masses. Strong currents of holiness began to move through the Body of Christ as saints sought to be more like the Master.

They stripped off the world that had crept in to stifle God's reality. These fresh winds blew against the grain of tradition, breaking new ground and opening new doors.

As the twentieth century came, so did an acceleration of God's moving. In Topeka, Kansas, at a Bible school called "Stone's Folly" a group of people discovered the biblical evidence of God's power. A new chapter in the church opened as men and women began speaking in tongues. A new world of possibility exploded out of this discovery. In a few years, powerful evangelists began to travel the globe with miracle ministries. Thousands would be drawn and touched by great revivals.

Mitchell was saved during one of these great sweepings of revival. Yet with all God was doing, so much remained to be done. For the average Christian, there was no mobilizing of his ability, no channeling of the untapped power of the church. Thousands were being filled with the Spirit, speaking in tongues, prophesying and believing for the abundant life, then going back to churches as dead as ever. The result was the rising up of hundreds of para-church structures. Unfortunately, they could not meet the need that only the church was designed to meet.

The church itself was still encased in Medieval, Catholic institutions and mind-sets that bound it. The power of the early church had been in Jesus' promise, "I will build my church." Jesus would restore in last day revival the dignity and power of the local church; the church as the nurturer, reproducer, caller, sender, recruiting station for fighters, restorer, hospital for the new birth, training center for world outreach. Mitchell, along with others, was born to that task and purpose, a small but significant piece in the plan of God. He was not chosen because of his talent or ability, but for the same reason that Jesus chose the twelve disciples; to show what he could do with the weak and foolish to confound the wise. A church in Arizona, handcrafted by the Spirit of God, would become a pattern of what was possible to the weakest of God's people, if they did it God's way. Not the story of one man, but of hundreds and then thousands passing through an 'open door' God has made possible for his church before Christ's return.

This isn't the story of an easy way to revival. The fact is that if the churches out of Prescott represent anything it's work and endurance. Not a new technique to control God and force him to do what man wants but a way to allow God to control us.

The Bible waxes large in stories of people who held on to nothing but hope. Who talked of promises that others laughed at. Yet, of a people who in the appointed time saw God's power revealed. God wants to show his power today to those that will first allow him to show them his will.

Out of Prescott Arizona God has sent out a vision that has in 12 years seen over 350 churches started from scratch all over the world. Evangelists

have developed that see miracles on a scale that boggles the mind, and converts are filled with a vision to touch the world. A man trusted what God said and has seen the potential that lies in serving God. It wasn't easy for Jacob to plant his seed in a drought, but he obeyed and there was a supernatural multiplication. The story of Prescott and what it led to is the same. In a small town God brought not a few but a seeming endless stream of young men with exceptional talent. Brought them as sinners and turned them into powerful preachers that pastor hundreds and preach like flames of fire. Finances have come out of common unpretentious people and commitment is seen in those that attend that would thrill the heart of any pastor. Not just a few people, but thousands are spending there free time to see the Kingdom established in their cities and lands. There isn't a pastor with an honest heart that wouldn't say I want that. Yet God works his will different than man, and the road to revival is often down rutted winding roads that seem to lead along strange paths and in wrong directions.

### **Small beginnings**

The heroes of the '50's worked hard at laying the groundwork for a future generation of rebels. James Dean was violent, but cool. "The Wild One", Marlon Brando, made bikes and leather a symbol of an age. Mitchell was a part of this culture. He was Napoleonic both in size and trouble making ability. His hawk-like features never graced the local church choir. In fact, it's a miracle that they weren't on the post office wall. Raised in the rough and tumble action of a redneck community, he seemed better prepared to warm a bar stool with a cowboy hat on his head than to preach.

He'd grown up in Prescott, Arizona, a town with a history of mines, booze, rodeos, and fighting. Mitchell was a true "Native Son". He describes himself then as a "two-bit hoodlum", who never got caught at his small-time larceny. He was a thief, burglar, and embezzler. If things really got tough, he wasn't above rolling a drunk for some quick cash.

Mitchell came from a broken home. His father had a weakness for gambling and drinking that turned out what society labeled a candidate for failure. He was of the breed (common in those days in the West) that would be labeled "Okie" or "Arky", depending on what form of insult you wanted to hurl.

He struggled through High School, and was graduated more by sympathy than scholarship. The year 1948 brought graduation, followed

by immediate enlistment in the Air Force. The main marks that the service left on him were some discipline and a slightly crooked nose, which had been broken while fighting as a Golden Gloves contender.

As 1952 rolled around, Wayman found himself out of the service and back in Arizona. While chasing the ladies in Phoenix, he met Nelda Sue Henderson at a dance in the Riverside Ballroom. Nelda was a romance novel junkie and, in some ways, their life would be like a plot from one of these stories. Not because of Mitchell's romantic nature, but through a romance that started in tragedy and blossomed into victory. The two of them drank full cups of tears and joy. Their start in married life was rough. He had been jobless for months when their first little girl was born. Hell tried to crush them, when suddenly the baby got pneumonia and died within hours. Life had thrown them a knock-out blow, but God intervened through a brother who was going to a Foursquare church. Out of the crisis of this experience, the Mitchells made their beginning, stumbling step towards God.

It would be nice to say that they immediately became two on fire Christians, but at first the light was more of a flicker. These were days of the most blatant spiritual ignorance, even in Pentecostal churches. Many of the great concepts of the Spirit were just forming in the hearts of different men, but for the Mitchells there was really little challenging them towards a life totally committed to God. It wasn't that the church didn't believe in tongues, miracles, dominion, revival and faith. They just had no idea how to release them. The church they began to attend was Pentecostal, but little was happening and the Mitchells soon fell into a rut.

One day Mitchell's faith was attacked by a Mormon he was working with. The encounter forced him to look at God's Word himself, to discover what, to him, was a new and a powerful truth on the redemptive power of the blood of Jesus Christ. Thinking and studying on this had stirred him tremendously.

On a Sunday morning in 1955, all these things were about to come into focus. As he prepared for church that morning, he was thinking of this exciting new concept and listening to a radio service with Oral Roberts. In those days, Roberts was in his prime. Traveling the country with his gospel tent, he was fanning the flames of the "Latter Rain" revival. As Mitchell listened to Roberts preaching on the radio, he began to feel his back tingle and power run up and down his spine. With no real thought about what all of this meant he went on to the morning service at his own church. He didn't expect anything special that day, but did respond to the altar call. Another man came and laid his hand on Mitchell's

back to pray with him. Instantly Mitchell was filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in other tongues. This was an overpowering experience. No one had told him to repeat "Aba Daba Do" or to go through the vowels rapidly. The fact was that he was almost totally ignorant of the Holy Spirit until that moment when God moved. Yet, God hit him with power and revealed His glory. Mitchell began to prophesy; speaking of how God was going to move powerfully, "In the nations of the world and the islands of the sea". As he spoke, he knew that this was a message to him, but the idea seemed so far-fetched to him then that he couldn't work up the nerve to share with anyone else that he was to be the man God used, so he let the Phoenix church think it was for them. The seed of God had been planted. Destiny was unfurling and Wayman was drunk on the new wine of the Spirit. Unable to leave the altar, his wife had to wait around for him until long after the others had gone home.

Mitchell didn't explode out of that service onto the revival circuit. In fact, to be honest, he didn't even quit smoking for several more months, but God was working. These were days of decision and formation. As a young man of 25 he didn't fall into the mold of those that were around him. The church he attended was a nice little flock with a good reputation in Arizona, yet most of its members were far from mobilized for God. Mitchell felt different. He never could quite understand how others could be saved and yet seem to appreciate the gospel so little. Others could sing, "I have decided to follow Jesus," and then spend their time vacationing, fishing, and acting like they did God a favor whenever they allowed Him to break into their schedule, but Mitchell could not.

His call to preach came on an Easter morning. His wife had already gone to church and he was preparing to go to work. Before he left that morning, though, he had set aside some time to seek God. While he was kneeling there, alone, God called him to preach. It wasn't an overpowering experience, and yet it was real enough to survive the years of testing and assault that faced him. He went to his pastor and she gave him the standard advice, "Go to Bible College."

He enrolled in a year's correspondence course, but it was never the esoteric realm of theology that moved him. Like most men, he was made to learn from the practical experiences of life. Books and study were a part of his life, but the truths stayed locked inside them when they were not brought out in the arena of life. What he thrived on were those times when the men of the church headed for the parks or went out to skid row to preach. It was there that he felt a spiritual excitement that the classroom kept trying to choke out.

It was during this time that he had a dream that was out of the ordinary. It was so vivid and clear in every detail that he knew it had to be from God. He was preaching in a magnificent church, to a crowd of influential people. The message rolled out from him, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" When he arrived in Los Angeles in 1957 to attend Bible School, the impact of this dream hit him. There, at the headquarters of the church, stood the exact building he had seen in his dream. He knew that if the building was there, then one day he must be destined to preach the message. Years later God would give the opportunity to see the dream fulfilled and the message delivered.

### **Struggle**

His struggle with L.I.F.E. Bible College began. It was a contradiction that the desert of Arizona would someday be an oasis of spiritual life for Mitchell, while the plush and fertile Los Angeles valley, teeming with life, was a spiritual wilderness. Here was a place of testing. His call had come; would he prove faithful to it? Like Moses who faced the wilderness and testing of commitment and denial, Mitchell would have to pay his spiritual dues.

School was a bad experience. Mitchell throbbed with energy ready to be unleashed. His wiry raw-boned frame sought release that never seemed to come. More was taught about what not to do than what to do, and many of the ill-directed concepts he learned took him years to forget. In their late 20's, the Mitchells were not the formable lumps of clay the professors were accustomed to shaping. His wife refused to submit that first year to the school's "no smoking" rule, and Mitchell wouldn't accept teachings that leaned towards Calvinistic doctrine. Aggression had been one of his main characteristics before he was saved and he still saw no reason to bend before what, to him, was obvious error. Standing for what he believed, earned him the title of a rebel, as it does today.

His battle with school was due to lack of motivation rather than ability. His mind was a steel trap that clutched whatever it took in. His tremendous analytical ability made him a natural problem solver. Anything electrical or mechanical was a snap for him. When he came to Los Angeles he worked with Lockheed Aircraft. But when a slump hit the industry he found himself without a job. By faith, he went ahead with college.

Soon he was hired by a coin-operated laundry equipment company. The job was simple and gave him lots of time for study, but paid a very minimal salary. In just a few weeks, a better offer came along from Flying

Tiger Airlines. It meant long hours and many distractions, but a lot of money! Mitchell turned it down. He faced the critical choice of God or mammon and from that decisive moment the gospel, not money, would always have priority in his life.

The fifties were a time of growing American prosperity; Dobie Gillis philosophized about girls, and shows like, "Leave it To Beaver," "Father Knows Best," and "Ozzie and Harriet" laid out a comfortable self-centered morality. The goal of the nation was to enjoy itself. Most people felt that prosperity, and all that went with it, was a spiritual right. They ran after it like a chicken after corn. Mitchell chose a different course. He wanted to give himself to school and study completely. It didn't matter that the school wasn't what he wanted it to be, or that his family limped from bill to bill, barely hanging on to financial solvency. God had called and he would follow.

He threw himself into college, but it was a battle. The school had sprung out of Pentecostal revival fires. Originally it had been formed to equip evangelists, but as time went on, it had drifted more and more towards a copy of other religious institutions. The faculty began to be filled with those who had failed as pastors and were promoted into teaching others. By the time Mitchell got there, many in the school's faculty looked down on divine healing, the gifts of the Spirit, and even the revival ministry itself.

For Mitchell this was discouraging, because like the needle of a compass, his heart pointed in the direction of God's moving. Not offering any actual practical experience, the school concentrated on concepts and ideas. This gave him a good foundation in the Word, but left him practically unprepared for the day to day realities of pastoring.

It was here at school that one of his most offensive habits began to show up — honesty. Mitchell was incapable of the duplicity and glad-handing of the plastic gospel that was becoming common. It always boggled Mitchell's mind that Jesus could say, "Let your yea be yea," and yet, that trait was so rare among those called to represent him. Nothing would get Mitchell in more trouble than to call a liar a liar or a snake a snake.

The term, "Tell it like it is", could have been invented to describe him. He never wanted to be anything but what he was, yet this seemed to offend many. In the church world "love" was often used to mask truth, and to keep people from having to be totally honest. Yet Mitchell couldn't see this in the life of Christ, and he enraged many of his contemporaries by his total candidness. If he's mad at you, he lets you know, and if he

likes you it can be seen by all. This was refreshing to those who had an honest heart, but seemed rebellious to many others. Injustice and hypocrisy were two things he hated. Age and years of service meant nothing to him unless they were linked to spiritual maturity. He was never able to pretend things were all right when they weren't, and stepped on many toes because of this.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Ministry

The West has always been known as a wild and dangerous place. Indian battles and claim jumpers have abounded. Pancho Villa made his raids into Arizona and Mitchell has fought some real battles of his own there. They seemed small at the time, almost humorous, but their consequences would be felt throughout his ministry.

Armed with a degree, this young scholar was ready to tackle the world. He stopped in Phoenix for a few months as a Youth Pastor. His main accomplishment there was to enrage the religious folk. At times this seemed to be his calling in life. He found it impossible to play by "The Rules". He could not be like the small minds that saw the gospel as a social event. He could not understand those who neither loved nor hated Christ, but simply ignored Him with their day to day emphasis on the world. Wayman was consumed with lost humanity. As youth leader, it was obvious to him that many of the kids were just playing at Christianity. One day at a youth meeting he saw his chance to strike a blow for righteousness. He went for the throat, pulled out all the stops, and conviction fell. It seemed a great success, until the next day when he found himself called on the carpet by the pastor. The parents who had chaperoned the event felt he had embarrassed their children by insinuating that "the little dears" might have a sin problem. Worse yet, in their book, he had shown no tact by doing this when their friends were there. Mitchell knew that this church wasn't the place to begin what God wanted to do.

Finally, the big day came. A church was offered to him in the town of Wickenburg, Arizona. The scenery was desert and the temperature in the summer did an excellent imitation of a blast furnace. It had a uniform effect on the disposition of the 2,500 people who lived there. It made them mean. This one horse town on the Hassayampa River gloried in the title of "Red-neck", and had always been a tough spiritual nut to crack. Straddling the highway that runs from Phoenix to Los Angeles and Las Vegas, the city made a comfortable living off dude ranches and milking the tourists. The people who lived there were locked into such deep ruts of lifestyle that attendance at a new church was the last thing they ever thought of.

Pastor Mitchell took it because (as mountain climbers say) "it was there". Less than twenty people showed up regularly and most of them belonged to the geriatric set. It was a church with a long history of tragedy

and failure. Worst of all, he was totally unprepared to change it. Seeing God move was rare in the denomination Mitchell had been trained in. There were about 4 churches that had some touch of revival, and he had heard of them over and over, but for the hundreds of other churches next to nothing was happening. Mitchell found himself in a difficult city with no idea of what to do. Today, any member of Pastor Mitchell's church could go out with a good idea of how to stir a city, but it was a hidden mystery to him in the late fifties.

Pastor Mitchell loved the challenge of difficult things and his lean and wiry frame was pointed perpetually forward. "When in doubt, do something!" he thought, so he decided to have a revival. He wrote to several people who were holding meetings at the time and laid his ignorance bare. In his letter of invitation he asked, "How do you have a revival?" The Westburgs, who he'd never met before, wrote back that they would be glad to come and laid out a strategy for the meeting.

It was one of those life changing weeks. People actually came and were filled with the Holy Ghost. What today seems just the natural impact of the gospel was an astonishing display of the power of God to this young minister. To see that people could actually be drawn into a revival service was a turning point in Mitchell's life.

All through school he had been taught to play down his Pentecostal affiliation. The professors had made it clear that the wise purveyor of the gospel didn't mention speaking in tongues. The latest doctrine was that the best approach was to claim to be Evangelical (or at the least, full gospel). That way you could escape the stigma of "Holy Roller". Yet the Westburgs would come to church thirty minutes before service and get right up on the platform, praying and speaking in tongues. It was amazing to this young theologian that the Westburgs didn't seem to know that this Pentecostal display would drive people away. Even more amazing was the obvious fact (as people came to church and brought others with them) that it didn't. It blew his mind, and from that moment he was irrevocably Pentecostal. While other groups chose to smooth out the gospel and make it more palatable, Mitchell chose to go with the rough white-lightning impact of the new wine. It's hard to comprehend today what that meant in a time when there was a stigma associated with the term "Holy Roller", but Mitchell didn't care. If he was going to bear the reproach, he was going to claim the blessing, too. No more hiding for him; the first thing he did was change his sign and put in big letters, "PENTECOSTAL." From that point on, he began to contend in all of his churches for open prayer and praise.

## Confrontation

Probably the greatest battle the pastor of a small church can fight is the one with finances. The Mitchells were far from wealthy, yet they had made a decision to put the church and study first. He got a job in Phoenix working one day a week. The pay was barely enough to survive on, but it left a lot of time to lay the foundations that would be built on in future ministry. It wasn't that Mitchell couldn't get more hours. They begged him to work, but ministry was first. He had heard of the need for a pastor to establish a prosperous image, but he couldn't afford it. His wife became an expert at stretching hamburger and Spam. They juggled bills and used things until nothing was left to use. Though Sister Mitchell would have enjoyed better things, she didn't complain. It was her support that made the difference.

A family in the church asked to speak with him. Under the guise of concern they said, "We're putting in about ten dollars a week, but that's really more than our tithe, and we're not sure that we're going to be able to keep it up" That amount seems small until you realize that the total offerings of the church were less than \$35 a week. The principles of many have been sold out for much less in the face of unprincipled bribery.

This was all just a ploy to let Mitchell know who was in control. The husband was a wimp who had given control of his marriage over to his wife, but one man to boss around wasn't enough for her. She had dominated all the previous pastors of the church, and felt she was the key to revival and spiritual health. She was, but as the key turned it was to let her out the door. To have backed down here would have bred the spirit of people pleasing that cripples most churches. The question before him was whether he'd be a prophet or a puppet. Mitchell would never be one to cater to the allure of numbers or to bend because there was a financial gain to be had. Unity of purpose would always be worth more than the temporary appeal of numbers.

Without batting an eyebrow, he said, "That's all right. God will supply!" It was as if he had slapped them in the face. Again and again, as time passed, they locked wills like two wrestlers seeking for a hold, but he was not going to bend. It wasn't a matter of great wisdom or foresight on Mitchell's part. He just refused to be manipulated. She could pray against him, lie about him, or even curse him but he wasn't going to sell anyone the pastorate.

The battle and the victory were a real eye-opener to Mitchell. Out of this, he learned that a major problem in many Pentecostal churches is strong, domineering women. Men in Pentecostal circles had been

out-numbered badly in the early years. Many women had been forced to take roles they were not designed for, and as a result, something unpleasant had risen in their character. Like mini Attila the Huns, these frustrated women had terrorized and laid waste many a church. Wayman saw the problem these uncovered women caused and was determined that he would never allow a church of his to be manipulated by man or woman.

The Wickenburg church began to prosper. It grew to 55 people and became financially stable. God showed Mitchell that if he would preach, the Holy Spirit would convict. One woman brought in \$179 in back tithes, and another woman remembered that she had promised God that she would tithe on the sale of their house in Michigan. She was so excited that she couldn't wait for church and took the money straight to Sister Mitchell. You could have knocked Nelda over with a feather as she watched her count out ten \$100 bills. In just a few weeks the church offerings went from about \$120 a month to over \$1,700. This was proof to Mitchell that God's people didn't have to be beggars. He saw that poverty was a spirit which could stop a church from doing the will of God, but liberality would release untold blessing. Out of this came the discovery of several principles of financial dominion, which were stepping stones to taking dominion in all the areas of God's working.

### **Missionary**

Mitchell had agreed to come to Wickenburg, understanding the limitations of the city, but he had made it clear that he had no intentions of being buried there. He began to feel stirrings to leave, but at this time he was totally innocent to the inner workings of a denomination. He was green enough to think that if he prayed, God would speak to those in charge. It was years before he learned of all the politics and manipulation that lay buried beneath the veneer of concern.

When a church in Courtney, Canada was offered to him he could hardly contain his excitement. Here he was with a chance to go to another country. Only later did it begin to dawn on him that there had been an insult tied to the offer.

In those days the Mitchells could haul everything they owned in a 4' x 5' trailer. So, with his wife and four kids he embarked on the great adventure of the will of God. It was a trip of many small miracles; bald tires (that somehow held together) and old cars that escaped the junk-yard by the use of bubble-gum and bailing wire.

Their first stop was his old home church in Phoenix where the

Mitchells received a love offering of \$196, and it was a good thing they got it. Right at the beginning of the trip a cracked head on the car engine cost them nearly the whole offering. Finally, they arrived in a strange town in a new country with a total of \$35 and found a church that was divided into warring camps. He knew next to nothing about the church except that much of what had been promised turned out to be an exaggeration.

This was a church with major problems. The pastor had had moral problems and was living in the city, and his deserted wife still attended the church. The church itself had split down the middle and half were seeking to join the Assemblies of God. It dawned on him that this offer was not a signal that he was expected to "go places". He was being labeled a spiritual janitor best used for cleaning up messes in devastated churches.

He discovered that in the organization's mind he wasn't of the caliber of pastors who were offered choice churches. He lacked the toothy smile, the plastic look and manner of the winner that marked those who, besides pastoring, could moon-light as game show hosts. He was too much of a "hick". He was considered able to take struggling works, but little else. Yet, "all things work together for good," and this very rejection would be the tool to sharpen God's instrument and bring him to maturity. Character isn't built by the easy road, and what others meant for evil only strengthened Mitchell's reliance on God.

When they arrived it looked as if everything was going to fall apart, but the Lord healed the split and things began to move along.

### **Frustration**

These were days when Sunday school programs were the rage. Mitchell pulled out all the stops in getting the kids in. He pushed every gimmick and program going, with great success. Some of those attending the church enjoyed working with children, and the building was soon bulging with kiddies. One Sunday they broke the all time Sunday school attendance record when 250 showed up. For Mitchell, though, it was a hollow victory. It didn't take great discernment to see that all he was doing was acting as a glorified baby sitter. People came to Sunday school, then left before the morning service. This wasn't what he entered the ministry to accomplish. He saw that, although Sunday school was a valid church expression, it wasn't the way to build a church. Kids were wonderful and Mitchell had a full quiver of his own (some said a quiver and a half), but Jesus hadn't sent the twelve out on a bus route, and Paul never put on a clown outfit to make high attendance Sunday. Now came a real time of

testing that nearly ended his ministry. He was a success by denominational standards, yet he felt that he had failed. He looked at the people and knew that there was no real change in their lives.

Mitchell is of the breed of doers. Inventive and inquisitive by nature, he looked for the right combination that could bring together God and man, but like Edison's frustrations in trying to create the first light bulb, most of the early experiments were failures. He couldn't escape discouragement, but at least he was learning what not to do in the future.

Vision can be as dangerous as it is helpful, because a man consumed with a vision can't settle for business as usual. When he sees enormous potential and nothing happening he opens himself up to doubts, attacks and assaults. Mitchell could see that all he had was another dead denominational church and he had no idea how to change it. In discouragement he threw in the towel and went back to Phoenix. He planned to never preach again.

Many attack the tinsel ministry of Christian radio and television. Its emptiness and lack of depth can often be appalling, but one good thing came from the church of the air. As a discouraged young man listened to one especially stupid show it dawned upon him that he could do better than that. He might not be able to shake the world, but if that guy could preach then Mitchell could too. He picked back up his mantle and put the armour back on.

In Phoenix he had begun to attend Fellowship Tabernacle. At the time it was the "going" church, but the longer he was there the more he knew that it wasn't what he was looking for. He could see that they were building on the latest fads and ideas that were sweeping back and forth through the religious world at the time. He wanted something more solid.

While attending there, he met another dissatisfied Foursquare pastor who was making his living in the appliance business. At the time Wayman was doing the same thing and the common bond drew them together. It wasn't long until the conversation turned to their frustration with what was happening in their respective churches. One thing led to another, and they found themselves goading each other into starting one of their own.

To Mitchell, this wasn't an idle challenge. His vision had been rekindled and the battle was ready to be joined. Never one to sit around and waste time, he began to scour the land for a building. In Scottsdale he ran across an old deserted house that had been bought by speculators.

Soon they had worked out a deal to rent it on a month-to-month basis and People's Church was launched in Scottsdale.

They caught the fringe of the beginning Charismatic move, and from the day the church opened they had about 75 people. The people were hungry and it grew from there. For a while things went along great. One would preach and then the other, but Mitchell soon saw that co-pastoring only breeds a deformed child with two heads. Disagreements arose over the way that things were being done. It was a lesson that he would never forget. Because of this, he was never again tempted to play down the authority that the Bible put in the hands of the pastor. Others would be tempted to flow with theories of democracies and multiple ministry, but Mitchell would hold to the local church and its dignity under a man of God. He didn't have to be burned twice to learn. The final break came over the handling of money. Mitchell realized that he could never be happy just going to church and listening to another man; he told God that if He would just open a door where he could be honest and not play any games that he was willing to go anywhere. That was all God was waiting for.

## CHAPTER THREE

### North

The fourteen month stay in Phoenix was about to end. A church opened up in Idaho. The Northwestern District Supervisor was a man that Mitchell had learned to like, and he soon found himself headed to Emmett, Idaho. Emmett was the county seat of Gem County and boasted a population of over three thousand. Located near the Snake River it was beautiful country, but the church itself wasn't that picturesque. It was a typical denominational church that ran from 70-75 people. Mitchell spent the next three years there. Many truths he had only begun to suspect were forged out during that time.

The church had never been able to pay the salary of a pastor. For over a month he preached on tithing and finances and saw the spirit of poverty broken. There was never another problem in that church with finances. Not only did he see this release the church in money matters, but more importantly, it released something in the congregation's spirit. Here was a truth that had impact for the world. A major block to revival was simply the covetousness of people in the church. Their fear of giving stopped a flow of grace. Faith and giving are interlocked. One can't exist without the other, yet most pastors were scared to even approach this sensitive subject. When it came to truth, though, Mitchell had the sensitivity of a Mack truck doing 80 mph. For Mitchell this was a law of spiritual nature. From that point on, whenever he took a church, it was only a few weeks until he began to push praise and giving. Even when he went to other nations, he knew that only liberality and worship could tear down the fortress of mammon, regardless of how poor the people were.

Another event took place in Emmett that would affect hundreds of future ministers. Dick Mills had come for revival. Though the meeting was good, the most important thing that happened was the opening of a whole new world of study to Mitchell. Years had been spent in college without ever hearing of the most basic tools for study. Mills had been discovering for himself all the rich meaning hidden in the words and language of scripture. He took a special offering to buy Mitchell a *Strong's Concordance*, *Vine's New Testament Word Study*, *A Berkeley Bible*, and a *Webster 's Dictionary*. The world that opened up to Mitchell through these new tools was as enlightening as Galileo's first look through a telescope.

In revival meetings that followed, these two men began to really look

at the meaning of words together. Mitchell had always studied and read extensively, but now he began to really become a student of the Word. His time released by the small size of the community and the church, he saturated himself in scripture and filled his spirit with a tremendous reservoir of truth that he would draw from in God's time.

Through this was laid an unshakable foundation of doctrine and key Bible truths. He came to a point where he could honestly say his beliefs were not because of what a denomination had taught him but because the Bible and the Holy Spirit had taught him.

### **Preacher**

If only one word were allowed to describe Mitchell it would be "preacher". In the resonance of his message there is a chord struck that speaks to hungry hearts. It's not just in the words or the thoughts that are expressed. They are not always revolutionary or put into the latest phraseology, but when he speaks the Holy Spirit causes his words to connect straight with the heart. Something about him makes it impossible to ignore his message. It must be received or rejected. No matter how nice he tries to be, if someone's not excited about God, the force and delivery of his sermons ruin any attempt at diplomacy. While others attuned themselves to the spirit of the times and delivered a low key talk from a stool, Mitchell learned how to thunder. He knew that he wasn't called to share a low commitment message, but "to reprove, rebuke and exhort, in season and out of season".

Emmett brought preaching into the forefront of his ministry. It happened almost by accident. He always had enjoyed study and worked hard at the Wednesday night Bible studies, yet with all of his effort these traditional religious affairs refused to come alive. One week he decided to do something different. He preached. Up until this time there had been a minimal response, but when he began to preach there was an immediate reaction. Within weeks the attendance had quadrupled, and he discovered that if a man will preach people will come to hear him.

The church was doing well. Attendance was around 125 with many more than that in Sunday school. These were days when a church of that size would put you on the map. It was self supporting and the office of divisional superintendent was tied to it, yet Mitchell felt the need to move to an area of greater potential. He was discouraged with the smallness of the town and wanted to find a place where his life could count.

## Challenge

He didn't want a large church as much as he wanted to find a place where there was a building that could be grown into so he could avoid a massive and draining building campaign. He started looking around. He tried to get others who had small works and wanted financial security to trade churches with him. He scouted cities and tried to work through the denomination. He even looked at pioneering but there was no financial support available in those days. Finally he called the district supervisor and told him that he had resigned that morning and he had better send in another man.

When asked what he wanted to do, Mitchell said he didn't know. The supervisor pointed him towards Eugene, Oregon. "The church hasn't had a pastor in three months," he said, "and it would be a good place to go for a little while anyway."

Mitchell agreed to go but made it clear he wouldn't stay. He had been to the church before and it was exactly what he wasn't looking for. The building looked as if it had been built by a madman. It consisted of a maze of strange and useless little rooms and it couldn't hold more than 72 people. Added to this was a crummy little parsonage stuck onto the back of the building and a dilapidated store building that added a final touch of uselessness to the whole affair.

The preacher who had built this had been there for 12 years and had felt that his one mission in life was to convince these people that they were never meant to have over 50 people and that God especially didn't want the gifts of the Spirit to operate there. A rangy group of about 18 die hards were anchored in the church and ready to defend their vision (or lack of it, depending upon your perspective).

Immediately upon arriving, Mitchell began to establish the principles that God had started to show him. In the first weeks he preached on praise, and (miracle of miracles) the people actually began to lift their hands and praise!

Breakthroughs never come without a fight. On a beautiful Sunday morning, when it looked like everything was going great, the battle began to rage. There weren't twenty people in the church at the time including the Mitchells (by then rather substantial family). For the first time those few people had begun to really praise. Mitchell couldn't help but notice that there was one little lady who wasn't joining in. He felt moved upon to encourage her. He soon realized, though, that it was like encouraging an ant hill with a stick of dynamite. The woman was a 73 year old retired

Pentecostal preacher, and she was enraged that Mitchell would dare to insinuate that she wasn't spiritual.

She left the service in a huff and didn't come for the next three weeks. Like a spider spinning and manipulating its web she went into action. Word soon came back that she was mad. Figuring that there were few enough as it was, he decided to try and go smooth the thing out, and went visiting to appease her wounded dignity.

It was a lesson that he would never forget. Many pastors expend tremendous energy trying to keep people that God's trying to run off. About six months after she returned, and right in the middle of a tremendous revival, she led a split that hurt the church badly. It taught Mitchell that periodically, every healthy body needs a healthy elimination. It caused him to view traditional follow-up programs differently than most pastors.

From the day Mitchell stepped through the doors in Eugene, Oregon, God began to work. His ministry was developing at a rapid rate. Truths were learned and implemented that bore immediate fruit. The blessing that had always been on his ministry was finding more refinement and release. Almost as soon as he got the door open the phone began to ring. It wasn't but a few months and the church was packed out with 65 coming.

Even as a young man, he had seen the tremendous benefit that could come from an authentic gift ministry. Several times he had gone to the great tent meetings of Branham and A.A. Allen. Although Mitchell didn't get into the circus atmosphere and run the aisles or let out banshee screams, it was obvious that the whole Phoenix valley was being stirred as thousands came and were held captive by the moving of the Spirit. These were things that challenged him as a young man, and he wasn't willing to jump on the bandwagon of attack just because of excesses in these men's lives. There were real problems in the lives of some of the great latter-rain evangelists, but when the flesh and mistakes were stripped away Mitchell saw a biblical tool of great value to building the church. He intended to use them at every opportunity.

In Bible college, Mitchell had become a close friend with Johnny Metzler. In many ways, they were a Mutt and Jeff combination. Mitchell, who was never caught up in the flash of ministry, had been the meat-and-potatoes man, whereas Johnny was given to flamboyance. Centering his ministry around Los Angeles, Metzler dressed in a way that would make a Hollywood producer look humble. The desire for God and the things of God is what drew these two men together. They had worked together at different times and encouraged each other in joint discoveries

about dominion and the moving of the Spirit.

Metzler's ministry had a powerful supernatural element that scared many, but not Mitchell. Friendships are seldom the accidents they seem, and these two friends were of great help to each other in many critical times.

Metzler was scheduled to come to Eugene for a three week meeting. The old timers in the church there were already mad at Mitchell's masculinity and dynamism. They didn't like the way the church was going and were looking for a fight. Their chance came with Metzler.

### **The Battle**

Wars are powerful events that hold captive the imaginations of men. The sounds of battle, the screams of the dying and the pageantry of victory move men in every nation and land, but the greatest battles are seldom fought in the public arena. It's on the small and obscure plane of everyday life that a man fights or quits. How much easier it is to fight a visible, obvious enemy than our own fears or the people in the church, who we came to help. Paul spoke of battle more than many generals, yet never held a gun or spear. In small groups across the face of Asia and Europe he fought God's battles to forge a church and build a pure and a Godly kingdom against real enemies. His enemies weren't hideous soldiers in battle gear, but people who had been called to be saints, who now resisted because they had become traitors to their calling.

The revival in Eugene started tremendously. It was one of the greatest meetings that Pastor Mitchell ever had. The church was packed. Without any advertising people were coming, jamming the building and filling the foyer. One man who had come was unshakably hooked on drugs, and yet, years of bondage were broken with one prayer. During those weeks, visible miracles happened night after night. Records document how a man who was born without a vertebrae had God create a new one in his back.

In the midst of all of this, one of the deacons had the nerve to come up and say that he didn't believe he had ever seen a real miracle. Mitchell was stunned. The man had been sitting on the front row the night before when a young boy's leg had grown out three inches right in front of his eyes. He asked this man, "Didn't you see that leg grow?"

The man could only say, "I don't know if I did or not"

It was this kind of blindness that disgusted Mitchell.

These dead saints had lost the ability to see the hand of a living God.

Then in the middle of the meeting Metzler took an offering and the old hands became enraged. The rebels arrived to confront their pastor, supposedly concerned that the offering would run sinners off. All Mitchell could think of was how insane this was. Here were people who had never seen a sinner saved. Now they were seeing them come in droves, and all they could contribute was whining.

The fruit of the previous pastor's ranting was about to be stillborn. To these people the packed building was somehow a betrayal of their "hold on `till the rapture" mentality. The final blow fell when Metzler called out the piano player and prophesied of God's blessing on her life, and of how she was going to be a key part of that congregation.

A few weeks after the Mitchells arrived, this woman had joined the church. She was a talented piano player. Wayman saw this as the hand of God and had her playing. What he didn't realize was that she had just come from a split in a "Church of God" She had been the Sunday school superintendent in that church, and had been accused of having an affair with the pastor. Even though this was a lie, the rumor had led to a real battle in the church. Though Mitchell knew nothing of this, the people in his church knew all about it, and to these people this was proof that Metzler wasn't a man of God. The old leaders walked out and took a good part of the church with them.

Mitchell was in a church that he didn't want, in a city he didn't want to be in, with a hassle that had come out of others' spiritual insanity. The obvious course was to leave, but Mitchell had determined to never take that way out of a problem again.

When the Mitchells had come to Eugene, Sister Mitchell had agreed to work so that her husband could give his full time to the church. She enjoyed the work, so Mitchell spent his time dealing with problems and watching the kids. The church appeared to be doing well, so just before the revival with Metzler she gave her two week notice. They were barely making it, even with her extra income. Now, just before she picked up her final paycheck, four of the strongest families in the church walked out the door, taking with them over two hundred dollars a week in tithes.

It turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It drove Mitchell to his knees. He had prayed regularly before, but something about this took him to a new level of grace. From that point on, prayer was never the same.

## **Discovery**

Up until this time Mitchell had ridden the denominational trail, biding his time, playing by the rules, and waiting for the promotion that would bring a larger church. He knew now that this was a fairy tale. He was not a politician and couldn't even play the role. To those in the organization he was a hick who would never fill their preconceived notions of what a leader was supposed to be.

It was just as well that they believed this. If he had ever been given a regular church it would have been like mixing dynamite with fire. He knew that the cause of dead churches was the old duffers who had hardened hearts. He would have split any normal, "status quo" church wide open.

The truth freed him. He had no reason to just go along with tradition. His perspective had changed and he felt no obligation to please the powers that were. He began to think the unthinkable. Maybe the way things had been done for years and years was not the best approach.

In Emmett, he had tried to get different young men to come from the Bible college and work with the young people in the church. However, Bible school had turned them into pros who were demanding salaries and offices; they wanted more than even he had. He had fought the system when he was in school and now he saw why.

The whole institution began to upset him. Camps were fine but they definitely were not the cure-all that demanded the time and energy they absorbed. Sure the kids went off to summer camps in the mountains and tremendous numbers made commitments to Christ, but a month later things were back to their carnal, normal routine. Sunday school also lost its romance. Though he would always believe it had a valid place, it began to fall into its proper perspective. Even missions (which he had always sacrificed to support) he now realized were contaminated by the touch of death that worked throughout the system. It was all built more on the world and politics than on the Spirit.

The most heartbreaking discovery was the complete lack of help for struggling young pastors. With the Eugene church finally going well, he was ready to move on. The organization suggested that he pioneer in Klamath Falls, Oregon. He shocked their senses when he said, "Sure, if you will give me \$100 dollars a week to support my family, but don't waste my time if you don't want to help me." Of course they didn't, especially if it meant money.

Nothing angered Mitchell more than a system that would invest in property instead of people. He vowed to God that if he ever had the

resources he would do everything that he could to help beginning pastors. Mitchell had wasted many valuable years just trying to learn the basics, because so few had cared to help. It hurt, and he vowed to do all he could to remedy the problem.

If he needed any final proof of the organization's true intentions, it was soon to come. When he was looking to move from Emmett, God had stirred him about Bend, Oregon. The pastor only had a handful of people, and was driving a school bus to survive, but when Mitchell asked to be allowed to change churches with him the organization's answer was, "No."

When Mitchell left Eugene, the organization sent a new pastor to take over. He was the pastor from Bend who had had so many problems, and didn't know a thing about the gifts or the moving of the Spirit. It was ironic that the denomination felt that Mitchell wasn't good enough to replace him, but that this pastor from Bend could replace Mitchell now that there was revival.

From Eugene he went to Carson, California. It was like Daniel waking up in a lion's den. The congregation was made up of women who all claimed to be preachers and had the credentials to prove it. They made it clear from the first day who they expected to have run the show. The Mitchells only stayed ten weeks. God began to bless, but Mitchell knew that if he tried to stay there would be a confrontation and an exodus. This wasn't what he felt God wanted.

It was then that he got a call offering him the Prescott church. The sad thing is that he had wanted to go there from Eugene, but another man had been picked. That man arrived and stayed just long enough to destroy the church. He ran off with a key woman in the church and his son ran off with another man's wife in the church at the same time. Mitchell told those who called him, "Oh, you want me to take the church now! You'll let me have it now that it's been destroyed"

Though he was disgusted, he had nowhere else to turn. His wife had grown tired of all the moves, so they struck a deal. They would go out to her mom's for Christmas, and while there, they would drive up and see how the church felt.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Prescott

Prescott has as old a history as any city in Arizona. In its day it was the biggest thing happening with mining, ranching, and even the state government there for a while. For years it fought Phoenix for control of the future of the state, but finally its mountain location and the closing of the mines forced it to give in to the inevitable. Yet the loss was in many ways a victory. The town with its beautiful old buildings became a mecca of escape. Chosen by *U. S. News and World Report* as one of the ten best small cities in America to live in, Prescott has tremendous charm.

As Mitchell drove out of the desert into the small hills that marked the beginning of Prescott valley, he couldn't escape the fact that he felt good. In spite of anticipating all the hassles and problems in the church, he felt the peace that goes with the will of God.

They dropped in to a restaurant just outside of town where two of the women attending the church worked. Barb Copeland and Sharon Allen had no idea how important that day would be to the future. As he came up to the restaurant, Mitchell made up his mind that if there was any-one to work with he would come.

He told them, "I'm Pastor Mitchell and we're thinking of coming here"

They replied, "There aren't many of us left."

He asked, "Are you folks going to stay?"

"We don't know," they answered. "We might if we had a good pastor."

That was all that he needed. No angel had brought a commission or written messages in the sky, but it was an open door. It was, in fact, one of the lowest times in the Mitchells' ministry, but, like David facing Zicklag, he could do nothing but trust God. Mitchell found that God can change a man's destiny overnight if he just keeps moving and believing. He told Sister Mitchell, "There's a building and a house. I can get a job if I need to, and it's a good place to raise our kids. There isn't much to work with, but there are a few people." He was tired of the denominational swan dance and was ready to build a church and forget the whole rest of the religious world.

### Foundations

A woman goes through nine months of stretching, pain and sickness to bear a child. Revival, too, is a miracle birth that also comes at a price. For Mitchell this wasn't nine months but nine years that had been invested in ministry.

It was 1970 when they arrived in Prescott. The city was about to birth revival, but only a seer would have know that. The reality was that Mitchell had walked into a church that had been badly scarred and had only about 35 older folks coming. Lying in the rubble, though, were some precious people who would rise to whatever challenge was placed before them.

To Israel it must have seemed twice the miracle that Nehemiah, directed by God, did so much with just scrap and rubble. What pride must have filled them when the broken walls that had been their disgrace became their defense. The Prescott church was just that kind of place. The material that had weathered the storms and tumult only grew more valuable with the testing.

The first task was to right the sinking ship. The previous pastor hadn't just taken off with a woman, but also with all the money in the church. Not satisfied with just cash, he added to the disaster by leaving behind lots of unpaid bills. The telephone bill alone was over \$300. The organization, of course, offered no help and expected Mitchell to pay them. One of Pastor Mitchell's first encounters in the city was embarrassing. He went to the bank to sort out the mess, and the Mormon banker, who knew about the problem, took every opportunity to rub it in. He asked if they were going to build their new building, which he knew was impossible. Pastor Mitchell wasn't concerned about his pride; he gave a half hearted smile and straightened out the situation.

Everything was falling into place. The foundations of praise and giving were laid. On the outside it appeared that little was happening, but there was much boiling beneath the surface. Some things would rise to the surface and be cast off, but the fire was applied and the purging started.

After only a month and a half Mitchell challenged them to give for an organ. When he brought this up to the church council, the typical response surfaced from one strong willed member. "We don't need one, and we couldn't afford it even if we did."

Squatting on the council were some pretty strange folks. Typical of many churches, those who should have been in control weren't and those that shouldn't have been were. One old duffer still smoked and probably had never even gotten saved. He spoke up, "This church has got on for

all these years without an organ and I don't see why we need one now." Mitchell did what many a great pastor has done; he ignored them and went on.

The next Sunday he took pledges and the church responded enthusiastically. It seems a small thing today, but this was the seed of millions of dollars that would be raised in the future. The people were no longer looking to the past failures but to the future opportunities.

The first steps were slow but definite. A young man and his wife who had recently been saved began to come to the church. They had been too radical for the other churches in town, but were looking for some kind of guidance. He was leading a Bible study in his home but what he really had was a gift in music. Before getting saved he had played and written music for an up-and-coming rock band. Right at the time when his rock and roll career was taking off, a run-in with the law and a praying mother had led him to give music up. Out of this man's conversion came the birthing of a tremendous gospel rock band that brought explosive impact to that early revival.

### **Ron Jones**

On a warm, lazy, sunny June afternoon Mitchell came in contact with a skinny young preacher wound as tight as a clock's mainspring. Mitchell was in the park because of the church's annual taco sale. Organizations set up booths in the city park, and pictures, knick-knacks, and every kind of food was unloaded on the tourists trying to escape the roasting temperatures of Phoenix. Though Mitchell really didn't believe in churches raising money this way, he was biding his time and developing relationships before stepping in and stopping the "poverty festivals" of Christianity represented by car washes, bake sales, and rummage sales.

Walking through the park was a young man who had just finished Bible School. Ron Jones was 24 and looking for direction.

Jones had run into an old acquaintance from high school standing at the church's taco booth. As they talked they caught Mitchell's ear, and Mitchell came over and joined in. The two hit it off from the beginning.

Jones had been hooked on denominationalism, but something in Mitchell's words grabbed him as he declared, "We've got to win this city. I know that the traditional ways won't work, but there must be a way to reach these people for Jesus."

These were words designed to set Ron's heart singing. Jones had

been raised in a Pentecostal pastor's home, but if anything, seeing the church world at such close range had driven him off. He'd done everything he could to escape the Hound of Heaven. His memories were of churches that had fought his dad's attempt to bring the real gospel. His mind was filled with troubled memories. A deacon had once knocked his dad down for nothing more than daring to start a meeting before he got there. Seared in his mind was the picture of the morning the family woke up to find the front porch covered with beer cans, not left by local thugs but by the church board who at the time was doing its best to starve the family out. These things hadn't dimmed his father's commitment to God, but they had driven him out of the ministry and had left a bad taste in his son's mouth.

While in school in Prescott he met Marie. He first saw her at the local Food Queen supermarket. With a few well placed questions he found out that she worked selling tickets at the Elks' Theater. Ron went to ask her out on a bet.

She told him, "You look young enough to go out with my little sister."

"That may be the case, but I'm talking to you."

"OK," she said, and they began to date. They got married at nineteen and headed out to shake the world. Marrying Marie was Ron's best decision ever. He was high strung, she was practical. The two balanced each other out.

He'd turned his back on the gospel by the end of high school and had been known more for drinking and fighting than anything else. Though Jones was far from an intellectual, Vietnam was raging and he had no desire to go fight, so he headed off for the University of Tennessee to dodge the draft. It was at school that God had a rendezvous scheduled with Jones.

Jones was a poor drinking partner back then. He tended toward religious arguments and wasn't opposed to beating up a Baptist who dared to suggest that the two of them had any chance to make heaven. Jones knew they were both headed towards Hell and reinforced this view with his fists.

While going to school he was witnessed to by another student. This young man was actually living for God and excited about it. Up until that time Ron had never really known anyone his own age who was dedicated to Christ. Meeting this man made a real impression on him.

He soon found himself driving out to an old line dancing, shouting, Pentecostal Holiness church. As a youngster he'd been a chronic seeker

after the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, and once again he began to ask God to fill him, only to face a barrier. As he knelt down to pray, some around him yelled, "Let go and let God," and others called out, "grab hold," as they shook him. All Jones could see was a little Winston cigarette pack dancing and singing, "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should." He soon got down to business, threw the cigarettes away, and was immediately soused in the Holy Ghost. He was actually paralyzed as he lay there speaking in tongues, caught up into another world.

That was what he needed. He felt the call to preach, and headed off to Bible School. All he had back then was a '55 Plymouth and an old cotton trailer he'd bought for \$20. He and his wife headed out in these two dilapidated vehicles for Oral Roberts University. They drove up to the school with junk hanging everywhere on that old trailer. They looked like Oakies returning to Oklahoma. The dean informed them that they had come to the wrong place and sent them off towards an Assembly of God college. He ended up spending four years at Central Bible College.

Jones struggled to maintain his spiritual stability. He was struck by the contradiction of training spiritual workers in a carnal atmosphere. During the first year real revival broke out. Students who had been playing church were saved and dozens were called to go to the mission field. Then the school stepped in to bank the fires and get back to classes and business as usual.

Jones personified intensity, and this got him in trouble in school and out. While going to college he worked as a barber. While in training at barber's school, a friend from church dropped by for a shave. He couldn't have picked a worse time. Jones was expecting some men from the state board to come at any moment and check out his newly developed skills. As Jones started to lather the man up, three authoritative looking men sat down in front of him. He knew they had to be from the State board.

High strung by temperament, Ron had always been horrible at tests. As a preacher, only the urgency of the Holy Ghost made him able to get up in front of people, and even then he often suffered horribly. Now, he was forced to give a shave (when no one got shaves anymore), and he knew his future depended on it. Waves of fear hit him. His hand was trembling as he took that straight edged razor and began to sharpen it. He reached deep inside himself to steady his nerves but utterly failed. His first pass across this poor man's face took a hunk of skin. Needless to say, this didn't settle his stirred emotions. He looked into the horrified eyes of his customer and leaned down with shaking hands and said, "You'd better pray." The lather around his lips began to quiver feverishly.

Jones proceeded to cut gouges out of the poor man's face. It was only after the three horrified men left that Jones found they weren't from the board at all, but customers that had learned who to avoid when they needed a shave.

He graduated from school with a weakened commitment, and unsure of his future. He returned to his hometown, Prescott, Arizona where he started cutting hair with his dad and working as the youth pastor at the Assembly of God Church.

When he met Mitchell that day at the park he was wandering around thinking of his future. In all honesty, neither of these men were that impressed with the other at their first meeting. Mitchell was the pastor of what looked to be one of the saddest and deadest churches in North America. Even his own denomination had labeled him a loser and refused to support him, but Jones couldn't stay away from him. Before he left the park, Mitchell asked him to preach a Wednesday night service for him.

When Ron met Mitchell at the door of the church his handshake communicated authority. Yet he had a winsome way about him. "This man has heart, leadership, and vision," Jones thought. In the service Ron felt something alive. Even with only 30 people, there was a Pentecostal fire that burned in that gathering. You could actually feel the potential of touching the world.

Here was what created the fellowship: the touch of God. Every person that came in began to feel that same pressure of destiny. This was no made-up, worked-up program, but a tangible pressure of the Holy Ghost that convinced young men and women that they could be part of destiny; from a city in the middle of nowhere, with no account people, the world could be touched.

## **Destiny**

Brother Mitchell decided to go to a revival in Cottonwood, Arizona. Here, in the belly button of red-neck country, evangelist Bob French was speaking. Mitchell had heard that French had a valid gift ministry. The drive took longer than expected, and the always punctual Mitchell arrived late. There was nothing to mark him as a pastor, yet French called him up front and said, "Brother, you represent a group of people that are not from this city, and God is going to move through you and through those people in a mighty move of God. God is going to give you the desires of your heart"

After the service Mitchell went up to talk to him. He asked him to come to Prescott and minister, but French refused. He wasn't holding many revivals at the time, but driving a truck. He was depressed about being away from his family and made a lot of excuses.

As Mitchell talked about his own frustrations in reaching people and seeing them saved, French began to tell him about what he had just seen on the West Coast where the beginnings of the Jesus People movement was just taking off. He mentioned names that, unknown to him, would become friends and co-workers of Mitchell's in the near future.

Mitchell left that night thinking about coffee houses and preachers on the beach. He didn't even have a clear idea of what a drug addict was, but he was getting excited about helping them. He knew something new was happening.

### **Jack Harris**

Right at this time, another brick in the building of God came into place. Jack Harris was not the material that Bible schools were looking for. In fact, the only one's that might have been looking for him at the time were the FBI. He was a born rebel. He'd joined the Navy to try to break his uncontrolled nature, but knew immediately after registering that he had made the worst mistake of his young life. Trapped in the Navy, he set himself for the first time in his life to really study. He wanted to know the symptoms of insanity, because he knew that feigned insanity was his only ticket out of the service. He soon discovered, though, that he'd tried a little too hard, and when he got out of the service he couldn't slip back into normal. The drugs, depression, hate and fear had taken over. At the veteran's hospital they informed him that he'd never function as a normal human again.

Harris had tried other churches in Prescott. He'd even gone with a friend to another Pentecostal church in the city, but this rock and roll addict had walked out when he felt they were "too loud "" It hadn't helped when a couple of his friends were kicked out for having long hair.

Harris got worse and tried the oldest trick in the book. He moved. He went to Boise, Idaho, to start over. It was a bust. Even his recent marriage to Pattie had only made things more difficult. He'd just lost his job when he got a letter from back home about a church with a man who loved hippies. He headed back to Prescott. When he went he had every intention of getting saved and going for God, but once he arrived he fell into the old ruts again. When a friend came to witness to him, he just

laughed it off and philosophized God away. Yet something told him his destiny was linked with this Jesus.

One night he dropped his wife off at a Bible study. He figured that Bible studies were good things for wives to go to, but he went to the woods and dropped some synthetic mescaline. It was a bad trip. While Harris was in another world that was full of torment, Pattie was discovering the new world of salvation. The Bible study prayed for her to get saved, and agreed in prayer that her husband would respond, too.

He got home at about two thirty in the morning. When he sat down on the bed, Pattie woke up and started to witness. He knew he couldn't keep going the way he was, so he agreed to go to church. It was there that he went to the altar and began a whole new life. Praying there that morning, he felt something that hundreds of drug trips had never given him; the awesome presence and peace of God. Mitchell looked him in the eyes and told him, "If you will never pick those drugs up, you'll never need them again." Harris knew it was true.

When he got home his friends were waiting with a new drug shipment. Harris did what no one believed possible for him. He told them that he didn't want anything to do with drugs again, and began to witness to these old buddies. If the Pope said he'd given up wearing dresses it couldn't have hit these men any harder. Jack was really free and never went back.

Mitchell saw these few young drug addicts as the beginning of a move of God. The church was still mainly old folks and "squares," but Mitchell began to prepare them for a future invasion.

### **Drug Seminar**

He got inspired to have a drug seminar. He gave Bob French a call and talked him into coming and preaching a revival in the evenings with a panel and drug rally on Saturday morning. French finally agreed to come.

Bob French never was the typical speaker. He looked the hayseed that he was. His politics were right of the John Birch Society, and he expressed them freely throughout his preaching. He was a picture, in many ways, of God's using weak vessels of clay, but there was also a real gift. The first night marked a turning point in the life of the church.

When Harris met French, he couldn't believe that Mitchell had asked him in. He thought Mitchell had more class than that. Here was a side of Pastor Mitchell that many had missed. He was as practical as any man in

the world. In fact, if any gift was his, it was probably the gift of common sense; yet this would never stop him when he felt God's prodding. He would release any man to minister who could help, even if the good was mixed with a little bit of flesh. Mitchell stayed close to bring needed correction and let God have his way.

As Harris was sitting in the audience, skeptically thinking about changing churches, French called out his wife, Pattie.

"Young woman, do you believe God? Do you believe that the Lord would give you the desires of your heart?"

French had no way of knowing that two doctors had just told her that only surgery could remove the blockages that kept her from having children.

French looked at her and said, "There are doctors that have told you you can't have children. I see a twisted organ in your body, and God is healing it."

Needless to say, this made a believer out of Jack Harris. Pattie found herself pregnant a few months later and the only surgery that she ever had to have was to stop the blessing after their third child.

The Harrises weren't the only skeptics challenged that night. Ron Jones was there, too. He had been taught at Bible school that the word of knowledge was only intelligence, and he was less than impressed about a revival where this was the main event. On top of all this, French was often defiantly unique in his style of ministry. One night during the revival he started cutting up his tie for prayer cloths. Yet people were being undeniably touched.

Jones was stunned when French began to describe what he could never have know about Pattie Harris. This shook his theology. Then Jones' halo was almost scared off when French turned to him and called him up. During the walk to the front, Jones did some quick repenting for his doubt and unbelief. French looked him in the eye and said, "Just because you're in the hip-bone church doesn't mean you can't come over to the knee-bone church. God's brought you here, young man, to be part of this church."

Until this time, Jones had divided his loyalties between his old church and Mitchell's. Jones and his dad would go to their old church and as soon as it was over, they'd jump in the car and make it to the Potter's House before the song service was over. The contrast between the life in one and the lack of it in the other proved to be too much, and they

ultimately chose to hear Mitchell. Jones was stunned that God would speak to him. If God had simply cleared His throat for Jones, he would have been overjoyed, but here was God actually speaking to him. Though it was not an easy transition, Jones came over.

On Saturday, they had the drug seminar. French asked the questions, though it was doubtful that he'd ever taken anything more than the recommended dose of aspirin in his life. The panel was made up of Ron Burrell, Jack Harris and a local hippie personality who went by the handle "Fat Linda". These three sat there expounding like true experts on the local drug problem and it's solution. Linda had only been saved for a few days and could barely remember her name. Harris was an old timer of two weeks and Burrell wasn't much better. The astounding thing was that over 150 people showed up, and no one thought it was a comedy routine. In fact, everyone was genuinely interested. Mitchell knew he was moving in the right direction.

He confronted Jones about what his vision was. It shook Jones to the core that someone cared about what he wanted to do. Jones stammered out that he wanted to start some kind of halfway house for kids on drugs. Jones was visualizing a flop house, but Mitchell had a feeling that what he'd heard about coffee houses was closer to what he was really looking for.

### **Jesus People**

Mitchell was moving. It would be easier to stop a charging elephant than this gospel preacher on the scent of revival. He made some calls out to the West Coast where all the action was, getting names and addresses. Then he and Jones took three days and headed for California.

When they arrived in La Habre where Don Matison was running one of the first coffee houses, kids were flocking in by the hundreds. As Mitchell walked in, he knew he'd found what he'd been looking for. In this little building over 100 kids were jammed to the walls, with others standing outside. The lights were dimmed and everyone was sitting on the floor. Mitchell wasn't excited by the music. It was as foreign to him as sitar music is to a harmonica player. He knew that what he was seeing was outrageous to the religious world, but he felt the hand of God and excitement surged through him. As they were leaving, he told Jones, "If Jesus were alive today He'd have a guitar over His shoulder and He'd be doing exactly what we saw tonight. This will work in Prescott ""

While on the Coast, they attempted to experience the wide variety of

the Jesus People movement. They checked out the Jesus people news-papers and several other coffee houses and churches. The event that would affect the mountain town of Prescott most, though, wasn't in any building; it was waiting for them out on the beach.

### **Larry Reed**

Stories about Larry Reed had reached them before they ever met him. He'd been a junkie for years and had been saved only after spending 7 years in San Quentin Prison. He was saved in the early days of the Teen Challenge movement. Sonny Argozoni was one of David Wilkerson's first heroin addicts to be set free, and he was just starting a church in Los Angeles for ex-junkies. When Larry got saved he cut his teeth on street meetings with Andrae Crouch (who was a nobody then), playing a hand organ and joining the others in giving testimonies. Larry would never fit into the normal style of Christianity. He was too uncontrolled, too alive, too consumed with a desire to see souls saved. He was capable of anything!

Once, he and another ex-junkie walked into one of the roughest bars in Seattle. They were wearing trench coats with suspicious looking lumps in the pockets. With hands jammed into their pockets pointing at the bartender. Reed told him, "Turn the music down!" When it was turned down, he jumped up on the bar and pulled a Bible out of his pocket instead of a gun. Here was a true evangelist.

Mitchell and Jones traced Reed to Seal Beach. There had been an old man that preached on the beaches. One night, some drunks buried him in the sand as a joke. As night came, the cold wet sand tragically drained the life blood out of his body. Reed was determined to take up where this man had left off. He was just coming up out of the water after a baptismal service when Jones and Mitchell arrived. The people were singing and then Reed began to preach. Jones and Mitchell could only stand and stare, with eyes popping out, as Reed leaped and danced pumping out the gospel with a jack-hammer delivery. They watched open mouthed as Reed started to prophesy on people and they began falling out on the beach under the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reed hadn't missed their arrival on the beach. They looked totally out of place. As a city boy he couldn't miss this displaced pair from the country. Jones didn't have the city walk. He looked more like a cow plowing a field as he came walking through the sand.

Reed dropped his criticism, though, when Mitchell asked him to come

preach a revival. In those days meetings were hard to find so Reed decided to "accept it now and pray about it later." He figured he'd have plenty of time later to find out what country this place called Prescott was in.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Evangelism

Things began to move into high gear. The die was cast. Mitchell had been looking all of his life for the key to what he felt God wanted to do. Many parts of the puzzle began to fit into place, and now he'd seen what he knew he'd been looking for; something more than just coffee shops and Jesus bands (he knew that they would pass away like other methods had). It was seeing the unorthodox approach of taking the gospel out of the four walls that had set him free that day. In the future he would make the ones who had come before him seem mellow, as he used every avenue imaginable to bring a public viewing of the gospel.

Mitchell was irrevocably committed to bringing the gospel message to his world. From that point, everything his church did was judged in the light of Jesus' command, "Go ye into all the world and make disciples."

While others emphasized fellowship, money, music, programs, etc., Mitchell narrowed in on souls. Like a man dying of thirst that sees a glass of water, he could not be turned away. While others simply *talked* about winning the lost, Mitchell *did it*. He dropped all the meaningless programs that interfered with this goal and hit the streets. This was the secret to Prescott's growth.

### Outside

Prescott was a great city for outreach. Right in the middle of town was a picturesque park that drew all the druggies and airheads in the area. In addition, several times a year tourists would flock to the city for parades, rodeos, and to look at the knick-knacks for sale in booths around the park.

Mitchell knew that the key was to get outside the building. The church rented some equipment from a local rock promoter and began to hold some concerts. Their first efforts were far from professional. The only equipment they could afford was junk, but even so the equipment was often better than the groups.

They had a park outreach where they mimeographed some crummy looking flyers. Half of the band weren't even saved, but they owned necessary pieces of equipment so a little compromise was in order. As the guys began to play and share at that first outreach, someone came running up begging to know who was in control. Mitchell told him that he was, and the man pleaded with him to stop. He told Mitchell that he was

part of a prayer group that was being disturbed by the public address system.

Mitchell asked, "What were you praying about?"

"We're praying for revival in Prescott"

Mitchell slapped him on the back and told him, "You can stop praying! We're the answer to your prayers!"

### **Arrest**

More and more young people began drifting in. A rock band had gotten saved and the church was growing rapidly when Reed came for the meeting he'd promised to hold. Reed had to borrow a car just to get there, and the four girls he brought with him were not exactly dainty flowers of religiosity; they were ex-prostitutes and ex-junkies. One of the girls was a three hundred pound mama who was due back to Los Angeles the next week to appear in court for knocking out a six foot policeman.

As they drove up to Mitchell's house and saw him, one girl let out a gasp and said, "Check him out! Are you sure you heard from God?" These California girls were not prepared for Mitchell arrayed in the latest Prescotonian attire. He came running out to meet them in a pink short sleeve shirt with a skinny little green tie. His pair of green stove-pipe pants lifted just high enough to reveal a pair of pink socks that finished off the ensemble. In those early days the young people weren't exactly drawn to Mitchell as a fashion plate wearing the latest style. They had to overlook the look and allow God to bring together what the world would say was an impossible match.

Mitchell never gave Reed and the girls a chance to rest. He hopped in the car and took them straight out to the Fair. For years the church had occupied a booth selling tacos at the *Yavapai County Fair*. Reed wasn't the type to just stand and pass tracts, let alone sell tacos. Reed used one method: rock the boat. Like Paul of old, Reed figured a good riot always drew a crowd. There, among the Boy Scouts of America, the Rotary Club, and the flower show, Reed jumped up on a table and started belting out the old time gospel. His shout filled the arena, "You must be born again!"

A huge giant of a man materialized out of the crowd and said, "Preacher, I don't like you, and I don't like what you're saying."

Reed, though, was under the influence of the Holy Ghost and ready to fight lions or giants. He cried out, "Devil, get behind me in the name of Jesus!" and just kept right on preaching.

Ron Jones had come along and was going wild as he watched all of this. When people started praying to get saved, Jones knew he had to come back later and try the same thing.

The next day, at the fair, Jones and two new converts from the church launched their attack on sin. With cat-like balance Jones perched him-self on a wobbling card table and started preaching. It might have gotten him an "F" in a homiletics class, but it was an "A+" display of zeal.

"You must believe in Jesus Christ today as your Lord and Saviour, friend of mine," he shouted to a growing crowd. "You can't get into Heaven in your new car. You can't work your way in. Joining a church won't do any good and you can forget about that dope and booze. You can only enter those blessed gates through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ."

Adrenaline was pumping, and Jones knew he'd discovered his destiny. He also found out how a young Christian who never did anything wrong could get thrown in jail. As he was really starting to cook, he spotted a large man with "Yavapai County" embroidered on his jacket, wearing a paper arm band saying, "Fair Official". This man was desperately pushing through the crowd yelling, "Stop, stop!"

Jones stiffened and said, "No sir! I came to preach the gospel and that's what I'm going to do. Our church rented the booth, and preaching is what churches do"

Though some in the crowd were with Jones, the official was enraged. He returned in seconds with two deputies. "That's it", said one of the lawmen. "You'll have to come with us" Before he could react, Ron and his friends were being dragged towards the patrol car and a waiting cell.

When Ron's father, Joe Jones, heard about this, he shut his barber shop down and headed for the fair. With a deadly serious scowl on his face and a Bible under his arm, he leaped up onto the table at the fair booth and "let `em have it." "Woe unto you, Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men!" He flew into a storm of preaching rarely witnessed by fair goers. For about ten minutes he blasted every force — Satan, deputies and fair officials — that might stand in the way of a gospel preacher.

If the city thought they had solved the problem by putting Ron and the others in jail, they were sadly mistaken. Mitchell was a born fighter and he let the city know, in no uncertain terms, that they had better back down, surrender and stop, or lawsuits, marches, and whatever else he could think of would splatter City Hall. He told them, "Who do you think you are? I'll

give you one hour to drop the charges" In less than an hour they were dropped, and the prisoners released.

The evening papers carried the story, front page with pictures. The news flew through that little town and in the service that evening there were people everywhere. That old church building nearly collapsed as people packed in.

Reed was so pumped up that he never seemed to stand still, and the floor was visibly moving in the excitement of the song service and praise. Mitchell didn't know if the building would survive the revival, but who cared? God was moving. During that service 85 people got saved and the church attendance that week leaped from 75 to 250.

### **Explosion**

Mitchell knew that this wasn't the result of his talent or programs. It had been an act of God and not something that could be duplicated or manipulated. Others would try, in the future, to duplicate the feat by getting arrested only to find that it wasn't the same for their city as it was for Prescott. The Prescott revival was never the result of some new method, but was merely a releasing of the Holy Spirit at God's chosen time. It was the beginning of the fulfillment of God's plan, promised years before when Mitchell was a new convert. The impact of that revival, though, would reach out like waves on a lake after a rock is thrown in. There wasn't any plan then, and there still isn't. There was only a man ready to respond to God's moving. Mitchell had wept for revival and learned how precious it was. God knew that He could trust him to be used as a lightning rod-a channel for His purposes.

From that point, drug addicts, hippies, outcasts, and misfits began streaming into the church. Probably the greatest miracle was that the handful of old line denominational people who started with Mitchell opened their arms and loved those that God brought in. Mitchell had preached a sermon about acceptance and they proved that they believed it.

Many of these kids had been rejected by other churches, but now they found acceptance. Kurt McKinney had seen one of his best friends get saved, and this friend's commitment had broken up their rock and roll band. He was upset and took it out on himself by eating all the dope he could get his hands on. He felt like God was trying to ruin his life and when anyone tried to witness to him he ran. It was like a grade B thriller with him being chased through the streets and alleys of Prescott by new

zealous converts. He finally decided he'd better give Christ a try, but one thing was sure, he was just enough of a rebel to make sure he went to a different church than the others attended.

He dropped in on another Pentecostal church there in town. As he entered the sanctuary, one of the ushers told him, "We'd appreciate it if you would sit out here in the foyer on a folding chair." It took a minute for the insult to sink in. When it did, he leaped up and went out cursing and yelling at them and their Christianity.

Almost every one of those early, key converts had this kind of experience somewhere. The churches didn't know what to do when young people came in with long hair and ragged clothes, but Mitchell did. McKinney finally broke down and went to the Potter's House. He looked the same, but their reception was totally different. Sister Burgess, a little lady in her 80's, had no idea where these kids were coming from, but she simply loved them. She was the first to see McKinney. She walked over and said, "I'm glad you're here" That changed his life. For the first time he was accepted, and the change in him was unbelievable. One day he was playing Led Zepplin, and the next he was singing, "Peace, peace, wonderful peace!"

## **Concerts**

After Reed left Prescott, the church did their first concert in the Boys' Club. Since this was a local meeting place it became a great location for outreaches. The church was located in an old building on Lincoln Street. They looked around for another building to hold a coffee house in, but couldn't find anything that they could afford. It was obvious that if they could get out of the church more kids would come. Until then they did what they could.

Mitchell had invited Don Matison to come out when they had met in La Habre. Mitchell had seen all of the equipment they had in the coffee house and assumed that they would bring it with them. He was shocked when Matison showed up with a couple of acoustic guitar players and not an ounce of equipment. At the last minute they threw some stuff together.

Someone had asked a folk singer from the local college to open the concert, and it was soon obvious he wasn't even saved. Another musician spent his breaks bumming cigarettes off people in the crowd as Mitchell watched in despair. The whole thing stunk, but it didn't matter; at the altar call, kids came forward in droves. Mitchell has never been tempted to think that all this revival was the result of his great talent, because he remembers

too well the awful things that God was forced to work with.

At another concert a woman in the church and her daughter gave a horrible performance on the guitar, and a band played. At the end of this monstrous program, the guy in charge got up, panicked, and gave the worst altar call in history. People came forward, though, and Mitchell came up and took over. He felt God moving, and just kept asking people to come, over and over and over. Even when no one came he kept them singing and said, "Someone is here that God wants to save. You need to respond."

### **Hank Houghton**

Someone was there. It was Hank Houghton. After Mitchell had gone on for several minutes, Houghton said to himself, "If he asks one more time I'll go up" Mitchell did, and Houghton didn't. Houghton was a born procrastinator, and it was only through Mitchell's diligence and God's insistence that he finally responded.

Houghton is one of Prescott's most unique converts, but also one of its best preachers. The only normal thing about him was the home he had been raised in. At twelve years old he suffered a horrible accident that scarred him for life and killed his brother. They were making a radio and stringing up a wire to use as an antenna. They threw the wire across what they thought was a phone line only to find it was an active power line that like a serpent striking hit them with thousands of volts of electricity. The power arched across the gap that separated them. His brother was instantly killed. Houghton himself barely survived. He lost a finger, which gave him a distinctive handshake and an unavoidable impact as he preached, pointing a claw-like hand at those listening. More distinctive than all of this, though, was the hairstyle he was left with. Most of his hair never grew back, and he had the Krishna look well before it was the in style.

Houghton became possessed by rebellion and hate. He was an uncontrollable force, and the older he got the more intense his hatred grew. Even his mother, who was a social worker, was unable to break through and communicate with him.

He earned a reputation at school as being bad, and the kids left him alone because when he lost it, he went crazy.

He was kicked out of school after school for causing trouble, until he finally ended up in a boys' home in Azusa, California. Here the corrupt

encouraged the corrupt, and he hardened more and more into a criminal mold. As a kid he had tried Christianity and had felt nothing. Every encounter only confirmed to him that Christians were jerks. At the boy's home, one group of Christians came dressed like clowns to show Jesus to these troubled kids. Houghton sat in the back making vulgar comments all through the show. He felt that Jesus must have been a nice guy, but he seemed like a real sucker to allow people like these to use His name.

Houghton was thrown out of the school for beating up two of the teachers and tried to commit suicide. His parents, moved to Chicago, and the change helped. He got out on his own by selling shoes and was liked by the boss. In 1968, he pulled strings and though he was a drop out he entered Chicago City College.

He tried to change at the wrong time in American history. It was an age of revolution, and the campuses were alive with rebellion. Marches were everywhere and the chant was "off the pigs". This was what Houghton was born for. As he listened to Jimi Hendrix's acid rock and Jefferson Airplane's lyrics about the beauty of drugs, he knew he'd found his religion.

He immediately began to hang out with the radical crowd at school. He began to write for the school newspaper, and with the help of others turned it into a radical journal. A friend turned him on to drugs and he thought he'd found the answer to life. He figured that real truth was in drugs and dropped out of school because it interfered with his search for the ultimate high. At about this time he drifted into Prescott, Arizona. He became a purveyor of cosmic consciousness and a local celebrity when he opened the city's first "head shop".

Houghton was a horrible capitalist, and though he sold a lot of drug paraphernalia and even drugs (from the back room), he always used up more merchandise than he sold. At first drugs mellowed him out, but not for long. He was soon known as the meanest person in Prescott. He sold the shop and moved out to the woods to devote himself to full-time "tripping". The drugs started to take their awful effect. He lost track of reality and even of himself. He became convinced that he was from another planet. He knew that he couldn't relate to the rest of humanity, and he could see that the world was a "slime pit" that wasn't worth the effort to destroy, so he spent his time hoping that a rocket would swoop down and pick him up so that he could get out of all the insanity.

He felt he couldn't trust people, so he started confiding only to his dog, but even he let him down when he used his car as a rest room. Then he had a timely encounter with a real Christian. This shook Houghton to

the core and caused him to begin to search. At the parties, in between hits on a joint, he would ask who Christ was, but no one seemed to have any answers.

He knew the guys who were playing in the band that night at the Jesus People concert. He wanted to see what they had. Even more important was to prove to a girl he liked that he was open minded about these Christian's God. He not only saw what they had, but caught it.

The emptiness was filled. Houghton started coming to church. He still wasn't normal (even today he probably wouldn't fit the title), and when he came, he and his dog sat on the floor at the front. He frightened some with his baggy army jacket, bushy beard, and few long strands of hair on top of his head. He still had trouble not arguing or slipping into colorful language that turned the air blue, but he was changed.

Hank Houghton wasn't persuaded because of an intellectual argument. He wasn't convinced about the resurrection or hyped by a high powered sales pitch. What got Houghton was God touched him and did a work of extreme grace in his life.

### **The Door**

Mitchell finally found a building for a coffee house. It was 17 feet wide, 35 feet long, and cost \$85 a month (which, at that time, was a giant leap of faith to pay). Revival was ready to roll. The members of the band, Eden, had gotten saved and changed a few of the lyrics in their heavy rock music, they screamed the gospel over the pound of the beat. It was fabulous. Twice a night, Friday and Saturday, the coffee-house would be packed out, with 7-15 people getting saved each night.

God was so real in those early concerts that you could say almost anything and people would respond. It was the time of Woodstock, and any kind of rock music drew people like a magnet. Eden had been one of the best secular groups in Arizona, and now the kids loved to hear them "jam" for Christ. It wasn't uncommon to hear some guy in the crowd telling a friend, "When the music ends, you need to go up to the front and let them pray for you! You'll get a really great rush!"

## CHAPTER SIX

### Roots

If things had stopped there, the Prescott church wouldn't have been any different than a dozen other places which were feeling the impact of God's outpouring of the Holy Spirit on young people. Coffee houses were springing up everywhere, and churches were being filled instantly with a motley assortment of young people who were sick of the religion and materialism their parents had dished out; they were hungry for real spiritual answers.

What made Prescott different was that the move of God lasted and grew. Many of those original Jesus people groups drifted away from soul-winning into some search for "deeper truth". It almost seemed like a law that, as they grew, they forgot about evangelizing the lost and began to concentrate solely on working with those who had already been reached. Mitchell was unshakable in his commitment to never let this happen in Prescott.

The heroes of the Jesus People movement (with few exceptions), have faded from public view, but the strength of the church in the mountains of Arizona is still growing.

A major reason for this is that Pastor Mitchell never drifted from his roots. His redneck upbringing was a great help to his commitment to do God's will. He refused to accept the concept of the travelling prophets. He challenged those reformed drug addicts to make the complete change and go to work; it was the greatest challenge that many of them ever faced. Most had never put in a good day's work in their life. Prescott wasn't the highest paying or easiest place to start, but many fought it out and began to slowly change.

What distinguished the church even more was that Mitchell began to allow these young men to minister. He didn't want a one man show, so he started training the men around him to share the gospel and bring people to Christ. There was no plan in the early days to turn out preachers, just a sincere desire to help these men and to build the Kingdom of God.

Ron Jones was a good example of this. He'd said he wanted to help kids, and now he was standing in front of them in the newly opened

"Door"coffeehouse scene. He jumped up after the opening concert to give the first altar call of his life. Even though he was a Bible school graduate, he'd never actually stood in front of a group with real live

sinners who needed saving. The band had just finished singing, "Chains, the Devil had me locked up in chains, but they weren't the kind that you could see. No-o-o, the chains of e-e-e-vil had a hold on me"

Jones took it from there and harangued the audience about drugs, dope and booze. He never took a breath between his message and his altar call, and blurted out, "If anyone wants to accept Jesus, come on up" The people looked back and forth at their friends and instantly froze up. No one planned on being the first to get up in front of their friends.

The band played a few more numbers while a discouraged Jones drifted back towards Pastor Mitchell. Mitchell pulled him outside and asked him, "Haven't you ever given an altar call before?"

Jones, with head hung down had to say, "No"

"You'll never get anyone saved the way you're going," he told him, "but it's alright. No one has left yet and you can go back in and do it right. Start by getting them to bow their heads, then while no one is looking around, have those who want to accept Jesus raise their hands. Then get those people who raised their hands to come forward. Got it? Do it just like I do in church."

Jones went back in full of trepidation, but fifteen hands went up and all fifteen came forward. He had learned a powerful lesson, and Mitchell had seen a man released who would eventually become a powerful minister. Here was a secret to future multiplication; the training and release of men.

### **Additions**

Those early days were times of tremendous excitement and joy. The atmosphere was electric with revival. Prescott was a beautiful mountain town which saw hundreds of young long hairs pass through on their pilgrimages to California. These "pilgrims" became a feeder for the church. When these kids came to town the troops were on them, trying to get them to give their lives to Jesus. As those who had gotten saved began to write home, many old friends drifted out to Prescott. Before long the Prescott church had little colonies of people from Chicago, Boston, Wisconsin, and every other point on the map.

It wasn't just young hippies that responded to the move of God. The church is often thought of as some kind of "hippie haven", but in reality it is quite different. Many older saints have become a key part of the church. After finally seeing the move of God they had hungered for for

years, many a religious refugee drifted over to join with the young people in what God was doing.

The church even ended up with a few community figures. Phil and Pat Payson were part of the Prescott elite. He was one of the best golfers in the city and on every community group that mattered, and his wife was a local society figure. With all of their success, the Paysons had one outstanding problem. Their daughter, Janet, was as wild as a March Hare. They had taken her to psychologists and seen no change. The pastor of the liberal church they attended hadn't helped. "A little wildness is only normal and she'll grow out of it," he informed them. They weren't sure they would live that long.

One night their middle class sensibilities were shocked when Janet came home talking about Jesus. This wasn't exactly the cure they had been looking for, but they loved her and anything seemed better than drugs. Then the day of reckoning came when Janet asked them to come to church. They really didn't think they needed that kind of thing, but they didn't want to discourage her so they went. In some ways it was all that they had feared. The old Lincoln Street church was a run-down affair on the wrong side of the tracks. A lot of pretty wild looking kids were going there. In fact, they didn't look much different than they had when Janet had done drugs with them, but now their language was spiced with "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord" instead of curses for every kind of authority figure.

The Paysons were distinguished members of the local Methodist church, and were taken aback by the tambourine playing and clapping. Especially grating on their Methodist sensibilities was when Mitchell reached a high point in the service and lifted his hands and encouraged everyone else to join in and give God praise. This was a tonic to these young people, and in that small, packed building they would almost take the roof off. With hands lifted and eyes closed, a roar lifted from the throats of the saints. It was almost too much for a staid couple who liked their religion in small doses.

The preaching began to get under their skin in an even more profound way. As the Paysons listened to those early sermons they began to see their own need for the first time. They had always been good people, but Mitchell had a way of causing the gospel to come alive as it never had in their own church. They began to realize that it wasn't just their daughter who needed saving. For the first time they realized that their own goodness couldn't stand long before a perfect God.

Mitchell watched them in those early days, and he made a vow to

himself that if they were to get saved he wouldn't make it any easier for them than for any other sinner. It wasn't long before the two of them lifted their hands during the altar calls, but then they just couldn't bring themselves to get up and walk down to the front like "common heathens". It would have been easy for Pastor Mitchell to take them into the back room for a special prayer, but he kept the heat on. They finally broke. In front of everyone they were saved and gloriously changed.

This couple turned out to be a key ingredient in the Prescott church. They started the tape ministry, led Bible studies, started the men's prayer breakfasts, and began a small report that has now grown into a quarterly paper reporting news about all the fellowship's churches in the U.S. and around the world.

Many others of every type and description have been dragged by the Holy Ghost into the church. Dave Robinson was a real cowboy. Arizona had lots of the drug store variety, but Dave and his family had a ranch that stretched from horizon to horizon. He was the real thing. He found himself surrounded by what every redneck hated: hippies. But he loved God and was soon drawn into the fellowship and salvation. Later he pastored a church in the little town of Truxton, a town of about 80 people. At one conference he stood to report that he had "about 40 head comin'".

The Prescott church became a strange mixture of the accepted and the unaccepted. Had they all met before they got saved a horrible brawl would have resulted, but through the Holy Ghost they became God's family.

### **Direction**

In the early days of the revival, the Prescott church was fumbling around looking for what God had for them. In many ways it still resembled the more traditional churches around it, but it wasn't a comfortable fit. Mitchell had stopped the rummage and taco sales. He knew that these were a giant waste of time and effort designed to help people avoid having to support the church with their own money. They had a few church softball teams in the beginning days, but these soon disbanded when they interfered with revival. Mitchell was convinced that the church shouldn't be an entertainment center, but a place where a living God was manifest. People who had met God would naturally express His love to one another, so the churches' organized attempts at fun were needless. Mitchell stripped away dead program after dead program from the church until he had a lean, powerful force engineered to win souls.

It was a time of intense effort. The church kept hopping day and

night. Mitchell brought in lots of evangelists. It wasn't uncommon to have a revival for two or even three weeks in a row. To those who were there, it was like a great continuous circus. Every evangelist was unique and a revival was a great time, especially when the preacher had a gift ministry. Who knew who might get called out? What secret might be revealed? What unspoken hope might be confirmed by God?

The young men were often marked by more zeal than wisdom, but Mitchell didn't care. He wasn't concerned about reputation, he was concerned about the Spirit of God. The city never knew what to expect next, but this one fact stood out: those who had once pushed drugs were now pushing Christ. It wasn't long until the rumors began to fly, and not always without foundation.

When "The Cross And The Switchblade" came to town, theater goers were unprepared for Hank Houghton and Ron Burrell. These two couldn't stand it when the movie didn't end with an altar call. The ticket puncher wondered about the briefcase held in Houghton's hand, but he wasn't exactly the type you stopped for small talk. Needless to say, the management was shocked when, at the end of the show, these two soldiers of the cross leaped up on stage with a portable PA and gave an altar call.

It didn't help the reputation of the church, either, when word got around about how the Potter's House handled people who caused a disruption. At a concert in the Boy's Club, Houghton and Greg Johnson were working the crowd as bouncers. They noticed a drunk cowboy giving his girlfriend a hard time in the crowd. Johnson came up to him and, using all the diplomacy he could muster said, "Why don't you shut up!" Figuring this would handle the situation he walked off. He didn't notice that the wiry little cowboy was now following him. Houghton saw trouble coming and slipped over behind the guy just as he hauled off and belted Greg.

Houghton, with lightning reflexes, was on the guy, his fist in his throat and his neck bent forward to choke him out. The only problem was that Greg thought Hank was holding the guy so he could work him over. Houghton ended up having to try to keep Johnson from killing the guy while he dragged him out. It was this kind of incident that cut down on the number of disruptions, but caused a lot of people to wonder about the Potter's House.

While other churches shoved these kids away because of incidents like this, Mitchell could see that God was bringing them in and threw his arms wide open. He wasn't too excited about their excesses, but he felt a

need to be redemptive. The twelve disciples hadn't been a mellow crowd themselves. Filled with the zeal of the young, they had been ready to start a revolution. Jesus taught them how to do it, but it was a revolution that was different than any other that had come before.

Sinners in the city never knew what hit them. It had been a tradition that the kids would head out into the boondocks to party and get high, but now, somehow, Jesus freaks always turned up at the parties witnessing and spreading the gospel. This was the birthing ground of many a future evangelist and preacher. Like Paul, they cut their teeth on the streets, in the marketplace and beside the river, preaching and teaching Jesus.

## **Zeal**

Larry Reed had been a spark to this tremendous move of God and he was always an adventure when he returned to Prescott to fan the flames of revival. Mitchell had Reed back again and again. When he came to town, even the most radical could be shocked. On his first trips, he contented himself with preaching at the fair and in the park. Soon, though, he showed up in a little van that he loaded up with saints, and at key spots they would unload with a portable PA and blast whatever crowd could be found. Finally Reed fulfilled one of his biggest dreams. He bought a Greyhound Bus. Great big red letters on the side proclaimed "THE ARMY OF THE LORD", while across the back was "THE BLOOD OF JESUS". And, of course, over the front window was the destination, "Heaven". He had built a platform on the top of the bus and attached two giant speakers that could be heard for miles. Now when he came for revival, the whole city got a taste of it. He was a rolling tent revival, taking church outside the building onto the streets.

The best time was in the revival services themselves. In those days, Reed was always an experience. He dressed in an outrageous style. He wore the baggies that were in style in Los Angeles at the time (they might be some burgundy color), with yellow platform shoes and silk shirts. What could even be more shaking was to catch him in the restroom after the service. Drenched with sweat from his preaching gymnastics, many a young saint was shocked to see God's man with his shirt off. He looked like a comic book, tattooed from arm to arm and neck to belly button.

He was a leaping, dancing, preaching machine. To new converts, Reed was always the greatest show in town. The young people would sit spellbound as he leaped, bounced, ran, squatted, and generally cut up all

over the stage. The church would always be packed out with many sitting on the floor open mouthed. For Reed's illustrations, every Bible figure took on the actions of a drug addict.

Reed might be preaching his classic Prodigal Son sermon. In that gravelly voice, broken by too much preaching on the beach, Reed would have the prodigal at the bottom of the line, ready to fill his belly with the husk of the swine. Then in an instantaneous transformation, the prodigal's not with pigs anymore but pleading, "Just give me a fix. I'm sick man, I need it bad. Just give me the geees. Just give me the geees off the cotton "" No one knew for sure what the geees was, but they knew it was a desperate situation.

He was never a refined speaker. In fact, in moments of excitement he was known to slip back into the slang of the streets. After praying for people half the night at one of the first revivals, some girls came and asked, "Brother Reed, could you pray for this girl to get the Holy Ghost?"

Larry was feeling good and replied without hesitation, "H--- yes, I'll pray for you" No one would have been the wiser, but Reed was never one to do things in a small or subtle way. Realizing what he had just said, his eyes rolled toward Heaven and he fell down in front of everyone crying out for God to forgive him. Mitchell had to come up quickly and try to keep things going while Reed got things right with his Maker.

The kids coming in were excited and filled their time with fellowship and church. They organized their own attack squads; loading someone's car or van to bursting, they would head out looking for sinners. Every event on the evening news seemed of dramatic importance. They would often stay up half the night talking about something they'd heard on the news and how it related to the coming of Jesus, trying to guess how soon it might be.

The "Door scene" was an outrageous experience. Bodies were packed together like sardines into a sweltering room. Yet, the discomfort somehow seemed to make the whole thing just that much more exciting.

Every new convert was a great trophy to be wondered at. Everyone would listen spellbound as they stood and shared their lurid pasts. When the happy endings of salvation came, the room would break into spontaneous praise and applause.

Harold Warner remembers an event that typified those days. Jack Harris had an old Volkswagen which he barely kept running from paycheck to paycheck. He picked Harold up from work one day, and headed out for Chino Valley. Jack kept telling Harold that he wasn't going

to believe what God had done. Finally they arrived at the spot. Harold could see the remains of a fire on the ground. The night before, Jack had prayed with a young man, and right there they'd burned a whole kilo of marijuana. To these ex-hippies, this was the ultimate sacrificial act. This was sacred ground. They were so excited that they wanted to get the newspapers and tell them about this unbelievable event. Both men knew that something of this magnitude would surely bring the whole Prescott Valley to salvation.

### **Revivals**

Revivals throbbed with life, and it was all Mitchell could do to keep the saints from packing up and following the different evangelists around the country. When Johnny Metzler prayed for someone they usually fell backwards under the power of God's touch into the arms of the pastor. It was always exciting to watch people standing in a line fall one after another as Metzler touched them. He often took people with back trouble and set them on a chair on the stage. There, he'd lift their legs to show how one was shorter than the other. Then, as he prayed the prayer of faith, the crowd would gasp as the short leg leaped out to the same length as the other. Here was a demonstration of God's power right in front of people's eyes, and everyone would leave wondering how anyone could ever doubt God's reality.

Another popular evangelist was Wes Baker. He could be recounting the story of David and Goliath, and as those minds that had opened up to drugs opened up to the words of the story, it became a living thing with David's dripping sword and Goliath's ugly head, severed and held high in triumph.

What frightened and yet drew these young people like moths to a flame was the moving of the Spirit. Special times were cherished as an evangelist, moved on by the Spirit, called up a young saint to tell him or her the secrets of their heart, or to reveal a picture of God's plan for their future.

Jack Harris had been saved about nine months when Larry Reed came to town for another revival. The church was so packed that Jack had to stand crammed into the back of the building. Reed had been prophesying over people, and Jack's heart had made one of those silent prayers, pleading with God to speak to him.

Reed came stomping off the platform at that very instant, shouting, "All right, all right, I know you're here, where are you?" It nearly scared

Jack to death. A minute ago he wanted God to speak, and now he was terrified that it might indeed happen. Reed stomped towards the back of the building, looking to and fro. He walked by Jack, swung around, pointed a finger at him and cried, "It was you!"

Before he could run or faint Larry said, "God's speaking to you. I see you in the ministry. I see you in other countries. I see people getting out of wheelchairs. I see blind eyes opening."

Jack was dumbfounded. He couldn't believe that God would use him like this, yet that word helped him and it became a point of reference in all his future times of trial. It was only four years until the prophecy began to be fulfilled. Hardly a month goes by in his life now that an outstanding miracle doesn't happen somewhere in the world as a result of his ministry.

It was because of Mitchell's willingness to use evangelists that many great things happened. He knew that he alone couldn't meet all the needs of the people. In those early days there weren't many evangelists to choose from, and many of these were less than startling. But whether it was a musical slide show or strange and even boring sermons, something always happened. Mitchell wasn't afraid of losing the people's loyalty to other men, and so he played them up.

He knew, firsthand, the problems these ministries could cause. His use of outside ministry led to many of the greatest challenges that he ever faced, but also to his greatest open doors. He had to straighten out many erroneous teachings and unsound practices after some meetings. Some evangelists had even taken advantage of his open-hearted attitude to try to get money or even to turn the people's loyalty away from him. The problems didn't invalidate the ministry, though. The New Testament shows these same struggles. Jealousies troubled Paul, wolves came in to attack the sheep, and those who he set as pastors in churches turned against him. Yet, God builds His church, and the New Testament is a record of shared ministry.

The good outweighed the bad, and Mitchell was always looking for men who could bring a new insight or a fresh moving of the Spirit.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **Distinctives**

It was the life that filled these new converts that radically changed Wayman Mitchell's ministry. God had been leading him from his early days to believe that the Word could be applied more dynamically than he'd seen in the do-nothing Christianity of most churches. He was tired of complacent pew sitters and hungered to turn the church into an advancing army; a flame of fire spreading out into a world filled with the dry stubble of sin.

Though this desire consumed him, he had been unable to pass it on in his previous churches. They had been filled with people who had been raised in church and were conditioned to hear only what they wanted to hear. They had been inoculated against a healthy dose of the gospel. The growth that he had seen up until Prescott was primarily from people transferring from other churches, people willing to go only so far. What was happening now, with the new converts who were flooding the church, would change all of this.

Jesus had also had trouble with the religiously satisfied of His day. They had seen no need to go all out, but the prostitute and the sinner were ready to give a full measure of love.

Those converts coming into the Potter's House were responsive. Many had done drugs in their search for a real experience and were used to doing radical and outrageous things. Most had no background in Christianity, so for them, what Mitchell said went. Once they had a taste of the power of the Holy Spirit they were hooked and wanted more. Many of them had tasted every type of sin and perversion, so a one hour commitment on Sunday would never satisfy them. They wanted a Christianity as intense as their past lives had been, and nothing short of a full time commitment would do. Out of this rose a church with a unique character.

### **Praise**

Mitchell had stressed praise in every church he had pastored. He believed that it held keys to spiritual deliverance and release, but until now the best that he could do was to get a few folks to lift their hands and let out a little feeble worship. These young kids had been raised on a rock concert diet. They knew how to praise, and when they turned that praise

toward God it nearly took the roof off. In fact he had to preach occasionally on not being too wild, or some would have gotten totally out of control. No harmonious blending of voices was this, but a dynamic, masculine explosion of worship. Mitchell was a man and he wanted the praise to be bold and forceful.

Men praise men with reckless abandon at football games and then clam up in a church service when they're asked to praise God. They say they're "not that kind of person," but what they mean is that they don't want to humble themselves before God. They fail to realize that when a man lifts his hands and voice to God, his life is put in right order.

### **Masculine**

Most of Christianity has been unconsciously dominated by the female. Women have traditionally made up the largest numbers of converts. Sadly, this has shaped a gospel that is heavily feminine in its orientation. The songs are sung in a key too high for men to sing easily, the praise is gentle and saccharine sweet, and the gospel message leans toward submission and winning the lost by a non-demanding love. To men this is often revolting, and most can only be dragged into these sugar factories by force.

As the seventies rolled in, most churches felt great pressure to lean towards an even stronger emphasis on women. The women's liberation movement was in full swing, and many churches were trying desperately to change the gospel's clear cut definition of male and female roles to fit the world of the '70's.

Mitchell saw all this as a terrible mistake. He had been saved under a woman preacher and knew that God could use women if men wouldn't respond, but he'd seen the problems in their homes and churches too. The Bible was clear and he would stand with it. Many women followed Jesus, but none of these were chosen to be part of the leadership of the church. Nothing in the Bible indicated that the New Testament church got four women saved for every man.

The problem boiled down to a sin problem. As the nation had turned away from the Word, its natural rebellion led it to violate scriptural command. Men shirked their responsibility to lead as a spiritual priesthood and supply the family's physical needs. While women rebelled against the scriptural demand of submission.

Mitchell saw unscriptural tendencies creeping into the church and

dared to stand against the tide. Many a raging feminist would be infuriated, only to come back later and thank him for restoring her femininity and helping her to break with the propaganda that had bred only frustration.

Mitchell is all man, and this affects all he does as a pastor. The gospel to him is, "the Kingdom suffering violence and the violent taking it by force "" He preaches love, but it's a love that shows Jesus with a whip in the temple as well as playing with little children.

The Prescott church learned to sing songs sung in a masculine key and the praise rings with a violence that can offend the tender sensibilities of some. Yet the fact was that the church began to fill up with men who thrived on the atmosphere and found their prideful egos shattered as they stood and worshipped a living God in a full, masculine way. Many men who had been previously satisfied to be shiftless bums developed new attitudes. They began to take their place in society, and surprisingly turned out to be hard workers. They became real leaders, vehicles that God could finally use.

### **Prayer**

Nothing separates the Prescott church from most of Christianity more than its commitment to prayer. The church world loves to talk about prayer's power but then does nothing about it. Most pastors pray only a few minutes a day, and for those in the congregation the amount of time given to this spiritual exercise comes to virtually nothing. The priority in Prescott is actually praying.

Mitchell preached and practiced prayer all through his ministry. It seemed to be something his people expected of him as a pastor, but not of themselves.

The young converts coming into the Potter's House didn't know enough to realize that Christians didn't pray. When Larry Reed came for revival, prayer meetings were scheduled before the services. Crowds showed up and shook the rafters as they pleaded for God to move. They prayed in the same urgent way that they praised. This type of prayer released many as they came together with others, lifting their voice to plead for God's touch. This was no round robin conversational talking, but "a sound of many waters."

Jesus had said not to pray publically, but the church world had overlooked the fact that He had said it to the Pharisees who prayed only

for show. They mistakenly regarded all verbalized group prayer as wrong. The early church, though, gathered daily to pray, and often several times a day they came together and were recorded to have shook buildings with their fervency. Today, Jews at the wailing wall in Jerusalem show us the pattern as they rock back and forth pleading for God to move. Jesus separated Himself, going out into the wilderness to pray. Why would He do this if He silently sent His thoughts to God? How could His prayers have been recorded in the Bible if they weren't spoken out? The Bible rings with the command to "Shout unto God with the voice of triumph," and these young people were freed to do just that. Some kneeling, others pacing the floor, they began to pray. Seeing God move in response to their prayers just fed their desire for more.

Since the revival with Reed every church service has started with a one hour prayer meeting. At first a morning prayer meeting was scheduled at 10:30. It was changed later to 7:00 so that more men could come before going to work. The church is literally bathed in prayer as every day (and sometimes twice a day) people come and bombard heaven. Several speakers who have come to minister have stopped in shock as they passed by the prayer room, captivated by the roar of the saints. "This is the reason for revival," they say, and they are partially right.

## **Giving**

In a world that runs on money, works for money, robs, fights, kidnaps, and even dies for money, it is sad that the church is sometimes too afraid to even mention it. Too many Christians have no problem praising God but something nasty rises up when they're asked to put their money where their mouth is. The parables of Christ are dominated by this theme, and in the Old Testament there is no worship or redemption outside the sacrifice of giving. From the building of the tabernacle to the establishing of the New Testament church, the giving of God's people has been fundamental to every moving of God.

America has drifted into a secular mold not just to deny God, but to worship "new" gods, which are actually only the old gods of lust and mammon. Their power can only be broken by a direct attack on this stronghold.

Mitchell had lived a life of sacrificial giving and had no qualms about taking offerings. He knew that in an age dominated by materialism there could be no liberty in the church without giving. No one would believe Christianity was real until it was seen affecting people's pocketbooks.

For much of the church world, an upside-down system has developed that gives prestige to the preacher who has the most warm bodies filling the most pews. Since preaching on money has a tendency to run folks off, the obvious remedy is to play this part of worship down.

People have learned to give for what they like and be miserly for everything else, so American Christianity is filled with people who rob God to buy their latest toys, and with beautiful buildings pastored by starving ministers.

The Prescott church was not built on numbers but on disciples. Mitchell was burned out on the numbers game and decided when he came to Prescott that he'd believe God to bring him loyal, committed people. How many came wasn't nearly as important to him as how many were obeying God. This emphasis weeded out the Christmas and Easter crowd, but built a militant core of people that was liberal in every area of their lives. Wayman knew that people needed to put their lives on the right foundation. Something in the fallen nature of man is healed when people give of the money they've earned through hard labor.

### **Radical Evangelism**

Another critical area is for God's people to speak openly of their belief in Jesus Christ. Most churches are full of secret agents. Mitchell emphasized the need to speak out and then opened up opportunities to do just that.

The '70s were a time of outrageous attire and lifestyles, and the kids loved any gospel message that would stir up the city. American Christianity had drifted into appeasing the world, when its call originally was to be a light. Paul had started revival by unashamedly proclaiming Christ. The book of Acts reads like a tour of the Roman penal institutions. Paul started trouble everywhere he went, but he got the message out.

Prescott was marked by a commitment to press the claims of Christ "in season or out." It became a contest to think of some new way to display the gospel. The Fourth of July became a time to spend in movies and street preaching, the whole affair culminating in the annual parade. The church always entered some float that declared a risen Saviour in the midst of marching bands, clowns, horses and majorettes.

### **Commitment**

Tied to this same principle was the unique level of the people's

commitment. In a good church in America, Sunday night will see half the number of people who were in the morning service, and it's a lucky church if half of the Sunday night crowd shows up for the mid-week prayer meeting. This fact appears to be almost as dependable as the law of gravity. As Mitchell preached and called for people to go all out, these young people rallied and actually came. They had spent six hours a day in front of a T. V. , and many had been faithful to their local bar for several nights a week; faithfulness to church seemed only natural. In fact, many wished they could go more often. As this same spirit was picked up by each new convert it changed the personality of the church. Not just in Prescott, but now in hundreds of churches it's expected that the attendance at any one service won't vary much from any other.

Mitchell believed and preached that each person was too vital to the Kingdom to be allowed to throw their life away on the world. He knew that if they didn't commit themselves to God they would be consumed with something else. All one needs to do is to look around and see how jogging, body building, hunting and video games dominate the lives of men. Women are not immune either. Some grow enough plants in their kitchens that Tarzan would feel comfortable swinging through and others become totally immersed in their families, current fashions, their careers or the occult. People naturally give themselves to something, and they were created to give their primary allegiance to God.

Mitchell believed that the church was the most vital organization on planet Earth, and that the people of God weren't fulfilling an empty duty, but doing Kingdom business when they came. How could they stay home watching "The Wonderful World of Disney" when the Lord of Creation was waiting to meet them? Destiny filled these people's hearts and they decided to "run to obtain."

There were lots of churches in Prescott that demanded next to nothing, and Mitchell felt no call to add to their number or compete in their religious games. He was determined that somewhere there would be a church that applied the gospel, and he planned on pastoring it. He made it clear (and still does) that the door swings both ways. If people didn't like it, they could go somewhere else.

## **Workers**

Nowhere was this emphasized more than with those who wanted to lead. No one signed pledges to come to every service, and no hit squads threatened inquisitions on those who didn't come regularly. What was

demanding was that anyone that held a position of leadership had to be an example. He had no intention of releasing a bunch of spiritual prima donnas.

In church, an attitude often develops that the new convert needs to be committed, but the old-timers are stronger, so they can slack off. In much of Christianity people lead Bible studies, sing, play in groups, and teach, yet are random in their commitment to actually gather with God's people. Mitchell had seen how this created a pattern of people

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Leaders

Christianity often gets leadership and management confused. Nothing was more important to the Prescott church than their pastor. Here was a leader. Many churches function by committee, and hire men who are trained to follow. It's fine to have a program and a plan, but these can get out of hand and build small-minded pharisees who become so consumed with the details of some program that they forget the purpose of the church. God's plan is to use men of vision. When God has a task, He looks for a man. They may be eccentric in their dress or lifestyle, but they are men who can lead.

Mitchell led because he knew that God had called him to lead. He wasn't just filling a job, he was fulfilling a divine commission. The young men he sent out to pastor were marked by the same attitude.

In choosing men to minister, Mitchell wasn't interested in technicians. Word skills were meaningless to him compared to a willingness to believe and work. His prayer was for God to give him laborers for the harvest.

While the church world emphasized intellect, appearance, and finesse, Prescott was moving under the direction of vision. Not a vision that had given them a blueprint for what to do, but the vision of a man who had been touched by God. The fact is, Mitchell often felt lost as to what the future held. He knew that God was present, and he did what was necessary to maintain God's presence in the services. Beyond that the church moved from day to day. Many who see the Prescott church as it is now think there was some kind of master plan. They want to know how it was done. The truth is that it evolved by a process of blind stumbling on Mitchell's part, but of divine plan on the part of God.

Abraham left the secure city to dwell in tents. The twelve disciples never fully understood their destiny until they were in it. Even David had trouble seeing how he'd reach the throne from the cave, but all hoped, trusted and followed. They held the unshakable conviction that God was guiding them as they prayed and moved out into the unknown and the uncharted. starting out on fire and then becoming like those around them; dead, lifeless souls slipping into a religious mold. He knew that life's most powerful force was not teaching, but example. If a core of people set an example, then all those who came afterward would be like them.

He wanted nothing to do with a system that bred lethargy. If someone

wanted to lead, they had to serve. The primary quality of leadership would be exemplarship. A leader's life must be an exhibition of the gospel. To play in a group, preach or lead a Bible study meant they must come to church and live a consistent Christian life. Talented young men and women were often frustrated when they came to offer their services to Mitchell. He would just smile and say, "Learn to be faithful." If they couldn't do that then their talent was useless. It wasn't long before being appointed an usher was an honor that was fought for.

Out of this came a people who had weighed the price of being part of the church. Just by being together they forged strong family bonds, and because of this they wouldn't switch to the newest church in town or scatter when Satan attacked.

Businesses expect their employees to come to work if they want to be paid. The Army demands loyalty and obedience from their soldiers, clubs expel members who violate their rules, and Jesus Christ has never accepted a profession of love from anyone unless it has had a radical impact on their life.

America was growing soft. For many, the word "work" had become an obscenity. Many young people worked at not working. Mitchell challenged the young men and women to make their job their Bible school. God called workers to the harvest field.

Much of the church built into their people the tendency to try to get away with doing as little as possible. Many churches respond to this American mood by creating a gospel as convenient as instant pudding and T.V. dinners. Preachers told their flocks, "God doesn't want you to have a nervous breakdown, so take it easy." While some theologians and psychologists emphasized family, self, health and happiness, Mitchell placed his emphasis on Christ and His body of believers. It met a deep need in those that were looking for a real purpose in life. Focusing on one's own self could never bring real happiness, only self's death could really free.

This is how the critical ministries in the Prescott church evolved. Every major ministry came spontaneously out of the body as God dealt with people. Mitchell had lost interest in church programs that required constant pumping up by the pastor. Great ideas are a dime a dozen. You can take any twelve people in America and lock them in a room for two hours and have a hundred great ideas on how to reach America. The problem comes when you try to find someone to implement them.

Mitchell emphasized the basics. He preached, called for sacrifice and

commitment, and pressed people to draw close to God. God then began to separate out the ones He'd use and told them what He wanted them to do.

## **Different**

It began to be obvious that they were on the cutting edge of what God was doing; they were moving in a direction that others in the church world weren't really interested in. Jesus had warned that those that had tasted the old wine would not be interested in the less smooth taste of the new. It was true 200 centuries later.

Mitchell had tapped into the Jesus People movement well before it reached the rest of Arizona. Here in a little town of 13,000 God was doing new things. The "Door" functioned in Prescott for almost a year before anything like it hit the Phoenix valley. Mitchell tried to get other pastors interested, but they weren't looking for the type of people that came with it. When he talked about the prospect of getting young people saved, other pastors could only think of how little these hippies would put in the plate and that none of them owned a razor.

One of the first outreaches the church did was to Mitchell's old home church. Seventy-five people spent the day covering Phoenix with flyers, promoting a concert at the church. This was the first use of what later became known as "guerilla teams"; sending a group of saints from other churches to descend on a city to stir it up became a standard practice in planting churches.

That night the building was packed. Every type of individual imaginable showed up. They were dressed in all the colors of the rainbow. Krishnas, drug addicts, and bikers in chains came. One outrageous character wore a bolt action from his gun around his neck. Eden played, and at the end ten kids responded. Although one of these later became the youth leader at that very church, the Phoenix church totally rejected the idea of ever doing anything like it again. Instead of seeing the potential, all they could see were the problems. They acted just like the ten spies who went with Joshua and Caleb; forgetting all the good God had done, they came back screaming their report of giants. Like most of the church world they preferred to play it safe with the handful they had rather than risk what they were unsure of, even after God had promised them blessing.

The band went down to Phoenix for another concert about six months later. A Baptist preacher who had gotten filled with the Holy Ghost set up a concert at Paradise Hills Baptist Church with Prescott's group, Eden. As Mitchell and the group arrived they were astounded to find over 3,500

already there. You couldn't even get near the place for the kids. They had to park blocks away and carry their instruments with them. The church world had never seen anything like it before. Some couples were openly making love on the lawn, while others smoked dope. Kids and cars seemed to stretch forever. Eden cranked out their music, and everyone there soaked it up. A man from the Hollywood Free Paper gave three altar calls during the day, and kids streamed forward every time.

Mitchell could see that what was bringing hundreds into the Prescott church could have brought thousands into a church in the giant Phoenix valley, but by the time churches got around to responding most of that initial excitement had already passed.

The conflict between what God was doing and what the church world was doing stood out greatest at church camp. When Mitchell loaded up his wild crew and took them to camp, it was a disaster. Most of the kids there were from Christian homes and Mitchell's troops were straight off the streets. It was like arranging a nice social evening between the Ku Klux Klan and the Black Panthers.

The thing that devastated the Prescott kids was that they found more sinners at church camp than out in the park at home. These kids could fool their parents, but not these street wise new converts. It was obvious to them that these kids weren't slipping off into the woods to pray and study the Bible, but had come up to pick up on the girls and sneak off and smoke dope.

Somehow Hank Houghton had been appointed a counselor, and he terrorized these religious sinners. When he found guys in his group out smoking, he threatened to break their arms if they tried it again. These poor kids had never met anyone who had studied at the John the Baptist School of Church Discipline and Holiness before.

The kids from the Potter's House had come to do business with God, but they found a religious institution that was only geared to play games. The saddest part of the whole business was that because these kids still had long hair they were the ones who got harassed. No one would believe they were really Christians.

The church world was after a certain look. Their narrow definition of what was acceptable just wasn't flexible enough to deal with the fresh movings of God. As a result much of the church would be left behind, trying to attract people with gospel quartets while the world was moving to a stronger beat.

It wasn't always easy to flow with what was going on or see much

hope in those who were coming in. They weren't exactly what the church world was looking for to add to its ranks. Many of these young people had picked up some bizarre and anti-social habits. Some had fried their minds on drugs and could hardly carry on a conversation, but as they patterned their lives after the Bible the fascinating result was kids who turned out to be the kind every pastor dreams of having. They soon began to adopt the very look and habits that the church had grown to expect. It took a redemptive heart, though, to bring them through the process of change.

### **Harold Warner**

Harold Warner was a good picture of this. He had been raised in Massachusetts in a well-to-do family, but the summer before he was saved he'd gotten strung out on heroin. Months had been invested in just getting high, followed by the shaking, wrenching consequences of withdrawals.

It was at this time that he wandered into Prescott chasing his cosmic visions of the future. After being in town for just a few days he noticed that his eyes were turning yellow. The hospital informed him that he had serum hepatitis and put him in isolation for ten days. On getting out of the hospital he moved into a place with some of the most notorious dopers in town. He crashed on their floor and violated all the doctors' orders.

On November 15, 1970, Eden was playing at the Armory. Harold had heard about how some of the town's most notorious druggies had gotten saved and went out to hear Eden play. He looked the part of a good hippie with hair that hung down his back and a pair of bright red bell-bottoms that fit as if he'd been poured into them. That night was the first time in his life he heard the gospel. The word "saved" was as foreign to him as something spoken in Swahili, but the exposure touched him. What got him even more was a young girl he met that night. He thought, "If this is what Christians are like I might check it out some more."

He went to the Sunday night service and, though he couldn't remember anything that was said, it penetrated enough to get him up to the front praying for forgiveness. As he came back to his seat everyone was crying and hugging him, telling him how happy they were. He wasn't sure why they were doing it; he wasn't even sure what he'd done. He hadn't had an overpowering experience, and didn't even have enough theology to quote John 3:16. In fact, he honestly didn't feel any different, but time would prove that it was real.

The same night they were having a baptism and Harold was asked if he wanted to join in. He hadn't brought a change of clothes, but said he'd go in naked if they didn't mind.

They turned his offer down and found him something to wear, and Warner started off on the Christian life. He remembers almost nothing of that first year because his mind was so blown from past use of drugs. It was hard to see great potential in him.

Sister Burgess, an 80 year old lady, took in this ex-drug addict and treated him like a son. Harold's main talent at the time was an ability to greatly exaggerate the truth. He spent a good part of his time expanding on his illustrious past to whoever would listen. The first memory he has of talking to Pastor Mitchell was at a Bible Study at the Payson's home. He was peppering his conversation with half-truths while Mitchell listened. It wasn't so much that he wanted to lie, it was just that he'd lied so much in the past he wasn't even sure what the truth was anymore.

One of his most crucial tests was when he realized that the girl he'd come to church for wasn't interested in being his Christian girlfriend. He had spent his life running. For the year before he'd gotten saved his parents hadn't even known where he was. Now, the spirit that cried, "Split!" was on him again. He started asking if there were any good churches back in Massachusetts. It was one of the most critical decisions of his life. He chose to stay.

He got one of the first jobs of his life as a logger. It was a sad joke to see this kid who hadn't worked a day in his life trying to play the woodsman. It took him three days to get fired.

He decided, then, that it was time to cut his hair. He dropped in at the Jones' barbershop and faced the music. Joe Jones loved cutting those long brown locks, and sniped them down to a suitable length for employment. Up until this time Harold had not been very successful at anything, let alone employment. Under the influence of salvation there began to be a noticeable change.

Purpose began to enter his life. It showed first in his determination to witness. Not much of what went on the first year stayed with him, but one thing that did was the level of emotion that coursed through him when Mitchell preached on world evangelism. Something deep within cried out to be satisfied. Sitting in the front row during one of these sermons was like having his heart torn out. A burden for souls and a desire to reach them began to consume him. He was moved by the preaching in a way that he had never been before.

The job he finally landed was at a grocery store as a meat cutter. Many of his customers thought he was part Mexican because they heard him singing all the time in a strange language. Little did they know that it was a tongue that only angels could understand. A battle for souls began to be waged over those slabs of meat.

The store was owned by Mormons who weren't excited about their store becoming the conduit for souls into a Pentecostal church. He promised to stop witnessing, and then witnessed some more.

His East Coast aggressiveness would push through doors that weren't always open. He displayed this talent to Mitchell. Bashfulness was never one of Warner's strong points, and he made himself a regular fixture at the Mitchell home on Audrey Lane.

In constant contact with Pastor Mitchell's patience and concern, a dramatic change began to take place. More and more, Harold became a man who was set apart. A determination was born that awed others around him. He decided he would give his life 100%, and did it.

He learned to preach in the Door scene like a parrot of Mitchell. Their voices and deliveries even now are almost indistinguishable on tape. He looked for every possibility to be a witness. One day, while cutting meat, an idea hit him about writing a column in the local paper. He left work and went straight to Mitchell's house. He was excited as he told Mitchell about his idea of putting testimonies in the paper of lives that had been changed.

These were the things that Mitchell was looking for. Not plans that he had worked up, but ideas that were obviously generated by the Holy Ghost. He encouraged Harold and even suggested the name, "Metamorphosis," and a new ministry was born that impacted that small mountain community. More than that, a young man found a place of service and a dignity that began to release God's purpose for his life.

When Harold became engaged to Mona, he refused even to kiss her until the night before they got married. He had become a man who had absolutely no desire to play with his destiny.

This young man who had been headed towards obscurity or prison was changed into one of the most astounding preachers in the Southwest. He went on to pioneer a church that, in just ten years, numbers hundreds and has planted over twenty churches. Only an eye of faith and a heart of redemption could have seen beyond the pushy young braggart he had been when he had first entered the church.

## CHAPTER NINE

### God the Architect

The Bible is the history of God taking men beyond themselves, of His building the church and leading men down paths they often didn't want to follow. The tabernacle was only built by divine help and guidance and David wasn't man's choice for a king. The New Testament Church would have never chosen Paul for a leader, or picked persecution as the best method of growth.

The Prescott church learned to flow with what God was doing. The music group had touched a powerful response. It had evolved naturally, as a result of several young men's burdens. Pastor Mitchell didn't crank up the typical follow-up programs, camps, clubs and benefits, or Sunday schools so complex that one needed a doctorate in child-ology to run them. He just had church. He preached and trusted God to speak to those He wanted to use.

God began to put desires into young men's hearts that would lead them to His goal. He closed some doors and opened others. Many of the things that were happening in the early days of the Prescott revival seemed insignificant, but would later prove to be vital.

As the church experimented and Pastor Mitchell released the people, new concepts began to rise. Some ideas were good and are still in use, others have drifted into obscurity.

Jack Harris had gotten Jim Terry saved, and the two became good friends. After work one day, as Jack was playing his guitar, the front door burst open and a body came rolling in. It was Ben Terry, Jim's brother. As he picked himself up off the floor, Jim came storming in, shouting, "You're going to listen to what this guy has to say" Jack started to witness and Ben started to listen.

Later, Ben told his cousin about what had happened and asked Harris if he'd come to his house and share his testimony with some kids he knew.

Jack said, "Sure!", and showed up to find twenty young kids waiting to hear him. He brought with him some rock albums by Jimi Hendrix, King Crimson, The Doors and others which he had marked at critical spots. He played cuts from these albums that showed what the modern generation believed, and related how that was what he'd believed until recently. From there he launched into his testimony and gave an altar call. Five people got saved that night.

As a natural flow out of that experience, people began to get together to share the Word and to fellowship. This led to the founding of home Bible studies. Before long, these studies became outreach points to different areas in the Prescott Valley. Those who attended would show movies and have pot lucks to reach people in their neighborhoods. It became a great tool for developing leaders and outreach. None of this came out of a programmed structure or even a book, but just naturally developed to meet the needs of people.

### **Preachers**

The whole concept of raising up preachers followed this same pattern. There was nothing said about anyone preaching, yet in these young men's hearts was a desire to be like Mitchell. Something rose up inside them that made them want to share the gospel like he did. They saw his vitality and craved it just as they had craved drugs and rock and roll. Mitchell made it clear that he wasn't just the result of his heredity, but that his strength was from God, and that if they sought God that same authority and purpose could be theirs. Some sought it and eventually began to find it.

Mitchell didn't set up *Wayman University*. There were no special "evening Bible school" classes. These would have violated his concept of the church. He didn't believe in a special class of Christians that had mystic properties to bring redemption. To Pastor Mitchell, every believer was vital, needing time and training. The church became the Bible school. He preached sermons that challenged every member to do their absolute best. These sermons drove out the uncommitted, but it fed the hungry hearts that listened.

There wasn't a special program; he just made his life available. He believed in the "radical" concept of being an example. While many were saying, "Don't look at me, look at Jesus," he saw this as a cop-out used by some to escape really living the Christian life. Paul had said, "Look at me, imitate me," not to take away from Christ, but to make Christ available to those of his generation. Mitchell lived his life as a pattern, and wasn't ashamed to have these young men do as he did.

He went out of his way to help those who wanted to be helped. He stopped by people's houses, took the men to lunch, and over many a hamburger they laughed and discussed the future.

Probably his most important decision was to put his trust in these young men. From the first he handled what went on in the church itself and allowed the men around him to handle the outreaches around town.

He could have done a better job than any of those inexperienced young ministers did, but he could never liberate the church by playing the dictator and holding the reins too tight. This was where young men began to get practical experience in sharing the gospel and felt the pull of God's call to make this a total lifestyle.

After outreaches, it was only natural that the conversation would drift towards the practical side of the task of reaching the city. These discussions were not from dry textbooks, but from observation of the realities of their lives. This was Jesus' method, demonstrating and explaining, answering questions that arose out of the natural flow of ministry.

Mitchell wasn't turning the church over to the congregation. He never left any doubt that God had put him there to lead and not to be led. When disciples were given responsibility he made it clear that they must do their best. He threw real responsibility onto their weak shoulders and made them carry the load. If they failed, he helped them out, but he took a pound of flesh to compensate if their failure was due to their playing games with God.

The band never forgot the night they were to play in a regular service and got the great idea of taking hands and praying before they went out. They ran and asked Mitchell to join them for this sacred moment, and he shocked their young senses when he snapped, "If you haven't prayed yet, it's too late." At first it shocked and even offended them, but they soon realized that the weight of responsibility was resting solely on them.

Though Pastor Mitchell could be explosive at times, there was no doubt in these novice exhorters' minds that they deserved ten times the abuse they actually received.

Pastor Mitchell had to have a redemptive heart. It's hard to see how Christ could have endured the young thugs, James and John, who went under the popular handle "Sons of Thunder". Who knows what inner reserves of grace He had to tap to deal with women of broken morals and disciples who were extremists? But He did, and if Jesus could, then so could Mitchell. He had to overlook much to bring confidence in these vessels of clay. There were young cocky punks just out of the local county jail, and others whose drug scarred emotions could send them from the heights of ecstasy to the depths of melancholy almost instantaneously. But Mitchell had been labeled and rejected, too. He knew how to instill a sense of worth and destiny.

At the end of the music scene an altar call was always given. Often,

Pastor Mitchell would lean over to a young man and tell him to "share" that night. Nothing was said about preaching, but that's what they did.

With no intention of developing pastors, it started to become obvious that God was doing that very thing.

At first Mitchell followed the denominational pattern. Not long after the church started moving, two young men expressed a desire to go to Bible college. Mitchell sent them off with his blessing. When Spring break came, these two who had left on-fire for God came back infected with the "institutional disease". The fire was banked and their hearts were cold. Like a horrible flashback, he remembered his own battles in school. He had no idea what to do, but he knew school wasn't the solution.

### **Gospel Stars**

The church had started following the same well marked trail others traveled in the Jesus People movement, but as time went on they found God directing them down a more and more unique course. Just as the road toward education turned out to be a dead end, so did the roads leading toward gospel superstars and deeper truth.

The Jesus People movement found much of its life and force in modern music. The generation of the 70's were bred to respond to guitar and drums, and for once the gospel wasn't ten years behind the times. Kids that hated the name of Jesus and the church began to open like flowers in Spring as musicians shared their same fears, aches, and hurts in a way that spoke to them. It wasn't a message of hate, destruction, and immorality like they heard on AM radio but an answer that came with hope and spoke of a Jesus who sounded alive and modern. At first all that motivated these artists was the sincere desire to express their joy and testimony in a contemporary style, but before long it became big business.

Gospel groups were cutting albums and making tours. Something that had started simple was rapidly becoming unbelievably complex. The group, Eden, had been ready to cut an album with Electra Records just before they were saved, and their talents were as good or better than anything in the Christian music scene. As they played Christian concerts on the weekends and went on outreaches it was obvious they could be a big hit. There was life in their music. The lyrics were simple yet they uncovered the shallowness of sin. Kids were gripped by lightning speed guitar leads that gripped the hearts of every rock and roll junkie within hearing range.

Don Matison had come out from Los Angeles and heard them. His excitement about the band was contagious. He set up a tour across the country. Here was the big time. It seemed like a great opportunity.

Mitchell got behind the group and sold his car to buy a van they could travel in.

The "gospel groupies" loved the guys from the start. Their hard rock beat was unique in Christian music at the time. It created a powerful forum for the message that was preached afterwards. At a concert in Illinois, they even saw a miracle. A girl was at the concert in a wheel-chair, and when the last song finally died down she asked for an album. Somebody in the band casually said, "In the name of Jesus come out of the wheelchair and get it". Everyone was dumb-struck and ecstatic when she, by faith, stood up and walked over to claim her album.

The only problem was, that while the people cheered, something unclean had started to come between the members of the band. Pride started to rise up, and divisions developed. These redeemed sinners needed the constant contact of a real church to maintain their spiritual equilibrium. They knew that they had made a mistake in leaving Prescott. They returned to find the coffeehouse in Prescott limping along without them.

Mitchell made a critical decision. He took the group aside and challenged them to make a commitment to the church. He asked them if they were willing to give up their dreams of glory and dedicate their music as servants. From that point there would be no record albums or big money for playing the concert scene.

These men made the quality decision to settle in and come under the discipline they needed. Prescott became their harvest field, and out of it came a solid foundation for God's work in their lives.

## **Illinois**

Ron Jones had been running the weekly Door scene. Twice on Friday and Saturday nights he would stand after the group played to cast the net for souls, and a catch always came in. As the flames of revival were fanned, so was his desire to go out and see the same thing happen in his own ministry. Jones was restless by nature, and Mitchell didn't know what to do with him. He went to Mitchell and told him that he felt he was called to be an evangelist. Pastor Mitchell didn't feel real good about it, but because he had no desire to dominate Ron, he let him go.

Jones preached a Wednesday night service, received a love offering and headed out with his family. With a pickup truck and a trailer, they started moving from revival to revival. Those first meetings offered slim pickings. The churches that let him preach were barely surviving themselves, and about all he got was gas money to reach the next town and a few cans of food to put under the car seat. God showed up in the services, though, and they were filled with energy and hope.

Jones and his family traveled like this for about six months. Then they drove into Creal Springs, Illinois. The Assembly of God church needed a pastor. It was a city that was just a dot on the Illinois road map, with a population of 900 (including cats and dogs), but Marie was expecting her second child and they figured that it was as good a place as any to stop for a few months until after she had the baby.

Jones started preaching. His stay in Prescott had shown him what God could do. He'd touched the fire of God and brought a spark of it with him, trapped in his heart. Here was the power of impartation. Potatoes breed potatoes and dead churches breed a stifled gospel, but revival births revival. After seeing real revival, Jones would never be able to settle for anything less. He knew what God could do and wasn't willing to just have "church as usual". He began to pray desperately for God to move, and it was only a matter of weeks before a tremendous revival broke out in that little hole-in-the-wall town. People began to get saved in such a frenzy that Ron ended up sleeping in the church so he could be available to help sinners who came begging to be prayed for in the middle of the night.

Outstanding things were happening. He was burdened for one old gambler who was notorious all over the area, and his feeling was that if this man could change, anyone could. Conviction was on Jones so heavy that he was unable to go to service one Sunday morning as he pleaded for this man's soul. The man was across town playing cards when all of a sudden he stumbled out from his friends and went to the house of Dion Thompson (a deacon in the church) and begged, "I've got to get saved!" The two of them went out into a field where the gambler broke down and repented.

Word about the revival began to spread. One Baptist preacher had heard about it and got so mad that he preached that Sunday night against speaking in tongues. He came home after the service and sat uncomfortably in his easy chair. Looking over at his wife, he said, "I believe I've grieved the Holy Spirit tonight."

The next morning the uneasy feeling had gotten worse, and he got a

preacher friend to go with him to the church and pray. He was kneeling about three-quarters of the way back in the sanctuary when the Holy Spirit began to fill the place. He didn't know what to do, or what it was that he felt. One thought came to him; "run for the altar!" He parted the folding chairs like water. Running for his life, he dove for the front of the church, and like a baseball player stealing a base he slid into the altar speaking in tongues. His pastor friend was completely baffled. He'd never seen anything like it before. He ran up to his friend who was babbling away in what, to him, sounded like nonsense. One moment he was laughing and the next he was in tears. The other pastor did the only thing he could think of; He grabbed a glass of water and threw it in his friend's face. It never even registered on the man, he was too gloriously soused in the Holy Ghost to notice a little water.

The Creal Springs church throbbed with life. One of the girls who had gotten saved was married to one of the town's most infamous bikers. Jones had promised Connie Campbell that he would come and witness to her husband Joe. He arrived at their house scared to death. Joe's Harley was outside, intimidatingly parked near the door. He knew that Campbell was unpredictable, and had only gotten wilder since his wife got saved. Partying day and night, Campbell had even taken to carrying a gun. Word was that he was mad that his "old lady" had gotten religion. Jones entered the house to find him still asleep at 1:30 in the afternoon after a night of debauchery. Jones was ready to leave, but Connie begged him to stay long enough to wake Joe up. Awakened from a drunken stupor, he wasn't a very receptive audience, but just before Jones left, he asked Campbell if he would mind if he prayed for him.

Joe figured that it wouldn't hurt him if this little skinny guy prayed for him over at the church and said, "Sure. I don't mind."

Jones shocked both himself and Joe when he dropped to his knees and started to bombard Heaven, pleading, "God let this sinner get saved and start to love his wife!" Campbell was amazed. He couldn't forget seeing that preacher kneeling down in front of him calling out his name before God. It was a picture he couldn't shake. The next thing he knew he'd promised Jones that he would come out to church.

He came several times to different services and felt each time there was something here he needed but he wasn't sure what to do. He had a feeling that Jones wanted him to do something, but Campbell was so ignorant of the gospel that he didn't know what Jones meant when he asked the congregation, "Who wants to get saved?"

Campbell went to a revival Jones was preaching for Art Goddard in

the nearby small town of Tams. When Ron gave the altar call, Art went to the back and practically dragged Joe to the front, where he insisted that he pray.

Joe was sitting at home the next morning, wondering if anything had really happened, when some old friends of his stopped in. They said, "We heard you got religion. Is that true?" He took a minute to answer, then said, "I guess it is." As the words left his mouth the power of God hit him. The more he spoke, the more excited he got. When his friends finally left, he felt he had to go downtown and tell everyone. He went from building to building telling the world what Jesus could do for them. He thought he'd only spent an hour at it, until he noticed the sun starting to set and realized he'd spent the whole day preaching.

It was only three days later that Joe was filled with the Holy Spirit at Ron's church. He was praying in the front when the whole church came to a hush waiting for God to speak. Joe began to feel a wind blowing on him. He wondered who had brought a fan into church and looked around, but couldn't see anything. He turned around to pray again and the wind began to blow harder. Everyone was waiting for one of the "old hands" to speak out a prophecy, when all of a sudden Joe's head snapped back and he shouted out, "Come out from the dead to among the living!" Jones was ecstatic that God had used this new convert. He was so excited that he jumped over the altar and ran around the building, jumping a pew as he returned to the front.

## **Rebellion**

The old saints were rising up against Jones just as they had against Mitchell. Some were mad at the revival; they felt that too many new people were coming in.

Jones took Joe's prophesy as a confirmation of God's hand of blessing. He had Mitchell's touch of revival, but he also had his knack to stir up the uncommitted. The breaking point came when he had Larry Reed come in to preach. That little mid-western town had never seen or even dreamed of anyone like Reed. He came in wearing his pink half boots, along with an orange pastel coat and long hair that made him look like an Indian. This was too much for the old religious hands. Though people were coming into the church in droves, the deacons walked out.

Jones was heartbroken. Nothing had prepared him for this, and in the confusion and hurt he quit. After loading his wife and kids on a plane, he and Larry drove back to Arizona. Jones was totally confused. He was filled

with anger at these devils who couldn't see God's hand. He was thrown into despair when he realized that God had wanted him to stay and work things out. He tried to go back to Creal Springs and catch the revival again, but it was impossible. It was a heartbreaking trial. Marie, afraid for her family's future, gave Brother Mitchell a call telling him about the desperate situation they were in.

Pastor Mitchell called Ron the next day and asked him to come back and work with him as head of outreach. It was a learning experience for both Ron and the Prescott church. It was becoming obvious that these young men wouldn't be able to just slip into the religious world. God's favor was on them, but they needed to be in closer contact with Prescott and find situations that supported them, instead of attacking.

However hopeless it seemed, the fruit in Illinois wasn't totally lost. In future years God's plan would unfold. Joe Campbell entered the ministry, first in another organization, but finally as a part of the leadership of the fellowship. Many ministers have been touched by Campbell and brought in contact with Mitchell, and churches started all over Illinois and its neighboring states that are experiencing a tremendous move of the Spirit.

One of Mitchell's unique marks has been his redeeming of those who found themselves in impossible situations. The religious world often functioned in a heartless manner, leaving those that had failed or panicked to spiritually die. Just like the axis powers in World War II, they had no respect for life. The Germans and Japanese sent out their pilots, and if they were shot down, they left them to drown or be taken prisoner. In contrast to this, America went to extraordinary lengths to save these men. At first this seemed foolish, but over time these rescued men gained an experience that the enemy pilots could never match and dominated the skies.

In the same way, Mitchell saw that there was too much of an investment in these young men to just allow them to fail. He would go to extraordinary lengths to redeem a man, and over time it proved a policy of great foresight. It became a law for him; all discipline must be based in redemption.

Almost every leading man in the fellowship has at some time needed to be helped through a difficult time. That willingness to help only sealed their loyalty more solidly to what God was doing.

## **Outreach**

Jones had come back to a church that was exploding with life. Before

leaving, he had been the leader of the Door, commanding and corralling a bunch of undisciplined new converts. He came back to find that many of those young men had risen to become powerful preachers and leaders in their own right.

The church wasn't content to just reach Prescott. The fire of revival compelled them to make all of Arizona their harvest field. Ike Cook was a local electrician. He took some vans and hooked up generators and projectors to make rolling outreach centers that could hit campgrounds and small isolated communities. "Guerilla teams" hit the Grand Canyon in the summer and anywhere else they could find a crowd.

The church tried working with other churches in the state. Weekend after weekend they would load vans up with saints and descend on cities like Williams, Needles and Cotton Wood. The results were exciting.

Jack Harris had seen potential in the dead-end city of Bagdad. The town existed at the end of a road that led up to its rich copper mines.

Harris scoped out the land and found an open door for a rock concert. As the band began to play, over 250 kids came, seemingly from nowhere, and 65 got saved that night.

Eden was returning to Prescott one night after playing a small out-reach on the Colorado River. They pulled up to a light in Kingman, Arizona, when the car next to them began to honk and shout.

The driver was in a desperate state of mind. He wanted to know if they were a band. They said, "Yes," and he begged them to come and play at the Kingman Fairgrounds. A big dance had been set up, with a band from California. The problem was the band was still in California and hundreds of kids were waiting to boogie with nothing to boogie by.

Eden agreed to play and raced out to the fairgrounds, setting up in record time. By the time the promoter found out they were a Christian band it was too late. It was an unbelievable scene as some were trying to dance to the gospel, but most just got convicted. Never short on brashness, the members of the group threw in their testimonies and preached a fiery sermon at the end, complete with altar call. Only God could open doors this wide, and only those bold in the Holy Ghost would have the nerve to step through.

The small mountain city of Williams, Arizona, shut down the main street and let the band play. Kids came by the hundreds at the sound of the pounding beat and wild leads. Before the night was over dozens responded, weeping at the altar call. Afterwards, though, the sad report

came back that the church didn't keep any of them. This was the maddening result that kept repeating itself in churches and cities that Mitchell knew were responsive.

People were getting saved all over the state. The young men in Prescott were learning how to move people to a real decision. Hardly a weekend went by that one of the men didn't stand before a group of sinners, numbering anywhere from a few dozen to a few hundred, commanding them to make a decision for or against a living God.

## **Growth**

During all of this Mitchell never let up in Prescott. The result was that the Prescott Church continued to expand, with key people being added weekly. Some who came in were out of more normal back-grounds. Gary and Helen Kelly were attending another Pentecostal church in town, but their lives had been spiritually pointless. They weren't even sure that the relationship they had with God was real. When they came to the Potter's House, though, they knew that the "Real Thing" had gotten them. Gary was a businessman but God was drawing him in, to put a call to preach on his life.

The same was true of Sylver and Joan Gaddis. Sylver had pastored for several years, but in the frustration of "people pressures" and organizational infighting, he'd quit, never intending to pastor again. He was a tremendously successful engineer. His skills demanded top dollar, but as he sat in Prescott the old hunger to minister began to flame again. When a door opened to pastor, he took a 75% cut in pay, just so he could preach again.

For Mitchell, the restoration of these men's faith in God and ministry was as important as the building of the church and the releasing of young men. He had fought his own battles with discouragement, and swore that he would not leave others to battle alone.

Prescott found most of its best material in the places that no one else was even looking. Ernie Lister was a case in point. Ernie was a Navajo Indian. Captivated by the traditions of his people, he'd begun to study to be a medicine man at 15. He learned the chants, potions, spells, and Navajo viewpoint of nature and God. In May of 1972 he wandered out to the city park, decked out in beads and moccasins. Ernie had become the Noble Savage. He sought God through chants and rituals only to find himself being more and more bound by alcohol, the curse of his people. He wondered how the teachers who told such glorious tales and

supposedly had learned the secrets of the ages could be living such small and shallow lives. These questions, though they remained unspoken, had grown to haunt him.

It was a beautiful Spring day in the park. In Prescott, winter breaks almost overnight. The snow disappears and trees leap into bloom. Spring comes with all its promise of life. That day Lister confronted another type of life, as Christ was presented to him not as a religion just for whites, but for all men. He had watched too many movies about the proud Indian to ever bow his knee to man, but that afternoon he knelt to repent and ask Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, into his broken heart.

### **Disciples**

The church had made a real impact on the local high school, and out of that came Mike Maston. Mike was only 15 years old, but he was already moving into the drug scene when he got saved. His parents didn't know about his drug use and were enraged that their son would even think of leaving the old family church. Maston's father let it be known that, "Pastor Mitchell ought to be tarred and feathered and run out of town" The next Sunday morning Brother Mitchell used the statement in a sermon, not realizing that Mike's dad was in the audience. Everything worked out for good, though, when at the altar call

Mike's dad came forward asking God to save him just as he'd saved his son. Mike's appearance wasn't the image of the tall dignified man of God. He was short of stature and looked less than fearful, but size and looks mean nothing to God. In him began to move vision. Vision that would one day lead him to be one of the leaders in the fellowship.

Even the guys going to the Prescott church had trouble seeing much hope in some of the new converts. Greg Johnson was working as a carpenter. One of his co-workers was a string bean who thought of little more than guitars and music. More than once when they were supposed to be swinging hammers, Greg would look over and see Bill Coolidge with his eyes closed playing his hammer like a guitar. Greg couldn't take it anymore and went to Mitchell, telling him, "This kid's a hopeless case. There's no way he'll make it." It would have been hard to have missed the truth any farther. Today Bill is one of the most powerful speakers in the fellowship and a good (if rusty) guitar player.

Working with these developing ministers was always lively. It was a little embarrassing to find out what one overzealous group of men had done to a girl in the church. These men had read a book on demon

possession and casting out devils. They were sure that most of the evil sin the world could be cured by a little exorcism. They had been on the prowl for some time looking for a chance to practice their talents. There was one girl in the church who was so ugly these young gospel knights knew it could only be the result of Satan's handiwork. Mitchell was shocked when he found that they had taken this poor girl and tried to cast out a Demon of Ugly. Sadly, she left as ugly at the end of the exorcism as when they started praying.

The excitement of revival brought its own problems. After a missionary spoke about Mexico, Hank Houghton and Greg Johnson came up to Mitchell to report they were leaving immediately. They had absolutely no doubt that God had called them South of the border that night. Mitchell questioned them a little about their call, and finally asked them, "Do either of you speak Spanish?" They had thought of every thing but this, and went away sheepishly but not defeated. Their willingness of spirit would stay with them through the years, and both would eventually have impact in many nations.

### **Discipleship**

The New Testament pattern of discipleship wasn't planned on some organizational flow chart. In Prescott the pattern of discipleship naturally began to evolve out of Mitchell's desire to help. He hadn't read any books on discipleship, mainly because few had been written. He'd read the Bible, though, and he believed that an impartation of God's Spirit could happen. Today discipleship has come to have so many meanings that it's a nearly meaningless phrase. It's a catch word that can mean anything from Jim Jones and domination to a spiritual cover-up to hide dead institutionalism. For Mitchell, "discipleship" came to mean "the sincere desire to help another man find his destiny in God ""

He was sick of the heartlessness of Christianity and sincerely wanted to help young men. Out of that simple desire has come beautiful and productive fruit. Mitchell made it clear to them that their first allegiance was to Jesus. Jesus Christ was the Head of the church, not Wayman Mitchell. Mitchell wasn't saying there didn't need to be a pastor in control. He knew that in the body there was an exercise of authority that brought a growing and maturing to those who submitted to it. The body must function in unity, and on the basis of Kingdom principles. Tasks had to be done, there must be organization for the church to function, but above all the truths of organization and loyalty there had to be Christ, and the desire to serve Him.

The pattern was as simple as the relationships developed in a healthy family. The father brings his young child, step by step to maturity; not to dominate his life, but to release that child little by little into maturity and independence. The father isn't offended that his son is independent, he's proud that his boy has made it, and that he's had a part in it. This was how Jesus developed His relationship with the twelve disciples. At first Jesus was in total control, teaching and leading them. Then they began to find release and expression. Finally He told them that they weren't servants any longer but friends, and they were tied together now in accomplishing the will of the Father.

Mitchell intuitively understood this and tried to help these men. He did one other vital thing. He lived the gospel. This was no secret hidden lifestyle masked in mysticism and cloaked in meaningless words and unexplained decision. Mitchell knew what these young shapable men needed to see and he gave them a simple and understandable guide to follow; himself. He was so dependable it bordered on boring. He never missed a prayer meeting when he was in town. He came to the outreaches and witnessed along side his disciples. Though he was years older than these young converts, he ran them into the ground with his zeal. He didn't just talk commitment; he lived it. He didn't have a TV set, because there wasn't time to waste and the taste of the world only interfered with the voice of God. His pleasure was the gospel. For him, preaching wasn't a hobby that he did between golfing and racquetball, it was his life and love. The church board offered him the typical month's vacation and he laughed at them. He was too busy, and revival was too critical to spend the summer gallivanting around the country for weeks on end. He was truly excited about serving God and these moldable pieces of human clay couldn't help but catch the "disease". None of the "look to Jesus, and don't look to me" theology for him. He pointed them to Christ first, but he knew that they would look to him, and did his best so he wouldn't be embarrassed by what they saw.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Church Planting

Time after time the Prescott church had seen God move in other areas of the state only to watch the converts die from lack of care. Mitchell knew that the missing factor was the church. Mitchell had a love affair with the local church. He knew its beauty and power, and yet found few pastors who would release its potential. He tried to work with existing churches, but they were marching to the beat of a different drummer.

Mitchell had been led step by step towards church planting. He didn't start with that idea, but he didn't flee from it as it became the obvious solution. He had men who he believed could pastor. The organization labeled them unprepared without schooling, but Mitchell saw this as their strength. They were prepared, but it was in the school of the practical. He knew that normal channels wouldn't open doors for these preachers. God would have to open the door.

If none of the other churches seemed to see the opportunities that were around them, that was their problem. He decided to unshackle the men that God had given him, and was only waiting for the right opportunity. Two doors opened simultaneously. Several outreaches had been held with real success in the city Mitchell had started in, Wickenburg, Arizona. Then a call came, also, from the little mesquite covered town of Kearny, Arizona. Located about 50 miles from Tucson, it seemed a ripe fruit ready to pick. Several outreaches had gone well there, and some Charismatic people had been reached who were beginning to harass Mitchell about sending them a pastor.

The group was meeting in a local businessman's living room, and when Mitchell questioned them about their interest, their response made the city seem like a real opportunity.

Mitchell's surprise announcement that they were sending out their first church that Sunday created a wave of excitement. The initial response was overwhelming. Money and pledges of support poured in. Everyone knew that this was the New Testament coming alive.

### Kearny

Pastor Mitchell decided to send Ron Jones and Harold Warner down to Kearny, to check out the land in the Spring of 1973. If it looked good, then Warner would start the first church there. It was a New Testament

picture as they gathered in the jeweler's living room for services. From the start, though, it was rough as this businessman began to show signs that he wanted to be in control.

They had arrived in town with a small but usable gospel tent. A failing evangelist had learned why tent revivals had stopped and made Mitchell a deal he couldn't refuse. Warner and Jones rolled out the canvas on a vacant lot in town, for revival services on the weekend. The local dog club soon showed up asking if they could use the tent during the day. Trained to take advantage of every opening, the men agreed, as long as Ron was the show judge. Poodles and Dachshunds marched passed his critical eye. Finally he gave his verdict and with it obeyed the gospel command to "Preach to all creatures." He preached a short sermon and pulled the altar call. Sadly it was a rough and willfully sinful crowd of animals out that day and none responded, but Jones and Warner had a great time.

The evening services were everything that could be hoped for. Several young drug addicts got saved and they brought their friends. Kids were getting saved in large numbers and Warner, fired up by the response, was preaching like a pro, but the more he preached the more he knew things just weren't going to work out in Kearny. The people who had invited them were offended by Warner's evangelistic zeal and the door was slowly swinging shut.

As Saturday morning dawned, Jones and Warner arrived for their swan song in the local parade. Somehow they had heard about the parade and gotten themselves in. They didn't have anything but each other and a portable p.a., but that was all they needed. The two of them were having a ball walking along behind the bands and clowns blasting the crowd, when upon coming over a hill Warner saw the face of the man who had invited them. His expression made it clear that everything was over. For Jones and Warner proclaiming Jesus to the city was the purpose of the gospel, but for this man it was the last straw.

It was becoming obvious that the best growth was that made up of new converts. Jesus had warned the disciples about "old wine skins" and the need to build on the new. In the New Testament church the record shows that many Jews came in, but it was never a comfortable fit. They wanted to keep the old ways, and they fought the Apostles, while the Gentiles flowed with the moving of the Holy Spirit.

Warner called home to Mitchell and told him the situation, and he said, "No problem, just come on home and we'll do something else."

That Sunday night Harold preached his farewell sermon, only five

days after starting, yet, he preached a message of faith on how they could take the land. Mitchell brought a truck down to meet them the next morning to help carry back the tent. The rain was falling gently as they pulled out into the desert landscape. They followed behind Mitchell in Harold's Dodge Colt only stopping long enough to call Jones's wife from just outside Globe so they would have a hot meal waiting.

They pulled back out on the road driving towards Prescott, when on a sweeping curve the tires lost their grip. Squealing free of their hold on the road, the car went out of control. Warner screamed, "Oh my Jesus," as the car rocketed off a thirty foot embankment. It rolled over and over. Windows exploded, the two were thrown about like match sticks, along with everything loose in the car. The roof came crashing in and both knew that at any minute they would wake to find themselves in eternity.

Jones was yelling, "Oh Jesus," when he heard a ghastly snapping sound that seemed to come from Harold. The car finally rolled to a stop on its wheels fifty feet from the highway. They both sat speechless for a minute trying to figure out what had happened. Jones looked over at Warner, and he looked fine. "Praise the Lord, are you all right?" he asked.

"Yea, I think so," Warner said, wincing. "Thank you Jesus. Just come around and get this thing off my head"

There was *nothing* on his head.

Fear began to choke him as he realized what this meant. Though bruised and beaten, Jones ran around to Harold's side of the car. The pain was too much to get Harold out of the car, and he had to leave him trapped. Scrambling and slipping, he ran up the bank to get help. Car after car refused to stop, and finally he went out into the middle of the road forcing a truck to pull over.

The ambulance arrived quickly, but the report was bad. Not only had Harold's back been broken, but his spinal cord had been irreparably damaged.

The ambulance raced through the night to St. Joseph's Hospital in Phoenix. Harold had the worst response possible: he felt nothing as he and Jones prayed. Though they were both believing for a miracle, that night none came.

### **Battling Darkness**

Some people act like the Devil is just a childhood fantasy. Satan, to them, is just a fairy tale figure like Santa Claus or a mythical figure used to

explain man's own base psychological nature. Pastor Mitchell knew there was a literal Devil who fights the plan and will of God. He knew his mark and had experienced his attacks before. This accident, Mitchell knew, bore the trade marks of the Prince of Darkness.

No work of God comes without a confrontation. Struggle, opposition and sorrow have haunted God's people for centuries in the battle that rages across planet Earth for the souls of men. The Devil was launching a major assault against an arising enemy to his kingdom: the Prescott church.

The news about Harold exploded like a bomb in the church. Out of nowhere, opposition began to arise. Phones rang constantly from the time people learned about the tragedy. Lips flapped. A group was quickly formed that knew Mitchell had missed God completely when he had started to plant churches. "Who is he to do things differently than others?" these people asked. The church needed to be like those around them, and leave their pastor's far-fetched ideas of reaching the lost behind. They defensively claimed that they loved Pastor, but they had to help him back to what God wanted for the church.

Entering that Wednesday night service was like entering a morgue. The body was divided, and even the good hearts were confused. Harold had been the best the church had. He was a gospel machine, studying, preaching, and witnessing. How could God let something like this happen to him?

That Wednesday night service was as critical as any Mitchell ever preached. The whole tremendous revival seemed to be ready to disappear in smoke. Mitchell, though, was a fighter, and God spoke to him of his days as a boxer, and how the best defense was a good offense. If they hit you, you hit them back.

That night he stood and made no excuses. He laid out what God had told him and said, "If you can't take the heat then get out of the kitchen."

"God spoke to me and told me to send Harold to Kearny. Now, he is lying paralyzed in a hospital bed and doctors tell me that he may never walk again," Mitchell said, choking back tears.

"Why is he in the hospital, you ask? Because the Devil would love nothing better than to stop us now. This church has a vision and we will carry it out. And if the Devil takes one man, we'll send out ten in his place."

"The Word of God is clear. 'Go ye into all the world.' That we will do!

If you think I'm wrong, if you think the Word of God is wrong, so be it. There's the door!"

Then Pastor Mitchell called for those who would take Harold and Mona's place. He challenged couples not to let the Devil stop them but to turn defeat into victory. Up to the front came 25 couples who said they would go. It was an emotional experience and many of them were changed for eternity.

Harold's best friend was Greg Johnson. Greg had fought the call tooth and nail, but that night he and his wife Robin came forward, weeping, to say, "Send us." They were in the ministry pastoring within the year. A handful of the disgruntled left murmuring curses of judgment, but the majority of the three hundred members stood firm. This was a church that would fight.

God always has looked for fighters. His men could cut the heads off a few hundred false prophets as well as prophesy. The great leaders in the Bible were also warriors. Moses, Daniel, David, Joshua, Gideon and a host of others knew how to battle. Over and over the Spirit has spoken to His people, "to only be brave and courageous."

The Devil hadn't rolled over when he faced Jesus, and he wouldn't stop because a church began to speak in tongues, either. No, the Bible had to be crammed down his filthy throat. "The Kingdom suffers violence and the violent take it by force ""

Jesus knew this and didn't gather great intellects around Him, but raw street thugs like the "Sons of Thunder." They might be asleep at prayer meetings, but when action was needed they were ready to call fire down or pull out the blade. Jesus had to re-channel their energies into new paths, but they never lost that aggressive cutting edge. These were men who could laugh at death and stand fearless before torture and threats.

Prescott was short on gentle scholars but it was loaded with fighters who would rise to a challenge. Mitchell sent out the first church to Wickenburg, Arizona, and began to lay the strategy for others soon to follow.

Among the key fighters was Harold himself. Many thought that he was through, but he didn't. Laying there in the hospital, no one heard him complain. For him nothing had really changed, because he knew that he was still called. After four months in the hospital he came home and Mitchell gave him no time to worry about his future. He had him preach the next service.

Mitchell promised him a place in Prescott, but Harold wanted nothing to do with that. "No, pastor," Warner said, "God called me to preach, and that's what I'll do "" Only three months after being released from the hospital, Harold opened in an old mission building that had somehow escaped demolition in Tucson. His wheelchair became a common sight to the locales as he went from outreach to outreach, building the church of Jesus against incredibly immense odds.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Earth Fillers

1973 marked the opening of a new avenue of growth for the Prescott church. As Mitchell began to launch churches he broke new ground, both spiritually and physically. There was no pattern to go by and new blueprints had to be drawn up. The Prescott church groped forward, looking for a way. Discovering dead ends and being forced to try different paths was frustrating, but they were steadily moving ahead. The only system for growth Mitchell had seen to that point was the denominational way. The organizations had you send them your men and money, and they took the responsibility to train workers and open new works. Headquarters took young men and put them into their "preacher factory", where they would try to crank out ministers. There, in an institutional framework, vague concepts would be drilled into their heads by solemn and somber professionals.

Mitchell knew that head knowledge was the least important factor in pastoring. Intellect wasn't the requirement. What was needed was determination, loyalty, and heart. Sadly, Bible school actually hindered these things from developing by taking men away from their local church.

Worse yet was what often happened to the men after graduation. By the end of a few years many had lost their burden to preach. For those that still wanted to pastor the worst often still lay ahead. These young and inexperienced men would be cast out into a cold, cruel, religious world to fend for themselves. Usually given the least desirable churches in the organization, they would be devoured by deacon boards made up of professional pastor destroyers. Many a man just disappeared, a casualty of a heartless system.

If a man wanted to open a new work, he found that next to nothing was given him to work with. With no money, help or advice, he'd be forced to smash his way through barriers until he could stand at the top of the mountain and hold on to what was his. Yet, the schools had often bred out of him the very traits that would make that possible.

The whole design no longer existed to help the pastor or local church, but stayed alive by feeding off the church. The pastor didn't receive money, but was to send his money back to the organization. Help wasn't quick to come, but lists of rules and requirements often flooded down. Mitchell was through with that.

The Prescott church didn't have a lot, but what it had would be used to help these young men. The more Mitchell became involved in church planting the less he wanted to organize and control it. God was leading him toward a fellowship of churches; men who worked together because they wanted to, not because they were forced to.

He decided to send the men out with a small but adequate salary along with the rent for the building. Prescott would pay for the opening revivals, movies, advertising, and expenses. The men would then be free to find the will of God for the city they entered. Above all, Mitchell would be there to help.

This wasn't something that he did because he had a lot of money laying around and nothing to spend it on. The church was made up of common people. There were no millionaires to underwrite expenses. In fact the economy in Prescott was one of the worst in the country. Arizona was a non-union state that had a very low wage scale. Many of the families were living on minimum wage because of the lack of any heavy industry in the town. In spite of the difficulties they felt the vision was theirs and were willing to believe God to help them.

God seems to like using the most unlikely places to insure that the glory will be His. He could make a little boy's sack lunch feed thousands and a handful of food fed a widow for years. God gave people a heart to give sacrificially, and somehow the church kept above water. Not only that, the people were blessed.

The Wickenburg church started with a bang. The problem was that the noise scared as many away as it attracted. The pastor cranked up the rock and roll bands that were popular in Phoenix and Prescott, only to discover that not everyone in cowboy country liked rock. The church opened in what had been the Old Texas Bar, and that alone was enough to scare many conservative Wickenburgers away. Where was the stained glass? The steeple? The choir loft? For many people, there couldn't be a church without these religious extras. Wickenburg started with a good little core of 50 but it took 4 long years to get past that number.

Ron Jones was launched into Flagstaff, Arizona, in November of 1973. A denominational church had opened up that had been dead for years. Ron came in ready to break it loose. He did break it loose, but it wasn't the break he expected. Everyone left. The only ones who came seemed to be flakes. It was hard for him to remember that those who first came to Prescott had leaned toward the flaky side, too.

Harold Warner left Prescott for Tucson. He took a crummy little

building in a crummy neighborhood. The walls appeared ready to collapse and the floor looked like a roller coaster. His big decision was whether vinyl or corduroy would be cheaper to use in covering the altar. Not more than 60 people could fit comfortably into that building, but Harold didn't need to worry because that many seldom came for anything.

The first outreach he had was a concert at the Pueblo High School auditorium. He scheduled the gospel rock group Nazareth to come in, and he couldn't have been more excited or had greater faith. He went out inviting people and knew that the 700 seat auditorium would never hold the crowds that would come thronging in. If visions and dreams could build a church, Harold was going to start with a thousand. He even called Brother Mitchell and told him they'd made a mistake by not getting a bigger place. His balloon burst instantly when the night of the concert came and the place was close to empty. As if that wasn't a hard enough lesson to learn, he also discovered that all of those who came forward to pray didn't always stay.

Harold found himself fighting to get just one or two to come regularly to services. Months followed with no one attending faithfully except his wife, Mona. One lady came more than most and brought her mentally retarded son who left puddles behind him on the floor after every service. Finally one, then two, then three began to come, but each one was like pulling teeth.

That summer Gary Kelly would go to Bull Head city looking for work. While there, he opened up his home and began to form a core for a church. Also opening churches would be Peter and Starla Edwards in Cotton Wood and Jack and Pattie Harris in Nogales. None of these would be easy places.

When asked what school they had attended, these young men often replied, "Prescott School of the Practical." Their lack of traditional credentials was hard for many Christians to understand.

When they tried to fall back on the Bible they found that few were interested. People hated the church they'd grown up in, but at the same time they wanted the church to be the same as it always had been. This left pastors in an impossible situation. Breaking the traditional mold would take time to find acceptance. People didn't care that the Apostles weren't graduates of Bible school, and most Christians were not really interested in going back to New Testament standards. This was hard on these young gospel knights. They had thought that the revival they had left guaranteed revival where they went. They found out how wrong that kind of thinking could be. Every city would have to be spiritually pried open by

prayer, action and believing. The devils in their cities seemed to care little that these men came from the Prescott church.

### **The Fight**

It began to be obvious why most churches don't plant workers. It's an impossible task. If looking at immediate results had been what moved Mitchell he would have pulled back or at least re-directed his energies. Church planting isn't a simple method to bring revival. In fact it would seem hard to find a more difficult way to spread the Kingdom. Each church that was sent out represented a major investment by the Prescott church in both finances and its best people, only to see them face terribly difficult times.

A whole new dimension of problems was added to Mitchell's life as these young men began to call back frustrated, rebellious, and ready to quit, but he knew that God had called them. He had never expected it to be easy and slowly but surely doors in these cities began to be pried open.

Even today, after hundreds of churches have been started, each new church still seems as impossible a task to accomplish as it was at the beginning. Each church struggles for life like a dying man labors for breath, and some even die. This very battle for life is where strength comes from. It is like the butterfly as it attempts to break free of the confines of the cocoon. A desperate struggle takes place. Throwing itself back and forth, it fights to drag its enlarged body free. Resting from exhaustion, its inner drive compels it to fight again. Without this battle the butterfly would never have the strength to fly. Just like this, wisdom begins to come to the struggling minister and head knowledge begins to be transferred to heart knowledge out of the battles.

The building of the Kingdom has always been a monumental task. In the New Testament, every church Paul started appeared, at first glance, to be a failure. Anyone with any sense at all would have quit and returned to Jerusalem. Paul never wasted time evaluating the cost. He was called to a task, and his life is the record of tremendous exertion for apparently small benefits. Prison terms lead to only a handful of converts here and great sacrifices birthed a small core there. Each new church only seemed to bring new problems, yet Paul pressed on and history shows that the end result was victory.

### **Small Beginnings**

When other pastors were told about these first attempts at planting churches their response was uniform. "That's nice," they said, "but it's too slow to win the world." Christianity is always looking for the knock-out punch; the one new tool to win the world without any effort or sacrifice. Everyone would like to believe that TV will do it, or maybe we can send an evangelist out to do it for us. Mitchell knew that only the New Testament church restored would fulfill the task. With no books, TV, radio or transportation much better than their own feet, the early church shook the world. The same method would work in the Twentieth Century, but work and sacrifice were needed.

Mitchell determined that the Prescott Church would be that restored New Testament church. They would not send money to someone else to do the job they could do themselves. Whether it would shake the world or even Arizona depended on God. They started the process by reaching out.

God works in the small. Only God could take an old man like Abraham and tell him that his heritage would outnumber the stars. Only God could make a ragtag bunch of slaves from Egypt take the greatest piece of real estate on planet Earth. David, a shepherd, couldn't defeat a giant. Twelve men couldn't win the world. A nation captive for seventy years couldn't come back, but God says, "For who hath despised the day of small things? .... Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts . ... and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

Mitchell wasn't discouraged by the small struggling start. He had learned to appreciate small victories. Too many Christians read of past revivals only to despise what God is doing today. Mitchell had been raised in an organization that wallowed in its illustrious past but left little room for God to move in the present. Many a young man would come to regret asking when they would see great things happen. Mitchell would respond, "They'll happen when you make them happen" For him, today was great enough. These small churches were great. God would have to accelerate growth, and Mitchell would do what he could do to help.

Growth comes not out of any one church exploding in revival but in an enlarging base of many smaller churches pressing out into new areas and the many being put together to make an explosive multiplying force of revival. It's as true today as it was 2,000 years ago that Jesus builds His church.

## **Servant Not A King**

If Mitchell had just been looking for something to make him famous, he'd have quit right after starting. Church planting only seemed to bring problems. It disrupted his own church, did little to make him friends in the organization, and on top of this these young men tended to blame him for their problems and looked to him to bail them out of their mistakes. It seemed like a losing proposition, but he wanted to help, and he did.

Each man went out expecting to see an explosive start, only to face the difficulties of reality. It shook some of them to their very cores. Many of these men had never really done anything hard in their lives. They were professional quitters and blame passers who would have run like rabbits if given half a chance. Mitchell found himself not only counseling his church but encouraging these men to trust God and stick it out. The problems they faced often caused every bad habit or problem in their life to surface. Rebellion that had been held in check in Prescott often flared away from home. Marriages started to come unglued from the pressures. If this wasn't bad enough, Mitchell found that several of the young men he was helping were complaining back through the Prescott church grapevine that he didn't give them enough money, and that he did everything wrong.

It took the patience of Job to keep putting them out, but the Spirit of God kept opening doors. Slowly, as these men faced themselves and began to turn to God, real ministry began to arise, and the churches slowly moved forward.

The church in Cottonwood, Arizona had to be closed down after the couple there lost their bearings and began to show signs that they wouldn't last. Mitchell wasn't going to leave them to die, and in spite of the problems it caused, he brought them home to be re-equipped and sent out again later. The determining factor, for Mitchell, wasn't whether the churches made him look good, but whether it was helping the young men to find their place in the Kingdom. That is what discipleship is, and he was called to disciple. He never thought of quitting and only looked for other ways to help.

## **Conference**

At about this time Johnny Metzler came to Prescott with an idea for a deliverance convention. He'd bounced around some ideas with other evangelists, and now he laid it out for his old friend Mitchell. Most Pentecostal pastors were leery of this kind of thing, but not Mitchell. He

loved the operation of the Spirit and got excited about the concept.

A conference was set up for August of 1974. Wes Baker and Al Fury were scheduled to preach. At that time five churches had been started, in Wickenburg, Flagstaff, Tucson, Bull Head City, and Nogales, Arizona. Plans were laid to bring each man back and allow them to bring some of their people with them at the Prescott church's expense.

The evening services were packed out, but much of the real work was done during the day. Only a handful came to those first morning services, but the impact would be felt for years. The people who had been brought in had been laboring with seemingly no impact in their cities. It was hard to catch a vision of reaching their area, let alone the world. As they came together with other churches involved in the same struggle, they saw for the first time what their pastors had been talking about. They went home copying the praise and prayer, filled with a new zeal.

In the last service the pastors were called forward and prayed for. Wes Baker prophesied on each of the young men, and those words of encouragement did much to give them perspective for the future battles.

The conference had been so beneficial that Pastor Mitchell decided to have one every six months. In a revival that summer, Al Fury had prophesied that the Prescott church would become a training center for pastors who would come from around the world to be inspired and sent back to their own nations. At the time it seemed to be only the rantings of a mad man, but out of the small beginnings of that first conference the ground work was laid that over the years would bring the fulfillment of that prophecy.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### Mexico

Mitchell had felt drawn towards Nogales, Arizona, for some time. It was a city that sat on the edge of the untapped harvest field of Mexico. He was only waiting for a man to feel a similar burden. Jack Harris rose to the challenge.

Harris left for Nogales with high expectations. It would prove to be one of the greatest doors to open to the fellowship, but one of the most costly, personally, for Harris.

Driving into Nogales is like driving into another world. The K Mart parking lot looks like a junkyard, with trash blowing everywhere. Not because the city doesn't care how it looks, but because hundreds of Mexicans come across the border to buy clothes and appliances that they have to unpack before returning home to avoid the duty.

From the small hills where the city stands, you can look across the fence into a world that at first contact isn't inviting; a world of need and hunger. Even on the American side Spanish is spoken more often than English. The air of the city is often filled with a haze, not from factories but the small fires used to heat and cook with across the border. Harris never forgot the first evening he looked up to see giant birds flying in to land in the huge Eucalyptus trees in town. He checked up on them and was shocked to discover they were giant buzzards. For him the beauty of the city would always be marred by the memory of that revelation. It was like the Devil laughing at him every time he saw them fly into town.

Driving across the border is always a shock. Another spiritual force rules. Crucifixes are everywhere, hanging on buildings, from car mirrors and around necks, but they have no meaning, even for the people that wear them. The streets are crowded, the smells assault the nose, and in a moment the caucasian goes from a majority to a minority. A minority that the police don't always protect and that's catered to for its money, but not always respected or even liked. Yet, with all the problems, Harris was being drawn here by Providence.

### Cruz

Before Jack came to Nogales, events had begun to pull the Prescott church to send a man here. One Saturday night at the end of a music scene in Prescott a young man came to the altar who left everyone bewildered.

Cruz Guerrero was obviously under real conviction, but he couldn't speak any English. Finally one of the girls who had taken High School Spanish was able to pray Cruz Guerrero through to salvation.

He was a wetback who had done like millions of others and left Mexico to find a new future. In Mexico his future was bleak. Jobs were impossible to find, and worse yet Cruz had a police record for stealing cattle.

Cruz tried to fit into the Prescott church. Terry had prayed with him, and she took the job of translating Mitchell's sermons for him. Cruz stayed around for three months, but finally the truth came out; he didn't understand a thing that Terry was translating. In frustration he decided to leave.

Terry went to Brother Mitchell and told him what Cruz was about to do. She explained that he was really saved and felt a call to go back to Mexico to preach, but he felt like he was wasting his time in Prescott. Mitchell sent Terry back to Cruz with a message, "Stay around. I'm going to send a man to Nogales and Cruz can go with him." This small act of confidence changed his life. No one else had ever had any hope for him.

In order to stay in Nogales and help Jack, Cruz had to get papers to be in the States legally. Jack took him across the border to Nogales, Mexico to try and get papers. Cruz explained how he needed a special letter to live in Nogales, but hadn't said anything about how he planned on getting it. The fact was that Cruz had never lived in the city and had to find someone who would lie for him.

Jack didn't speak a word of Spanish, and Cruz didn't speak any English. They spent the day inventing a new sign language. The situation was funny, but it was also a beautiful testimony of God's ability to turn anything to good. Jack found himself sitting out in the car while Cruz was up at a Baptist church asking for the letter. Time was passing while Bill Walworth was talking to Cruz, and Jack got impatient and went out to see what was taking so long. He was surprised to find that Bill spoke English.

Bill asked Jack, "Are you a Christian?"

"I'm his pastor," said Harris.

"Well, neither of you look like Christians," Walworth stated, "and furthermore, this guy is trying to bribe me so that he can get a pass-port."

It was a joke. Jack tried to straighten things out, but soon realized that Cruz wasn't going to be able to get back across the border. He had to go back to Prescott, so he left Cruz in a hotel with enough money to last a

week.

Just before Cruz left Walworth he told him, "If you don't give me the letter I'll have to stay here. It will be your fault." With that, he left his address. Walworth began to get convicted during the next week, and took Cruz to his own home.

Walworth was the son of Baptist missionaries who were over several churches in Mexico. He wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life. He'd gone to Baylor University, but had run into trouble when it got out that he spoke in tongues. Cruz didn't know a lot, but he did know that he and Bill needed to do like they did in Prescott and get out on the streets and witness. Bill got excited, and his parents soon kicked them out of the house for being too radical. Jack returned to Nogales to warn Cruz to stay away from "that Baptist" only to find that his congregation had doubled and he now had an interpreter.

### **A Church**

Now all they needed was a building. When Jack had come to Nogales he thought he had a church tied down. The Prescott congregation had purchased a building from another group, but they had slipped in a clause allowing them to stay in their old building until the new one was finished. When Jack arrived to start pastoring he found that the other church had no intention of leaving, and legally there was nothing that could be done about it. Harris had Bible studies in his home, but it wasn't the same as pastoring.

He kept feeling drawn towards the Mexican side of the border, and finally, in desperation, he got permission from Mitchell to get a building in Mexico. At the time, conditions in Mexico were turning Nogales into a boom town. Border businesses seemed to be the answer to Americans' need for cheap labor, and the jobs were drawing people by the thousands. Nogales was a city that was cooking day and night. Harris got a small building and started his first pastorate in a land where he couldn't speak a word of the language, but God had a plan.

It didn't take long to fill the little storefront they had rented. Sunday nights were always exciting. If things got slow the pastor could always cast devils out of one man who manifested every Sunday night.

It was a church that would never do things in a small way. As the number of converts grew, Jack felt that it was time for a baptismal service. They didn't have a tank, but good old "Yankee ingenuity" came to the

rescue. They bought a 3 foot tall steel and plastic swimming pool from K Mart. The men set it up in that small building and it stretched from wall to wall. Unfortunately, in their zeal they had neglected to read the instructions while setting it up.

Everything was going along fine until one sister that weighed 220 pounds was put under water. As they dunked her, the rip tide hit the sides and the whole pool instantly disintegrated. The baptizers looked up just in time to see the horror register on everyone's faces in that packed building. A three foot wall of water went roaring off the platform to perform the first mass baptism in the history of the fellowship. Ladies screamed and leaped up on chairs. The water swept Bibles and everything else towards the back door. Passers by were shocked to see the door come crashing open as water and people were swept out into the street. Never saying quit, they took the few who still had dry spots on them and had them lay down while they sloshed them in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Ghost.

### **Indigenous**

Mitchell believed in the indigenous church. He felt that every church needed to be able to support itself. If a church was to have dignity it couldn't be supported from outside forever. He was more than willing to help a church get started, but eventually it must stand on its own.

This put Harris in a difficult situation. As he drove around Nogales, Sonora, the poverty screamed at him. Families were crammed into one room, with no heat or water. How could he ask these people to give? He wanted to take all the money he had and give it to them. As he drove, though, the Lord spoke to him. "The only way this nation can be blessed is if they learn to give." The scripture came to him, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." God reminded him that this prophecy applied to a nation and only the liberality of God's people could bless Mexico. Harris began to preach on money.

To the Nogales church this was shocking. They had hoped that he had come with some kind of welfare program, but instead, he was asking them to give. Cruz had married Terry, the girl who had been his translator in Prescott. She was a great help at this time. Even though she and Cruz were living on only \$10 a week, she had learned the value of giving during

her three years in Prescott. She helped to share it with others. At first when Jack preached on money it would cause the service to tighten up horribly, but he kept pressing it and the church broke through into liberality.

Soon, a miracle began to happen. People began to get good jobs and the church began to pay its own way. The foundation was laid that would enable the Nogales church not only to send out churches all over Mexico, but to send them into the world. Not with money from others, but from its own churches.

A militant spirit of evangelism is another secret to the power of the churches in Mexico. This wasn't easy to establish. The fact is that the whole church in Mexico is illegal. To open a church you have to buy property, deed it to the government and then hold your services there and nowhere else. Harris broke all the rules.

They took the portable PA and went out on the streets preaching. When riding the buses they often stopped just long enough in the front to give their testimony. The Federales threatened, but there was no stopping them. Before long, the pimps were finding their business affected as the prostitutes and the customers began to get saved.

It is obvious from the experience in Mexico that the gospel will work anywhere if it is given a chance. The secret is to trust the Bible and follow its pattern and not man's.

That doesn't mean that there were no problems. After a short time the church on the American side opened up for Harris. He put Cruz in charge South of the border and helped as much as he could. It was only a few months until Harris got inspired to send Cruz down to Obregon to start a second church. It seemed to follow Paul's pattern but it was a decision that would be regretted. Cruz didn't have the experience to build a work. Out of this and some similar experiences in the States, it was decided that no man would be sent out who hadn't been saved for at least three years.

The fellowship saw that there were three things that couldn't be skipped. One of these was time. These men weren't prepared for the battle, and all that happened is they set in a city dying. If it took three years for Jesus to prepare the disciples, it was decided that the fellowship would wait at least three years to send out workers after they were saved.

In addition, there was the need of involvement. A man had to have an opportunity to stretch his wings. They couldn't just start with a background of no practical experience and be successful. Jesus started the twelve with small tasks and enlarged on that foundation.

A final requirement was atmosphere. Truth isn't so much taught as caught. When a man is in revival there is an impartation of that same spirit, and this isn't something that can be picked up in a book or from just a few weeks of contact.

### **Crusades**

Crowds came out in Mexico to see almost anything. People milled around with no money and nowhere to go. It was decided to try a crusade to impact Nogales. Jack Harris rented the bull ring for several nights. Argemero Feguerro, an evangelist who had worked with Morris Cerullo in South America, was invited to be the speaker. He spoke Spanish and had an outstanding miracle ministry. The church plastered the city with posters and rented cars with P.A.'s built on top to announce the crusade meetings.

The crusades results were beyond the dreams of those that planned it. Several thousand attended each night and when the altar call was given the people didn't take the time to go through the doorways; they just streamed over the eight foot restraining wall to fill the stadium floor. After praying for them to get saved, Argemero would ask them to lay their hands on whatever part of their body was sick and believe God to heal it. Hundreds streamed forward to testify of miracles that had happened.

It was obvious that a tremendous impact was being made and Jack begged Argemero to stay longer. Argemero had a better idea. The next night he announced that he was leaving, but that everyone was to come and bring the lame, the blind and the deaf because evangelist Jack Harris would be there preaching. Jack was both thrilled and terrified as Argemero told him he could do the same thing that he did.

The next night Jack stood in that stadium of people, scared to death that nothing would happen when he prayed. It was encouraging to see the people stream forward to get saved, but would they be healed? He was almost afraid to ask for testimonies and then was humbled as person after person stood to tell of God's miraculous work in their life.

He told Mitchell that he wanted to travel around Mexico preaching crusades, but Mitchell said, "No" He wasn't going to just scatter the seed. He knew that the key was the church and there was no reason to have a crusade until a church was started. Jack went back to the hard task of pastoring, but every few months another crusade would be held. First in Nogales, then in Obregon, finally growing to a point where he would often be found traveling around the world preaching and seeing people healed in addition to his many pastoral responsibilities.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### Flagstaff

Ron Jones found himself launched out of Prescott to the beautiful mountain town of Flagstaff, Arizona. It was a university town setting in the shadows of the San Francisco peaks. An old Foursquare Church there had been offered to Mitchell. It had been sitting petrified in religion for years with a handful of people when Jones stepped in.

He had come to town less than excited. He wasn't sure this was the place God wanted him to be, and this nagging doubt would torment him over and over during the next year and a half. It led to a principle in church planting: the fellowship never forces a man to go somewhere he hasn't chosen to be.

Ron arrived in town to learn that the founder of the city had vowed that no Pentecostal church would ever be in Flagstaff. It didn't add to his sense of well being when everyone told him how difficult the city was. When Ron and Marie arrived, one lady met them at the door of the church to tell him that it was cursed and God had written "Ichabod" over the door. Jones called Mitchell to tell him the horrible news.

Mitchell wasn't fazed. He told Jones to go back and tell her that when he came to town, revival came to town. Jones hoped and prayed that Mitchell was right.

He opened up with great hopes, but from the beginning it was a battle. The people who were in the church gave him no support. In fact, within a month, almost all had deserted ship. He cranked up some movies and people came out by the hundreds. The little building was crammed to the windows. Afterwards, people came up excited about what he was doing. He learned that two hundred people around town had been praying for a church just like his. Sadly, though, not one of them ever showed up for a regular service. They wanted someone to reach the lost, they just didn't want that "someone" to include them.

Flagstaff is a picturesque winter haven, and the chapel was a beautiful little white clapboard building that could grace the front of a post-card. Snow fell often at that 7,000 foot elevation and during the winter it was a rare day that a chill wind didn't blow. Jones began to discover that cold winds were blowing in the spiritual regions as well.

It only took him two months to whittle the crowd down to nothing. The only ones who stayed were most of the weirdos in the city. Yet there

was a militancy to his message, and a feeling of purpose as he pressed forward. He often declared that "If no one comes I'll preach to the chairs." And at times it looked as if he might have had to. Converts were hard to come by, so when a couple of young men stopped in one Sunday morning Jones wasn't letting them out. When the altar call was over Joe Weidinger looked up to see Jones pointing his finger at him and telling him to come up front. Joe slipped out of the chairs and went to the front to get gloriously saved. From that moment he knew he was called to preach, so he dropped out of college to be ready to pastor. Several years later his chance would come.

A small core began to form. Becky Robinson came up from Prescott to go to college and was drafted to be the piano player. Judy Gardner had also come to Flagstaff for college. Having been popular (but lost), she fell in love with the Joneses and the praise. She was excited about serving God and ready to be shaped. Marie mentioned to her that she might want to wear a dress rather than pants so Judy wore one of the only dresses she had. It was the era of the mini skirt, so Judy's was right in style. Unfortunately hers only seemed to reach a little below her naval. Marie Jones decided then and there that slacks were just as good as dresses.

## **Barriers**

After the first handful came in, it became impossible to get anyone else to stay. They came out in droves to see the free movies, but weren't interested in more than entertainment. This was the pattern in most of those early works. A handful would respond, then the environment became unproductive until the young men enlarged their faith and capacity to help people. The problem was that each pastor only told the other pastors about the victories. Each was convinced that he was the only one failing. This drove the men to greater and greater levels of frustration as they tried to force revival.

People got saved, but it seemed impossible to keep them. In each beginning church, the Devil loved to send in great quantities of nuts and people giving empty promises. It wore down the young pastors. Tied to this were the dependable assaults of the religious community. In Flagstaff, Jones was believing for great things when a group of twelve young Christians asked to speak to him. These were men who were leading Charismatic Bible studies in town, and said they wanted to see God move. He was excited until they began laying out their rap about unity. They didn't want to unite with him; they (as all the unity crowd seem to) wanted him to unite with them. When he showed a lack of interest in "their thing",

they fired off their attack on everything Jones was doing. The praise was wrong, the evangelism too aggressive, the people too immature. Jones was stunned, then enraged.

For weeks he came to church to preach, only to have the anger rise once again to the surface. He would tell the few faithful, "I was going to preach a blessing sermon, but now, I'm going to chop wood." He'd then proceed to rail on every devil in Flagstaff. The problem was they were all going to other churches. Jones "chopped" enough wood in these first few months to deforest Siberia.

I had gotten saved at the same time as Weidinger. We were saved only weeks when Jones decided it was time for us to start reaching out. Prescott had released men and Jones was going to release us. He scheduled in '*Thief in the Night*' and we set up places to show it in Winslow and on the college campus in Flagstaff. The night before the movie outreach to Winslow I found out that Jones wasn't going to be there and that I was supposed to run the show.

Fear gripped my heart. Joe and I had had several bad experiences in that city. Joe had been raised there, but recently we had been thrown out of the redneck community for being hippies and trouble makers. Now, here we were, just a few weeks later, coming back to do a gospel presentation. Somehow I doubted there would be a loving and open response.

In hope of getting Divine Guidance, I decided to play Bible Roulette. A friend seemed to be able to just flip open his Bible and get a word from Heaven, so I closed my eyes and let the Bible flop open, my finger blindly searching the page looking for the place that God would use to bring me peace. I opened my eyes to read Joshua 7:25, "And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned him with fire .. ." It was immediately obvious to me that Bible Roulette was an unscriptural method of finding guidance.

The night of the movie we loaded up an old bus the church had. We were a strange army, two of which were spiritual crazies Jones had specifically warned us about not letting them do anything. None of us had been saved long. There were four Navajo girls from the high school going along and a handful of others. Jones' last words were spoken with great urgency, "Whatever you do, don't let anyone get ahold of the mike."

I wasn't sure what would happen if they did, but I was prepared to bean anyone that showed an inclination to get too close.

Over seventy five came out to the Winslow High School to see the

movie. At the midpoint, Weidinger stood to give his testimony. As he began to nervously relate his sordid past of drugs and booze, it was obvious that his words were having an impact on the audience. Only later did we realize that his mother and several of his relatives were there. For the first time they were learning that little Joey hadn't been as pure as they had imagined.

At the end of the movie, I stood to give the altar call. I'd only been saved a few weeks myself, and it dawned on me I had no idea of how to pray a sinner's prayer. Quickly, I grabbed a tract and copied the prayer off the back onto my palm, only to have it just as quickly disappear as a result of my overactive sweat glands. The moment of truth came too quickly. The film was over. Walking quickly to the mike, I decided to copy my pastor's smooth, refined delivery. At the beginning of every altar call he would take the mike and say, "With the piano playing and Christians praying, I'd like to ask, who would like to get saved." I started out alright. "With every head bowed" rolled off of my lips. Then, confidently, I added, "Now, with the piano praying and Christians playing .. " It was a miracle the place didn't erupt with laughter. Yet, God was there and in spite of the stumblings, several raised their hands and came forward, including Joe's mother. It was an exciting time, yet it did nothing to build the Flagstaff church.

Outreaches that year led to over 800 people getting saved, but the church couldn't seem to stay over 35. The attendance would rise only to fall again. It was like a wild roller coaster ride that always ended back where we began, with just a handful of people.

In those early days the men themselves had little idea of what lay ahead. When they first went out, they felt that they were the answer to the dead lifeless churches that filled America. But as they began to face difficulties, doubts about what they were involved in began to rise. It looked like there were several other things happening in Christianity at the time that were a better idea than what Prescott was involved in. This led to problems with these early pastors. They often violated what Prescott had been founded on only to reap the consequences later.

Jones knew there had to be a way to bring revival to Flagstaff. The great thing in the old days of Pentecost had been gospel tents. Prescott had a tent, so Jones knew if he set it up near the college, people would surely flow in. He got one of the wickedest and most powerful men in the city to donate a piece of land across from the college to put the tent up on. This shocked the city council so much that they approved a tent meeting for the first time in the city's history. Everything seemed to be coming into

line for a great time.

The only problem with the whole scheme was that the days of the tent revival's popularity were over. Very few people came. In addition to all the other difficulties, it rained every day, soaking the sawdust on the floor and giving half the congregation colds from night after night of wet feet.

The damp did add one spark of life to the meeting. A couple of the young men had wired the tent. Knowing nothing about electricity, they had done a less than adequate job of grounding the system. Things worked fine as long as the preacher stayed on the platform, but if he stepped off — beware!

This was discovered one evening when Joe Weidinger was taking a turn at preaching to the small crowd. He was plugging away at a pretty good pace until he stepped down onto the wet saw dust. All of a sudden, Joe came alive! He was leaping and jumping as he preached like the wildest of old time evangelists. It was only later that we learned his energy wasn't divine but part of the Public Service Company. He was being electrocuted from the wet ground.

Pastor Jones found an accidental benefit of the wiring the next night. The preaching was over and a woman had come to the front to be prayed for. As He reached out to lay hands on her, a waiting bolt of electricity arced across the void and zapped her. She let out a scream, crying, "I felt it, I felt it." It set the place afire. She later came to Ron and told him, "I've been prayed for by many men, but I've never felt the power like that."

Jones felt it was better left without explanation.

The only tangible result of the meeting for Ron was that some people left the church. He was about to go crazy. He wanted to leave and go out as an evangelist again, anything but fight it out in this difficult situation.

Jones wasn't alone.

## **Tucson**

Harold Warner was clawing his way forward in Tucson. It was a real battle to break through the religious lethargy of the community. Just finding something to attract people was a battle. He brought in almost anything he could find. Music groups played that were squirrely in their music as well as their doctrine. Some revivals would have been comical if he hadn't been so dependent on them. Finally, a core started coming together. It was then that he decided to try an "illustrated offering".

Malachi 3:10 speaks of robbing God and Jack Harris had gotten inspired after reading it. He wanted to bring the thought of this scripture home powerfully to the few faithful coming to church. Most hadn't gotten the idea of tithing down just by Jack's preaching, so he thought that maybe a dramatic portrayal would convict them to tithe.

He asked a young man in the church to stage a robbery. It was hysterical. The guy wasn't the type. He couldn't find a stocking so he bought a pair of pantyhose. He pulled them over his head and came prancing into the service with the legs trailing behind like rabbit ears.

As he bobbed and weaved into the building with a squirt gun, the crowd went wild. Harris, trying to hold back tears of laughter, still made his point.

Harold liked the idea. He got a young man to wait outside the building until the evening offering was being taken. He had a stocking pulled over his head and a gun in his hand. On cue, he threw the door open and pointed the gun at the crowd.

Everything was supposedly arranged. The thief was to steal the morning offering and then Harold would use the people's shock to bring home the point that if they weren't tithing they were as big a thief as this man.

There were only a couple of problems. First, he had picked an ex-thief. When he threw open the door, terror gripped everyone. Second, he had forgotten to tell his ushers. When the villain told them to stay put — the ushers didn't. They jumped the thief and proceeded to drag him out to the parking lot. Ignoring his muffled cries, they began to work him over.

Harold tried to bring order back inside and wheel to the back and save the poor actor's life while there was something left of him to save. He came back to give an embarrassed explanation and watch the service barely limp along to a conclusion.

He became much more cautious about the things he did.

## **Nogales**

Jack Harris had left the explosive revival in Prescott to come to a border town that seemed to have the hardest people in the world. He had seen miracles happen in the bullring, but now in his own church he didn't even seem able to get anyone filled with the Holy Ghost.

In frustration, he called Pastor Mitchell and told him that he wanted

to quit.

He expected a different response than he got. Mitchell laughed at him. Then he began to share a sermon he'd recently preached. In it he spoke of how Isaac was a man with God's promise on his life to take the land. More than this, his father had seemingly paved the way for Isaac, but when the day came for Isaac to call the shots he found every promise contended against.

He was told that the land was his, but when he went to claim title deed through the claiming of the wells of his father, Abimelech fought him. Isaac found every well clogged up. He had to re-dig. Pastor Mitchell then applied this to Jack. Sure they had the promise of revival, but the Devil wasn't about to just roll over and play dead. Each man would have to re-dig the wells of his spiritual father. They would have to contend and prove that what Prescott did would work for them. Jack saw hope, and started once again to work the barren soil of Nogales.

### **Near Defeat**

These battles were beginning to wear on Mitchell. He hadn't lost any hope in what God could do. He knew that the church had tied onto something powerful, but he wondered if he was the man to bring God's plan into fruition.

The men all seemed to be struggling along, and they faithfully cast most of the blame for this at Mitchell's feet. Several men were starting to show a blossoming ability and it was agonizing to try and find the right directions for their lives. He didn't have any simple answers for them.

Then, in August of 1974, the Devil struck hard. That night Mitchell had preached a scorcher of a sermon on sin and he had hammered especially hard against homosexuality. While he was ministering, he could feel real opposition in the service. It turned out this wasn't a fantasy.

He was awakened early that Monday morning to find his church in flames. Someone had stayed hidden in the church until everyone left. Breaking into the office, he took the door and broke it into kindling. The arsonist built the fire in a room with no windows to keep it from being discovered, then turned on the air conditioning so the smoke and flames would be sucked into the duct work of the building. The only thing that saved the church was that the building had fuses built in, to shut down the ducts at a certain temperature. A neighbor finally saw the fire and called the fire department.

Over \$55,000 worth of damage was done but the building itself was saved, though it had been within ten minutes of being destroyed. The next few months were some of the most difficult in Mitchell's not so easy life. Peter and Starla Edwards had to be brought back to the church after being sent to Cottonwood. Some still thought that Harold Warner's accident had been some kind of divine judgment, and were upset at sending these young, inexperienced couples out.

Tied to this, a battle raged in the church with some disgruntled folks who felt they weren't given the voice and power that they deserved. Mitchell had angered some who were used to doing their own thing. They liked to preach mini-sermons at the end of the pastor's message by calling it prophecy. They couldn't believe it when Mitchell put a lid on them.

Others were upset because the costs of church planting put pressure on them to give. The church was strapped for finances and yet it didn't seem to be having much impact. People were openly doubting the idea of church planting, and a real rebellion was being orchestrated by a major figure in the church. As if all this wasn't enough, one of the evangelists who Mitchell had used was calling and writing letters undermining him as a pastor and trying to win the loyalties of the people over to himself.

An honest person couldn't escape the gnawing feeling that some of the problems were because of him. Pastor Mitchell had never seen himself as a great administrator, and knew that he lacked leadership skills.

It seemed like he had taken the church as far as he could. Maybe God should bring in someone with more experience who could do a better job, someone who had background in dealing with a large church and could cause the full impact of what God was doing to be released. Mitchell knew that God would bless his life, though, and was willing to go and start over again. He contacted Wes Baker. Wes was a tremendous evangelist and was pastoring a leading church in the Foursquare denomination at the time. He seemed like the perfect man to take over the Prescott church.

Mitchell had a real burden for cross cultural evangelism. He was tired of the old prejudices that made churches into little havens of bigotry. Nogales, Arizona, had always weighed heavy on his heart.

Here was an open door to reach down into Mexico.

This wasn't just a passing fancy. A plan began to be put into practice over the next several months. Mitchell started the wheels turning to allow him to leave Prescott and go to Nogales. Wes began to make the arrangements needed to leave Los Angeles and come take over as pastor of the Potter's House.

It was all set to come to pass, when Wes called Mitchell and told him that he felt the whole thing was a mistake. Wayman was stuck with the responsibility and kept plodding forward doing the best he could. In Psalms, David wondered whether the promise could ever survive the attacks. Moses knew what it was to have his leadership questioned and hard choices placed before him. What must the persecution of the early church have done to the minds of some of those early leaders? Yet, the power of the gospel isn't in making all the right decisions, but it's being where God wants his men to be. God can take the weak choices of men when they are mixed with faith and accomplish great things.

Later, Mitchell was able to see that leaving would have been a tragic mistake, and thanked God that Heaven can intervene to keep us on track. Yet, at the time there was an awesome assault on his mind.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Providence

Every major event in the Bible was predicted well before it ever came to pass. Though man has a part in the work of God, the final outcome is because God has determined that His promises will be fulfilled.

It wasn't the brilliance of the twelve disciples that built the early church. They were good but simple men who, left to themselves, would have made little impact on Galilee, let alone the world. It was impossible for them to understand the full plan that God had for them. Peter was called a devil by Christ Himself for his lack of insight. Even after the resurrection and birth of the church, Paul had to rebuke Peter for falling into the trap of religion.

Only divine intervention kept the church moving forward. Visions of sheep and pigs, supernatural outpourings of the Spirit, divinely inspired persecution, and angelic visitations, all played a critical part.

Hundreds of years before Moses came on the scene, God had revealed the date the people would be freed. Paul did great things, yet it wasn't a surprise. A prophet, at his conversion, had marked him as a chosen vessel. The prophets had it drilled into their heads that God had picked them way before they picked God.

Many of those who have done a work for God have found comfort in this truth. John Wesley commonly referred to himself as, "a brand pulled from the fire" As a child he should have burned to death in the inferno that engulfed his parent's home, but he was rescued. He knew that God had preserved him for a task, and confidently trusted God to help him do His will. He understood that the great revival he was given credit for was actually a work of God, not man.

Brother Mitchell knew that most of the impact of revival he experienced was in spite of him, not because of. His role was critical, but God's was essential. Several times he would have taken a wrong turn or made what could have been a fatal error only to have God move in to change his direction at the critical time. This built in him a tremendous confidence in the promises of God.

As a young, barely saved Christian he had received the promise that his life would count. He wasn't even looking to be used when God filled him with the Holy Ghost, but laying there with waves of the Spirit moving through him, he knew that he'd been separated to a task. The vision he

received of his preaching in Angeles Temple only made this more of a reality.

At critical times, God had spoken to his heart and reaffirmed His promise. In Canada, under the assault of doubt and pressures, God had spoken to him in prayer through Isaiah 54:17, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me" He might face opposition from every direction, but again and again the words came alive to let him know that God was fighting for him, and that he was promised continuing revival.

In July, 1967, God used Dick Mills to speak through Isaiah 58:11, "And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" This was great comfort in the battle. Reading farther in that chapter, vs. 12 exploded in his heart, "And they that be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in." At the time this made no sense to him, but he marked it down and found real comfort in it.

Mitchell looked back from Prescott on a history of taking churches that had been destroyed and seeing God use him to rebuild and restore. Three of the churches he'd taken had been devastated by moral problems, and every church was on the verge of disappearing into obscurity and spiritual death. As he began to plant churches, those words which had been spoken years before were beginning to become clear. He saw the fulfillment of these promises in what was happening in Prescott, but he felt that God had something larger in store than what had happened up to that point. The whole church world was stumbling forward in the dark. Most churches seemed to be stymied and bogged down in stifling structures and concepts generated in the world. The very denomination he was a part of had lost the vibrant touch of life that once marked it. He felt that, somehow, God would allow Prescott to be a part in restoration.

Another anchoring word to his vision was Isaiah 54:13, "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children." At the time that these words were spoken he thought they applied to his own five children, and in a way, they did, as all of them grew up to serve God. But over time, it became clear that God had meant this to apply to his spiritual children. These young pastors battled with their calling, but God had promised that He would teach them, and He did.

Mitchell was aware of all the techniques in Christianity for motivating people. He had tried to build churches with programs and plans, and had followed after each new concept that had swept through the church when he was a beginning, struggling pastor. He knew that Prescott was a move of God and that more was involved than just a new spiritual gimmick. He knew that structure and tools were important, but the only explanation for what was taking place around him was that it was due to the Spirit of God.

He could see clearly how God had opened the doors that had blessed the church. God had brought Mitchell in contact with the Jesus People movement and brought the band together at the critical time. God had forced the church into church planting. God had put a desire in Mitchell's heart to help these men and expand the impact of the church. Only God could have opened the door into Mexico that Prescott stumbled through. Mitchell had confidence that if God had opened these doors, He would open others.

Mitchell was determined that he would allow God to direct. His job was to work at staying receptive, flexible and obedient. He also refused to be turned aside from what God had already given them. The more the impact of the vision grew, the greater the pressure was from those outside, to control and re-direct it. But Mitchell wasn't interested in changing or streamlining the vision, and he certainly wasn't interested in blending the methods of Prescott with the church world around him. He had a simple, unshakable faith in God's directing. It wasn't his revival, it was God's. He was a steward of a sacred trust, and wasn't interested in experimenting. Those in the unity movement and those with organizational minds would call this obstinate, but Mitchell called it being faithful.

## **Outsiders**

Nothing would show a greater degree of divine involvement than the way in which God brought others into relationship with the fellowship at just the right moments. As the church reached out, it found most pastors uninterested in what was happening. Mitchell was open to help or encourage anyone who might come along, but few could see how a church in a little town like Prescott could help them. This wasn't true, though, of everyone.

Several critical men had come from outside. Ron Jones had come in from the Assemblies of God. Walworth came into contact with Cruz at God's moment. A large part of what Mitchell hoped to do was tied to being able to help receptive pastors from outside. As the fellowship began to

grow more and more, God brought it into contact with those looking for something more.

Key men came in to join hands with the men who had been raised up in Prescott. Joe Campbell had been saved under Ron Jones' ministry, but he stayed in Illinois and went into the ministry there. As time passed, he became frustrated with the organization he was a part of, and finally got back in touch with Jones and came to Arizona.

Harry Hills had been a successful pastor and evangelist. Seeking revival, he'd used every trick in the book. One fateful Sunday he created the world's longest banana split after church.

From his first contact with the fellowship, Harry knew it was for him. Not worrying about the consequences, he pulled his church in Sparta, Illinois, out of his organization. Several excellent families followed, forming a core of people that would lead to the opening up of a multitude of churches.

### **Ruben Reyna**

A man who would play a significant role in the vision of the fellowship was Ruben Reyna. Raised in East Los Angeles, hanging out at Roosevelt High, he started using LSD and mescaline heavily. He spent most of his time in high school just hanging out at a place called Blueberry Hill. Pushing drugs to make a living, he was headed for the gutter, or prison.

His life was made up of the East L.A. gang fights, drugs and immorality. Though he escaped prison, he didn't escape doing time in the local jail, but considered this to be the small price you had to pay to be accepted.

He'd had encounters with religion, but none of them had ever moved him. He'd bounced from Catholicism to Mormonism to Jesus Only and had been baptized so many times he was getting wrinkles, but nothing seemed to help.

Everything began to change when he ran into a guy named Sam. He was a notorious old dope fiend who had gotten saved. Sam started to lay it on Ruben. It shook him up so much that he went out and ate all the drugs he could find, then got drunk on top of it. When he came home to his wife, Stella, they had their typical fight, and Ruben told her, "I'm going to find Jesus" Stella packed his bags and sent him on his way.

Ruben found Sam's house and knocked on his door. When he opened

it, Ruben didn't waste any time. He shouted, "Hey, I want Jesus!"

Sam knelt him down and led him to the Lord.

Sam was working with Victory Outreach, a church that Sonny Argonzoni had started to reach drug addicts. They had a home where they kept guys to dry them out, and Sam took Ruben there.

Ruben walked in expecting to see a bunch of religious sissies and was shocked to see a room filled with guys straight off the streets. When he walked in, he was greeted with, "Hey, what's happening, Porky? What's going on?"

Ruben asked, "What do you mean, what's going on?"

The guy said, "Jesus changed my life, man"

He didn't know how to handle this. He said, "Ah, you guys are getting loaded."

They hustled him upstairs to the third floor and put him in a room with another guy who was kicking heroin. His name was Hank and he looked like he'd been through Hell and back, but he turned to Ruben and said, "I'm going to make it, through the power of Jesus"

The next morning he woke up to a bunch of guys shaking him and saying, "Let's pray." Ruben thought to himself, "O.K. one short prayer, then I'm out"

He went downstairs and joined everyone else. Someone said, "Let's hold hands and pray."

Ruben said, "I'll never hold hands with no one. Only sissies hold hands."

A guy near him said menacingly, "We're going to hold hands!"

Ruben looked around and saw that most of the guys there were bigger than he was. Several of them were tattooed down and straight out of the joint. At that moment, he got a new vision of hand holding and said, "So, we're going to hold hands. Fine."

The men stood in a circle and started to praise God. Ruben couldn't believe he was involved in this. Here he was with a bunch of reformed junkies', who had their heads back, while bouncing on their toes speaking at the top of their voices in strange tones. Ruben knew that he'd stumbled into a cult. He opened his eyes to see what was happening and as he did he saw a guy on the other side of the circle looking at him. He thought, "Oh no, they've caught me looking."

Finally a missionary walked in the back door and everybody quieted down and began to listen while she told about Jesus, repentance, and the coming Kingdom. After finishing she began walking down the line of men, laying hands on each of them. As she did this, each of these big burly ex-cons collapsed to the floor.

She must have had some kind of electric buzzer in her hands, he thought, because every time she touched one of them they were electrocuted. He was standing at the end of the line and didn't know what to do. She got closer and closer.

Finally she reached him and asked, "What's your name?" "Ruben"

"Do you know that God wants to use you?" she said. And with that she touched him and he fell back on the sofa.

Ruben couldn't believe it. He thought, "No woman's going to push me around," and leaped back up and took a Karate stance in front of her.

She walked up to him and said, "I told you, God wants to use your life. I want you to say a prayer with me" Ruben prayed a prayer with her and began to weep like a little baby. He fell to his knees and, as he did, he felt something ugly leave him. It was like a dark cloud had been taken from his heart and a flame had taken its place. His hands shot up in the air and he couldn't have taken them down if he wanted to. He left the place transformed.

When he got home, Stella wasn't nearly as excited as he was. She looked at him and said, "You're a hypocrite. You ain't saved. You've flipped out on drugs this time for sure"

Several months of battles ensued before Stella got right. At first she said she was going back to the Catholic church, but over time she began to get interested in what he was doing. She thought that he might have a girlfriend at church, so at first she came just to make sure. While they were standing in the service she laid into him, "You're a hypocrite. Look at you lifting your hands up. You're playing the part in front of all these people"

Ruben wanted to hit her. He said a prayer, "God, you know that I can't stand this nagging and I'm going to hit this woman if she doesn't stop it. Put a wall between us." In that moment it was as if God had built an invisible wall. Ruben could only hear a little squeaking mouse-type sound from Stella's raving.

That day she went forward and got saved.

Ruben had been a real introvert with no friends and a lack of trust for anyone. When he got saved, there was a miraculous transformation that

turned him into someone with boldness. He would slip out into the hills and pray, "God, give me a personality. If you want me to go and preach, I'll go, but you'll have to show me and help me. I'm just a puppet to the world, and I can't put words together." God answered that prayer in ways beyond Ruben's dreams.

He had felt called to preach the day he got saved, so he signed up for Bible College. He had hated school before, but now he was filled with a desire to know the Word. No one thought he would make it through school, because he couldn't read or write, but God filled him with a violent commitment to make it. He spent nights praying for God to teach him out of the Bible and God did. He graduated from school with A's and B's.

Two major forces shaped him during this time. One was a Spanish man at the school named Camarillo. He taught straight from the Word and demonstrated what he said with his life. This profoundly impacted Ruben.

A second important encounter occurred when he went as the driver, with a brother named Cal on a missionary journey to Washington. At the end of the first day they stopped and Cal said, "We've got to pray."

Ruben wasn't sure how to pray, but Cal took the lead and started. Ruben could feel the presence of God. He knew that things were breaking and changing. That night left him permanently changed, as he saw and felt the power of a man who could pray.

Two years after getting saved Ruben went out to preach. One day Sonny Arguinzoni came and got him. As they drove he said, "God's been really dealing with me that you should go to La Puente."

Ruben said, "O.K. I'll go"

Just before they were to leave, Ruben was back behind the house praying, when God spoke to him to go find Stella. He came into the house and found his wife standing there with the keys in her hands and a wild look in her eyes. Ruben asked, "Where are you going?"

She yelled back at him, "Don't talk to me, I'm going to go get loaded"

He grabbed the keys. "Well let me pray for you", Ruben pleaded. She ran for her room and locked the door. Ruben was frantic. He pounded on the door and, when she wouldn't open it up, he broke the door down. As he entered the room he began to rebuke the Devil and commanded him to leave. As he did this he felt something leave through the window.

Stella came to him, crying. She sobbed, "I was under fear and attack, but now I'm free"

## **La Puente**

Ruben was left in La Puente with nothing but a portable P.A. system. A lady in town heard about him and loaned him her house. It had been converted into a church with pews and equipment. The first service one guy named Pat Fitzgerald got saved. At first there were only three men coming and they never wanted to sit in the chairs. It wasn't uncommon to decide to shut the service down and head for the streets to do some witnessing.

That first crowd was brought together by raw determination. Ruben and Stella would hit the streets, going door to door. Ruben and a brother came to one house to find a hopeless doper named Joe Garcia. He had an earring, jeweled glasses and a cane. He'd used drugs for 20 years, but Ruben believed God could change him. He went to church that night, but what touched him wasn't the service, it was Ruben and his family. They didn't have any money themselves, but stopping to get one hamburger they excitedly divided it into four parts, rejoicing that God had allowed them to have that. Joe got saved that night and delivered from drugs.

Ruben brought Bob Dool in to preach and the place was packed. In fact, they came the next service to find that City Hall had shut them down for overcrowding the building, so they borrowed a church in Pico Rivera.

It was here in Pico Rivera that they started a band that would play all over the Southwest. With it they began to hit parks and do street concerts. After the Sunday night service everyone would head down to Whittier Boulevard to witness. It wasn't long before that place was packed too.

The church was made up of ex-drug addicts and Chollos. It was a wild crowd and wild things often happened. In one service a gang showed up outside the service wanting to drag out one of its members. Ruben was about to preach, but decided to dismiss church and go out and witness. At first the gang panicked, thinking the whole church was going to jump them. Before they could run, people were pressing the claims of Christ. Several got saved that night and are still attending the church.

One year they entered the Pasadena Rose Parade. The band was playing and Richard Salizar preached. He yelled out at a crowd of young men, "I challenge you." He wanted them to get saved, but they thought he wanted to fight. Luckily the truck had hydraulics and the driver lifted it up out of harm.

A favorite activity was to take the whole church and have a march. People would be beating tambourines and singing lustily, "I'm so glad

Jesus set me free!" It was a radical thing to do in those East Los Angeles neighborhoods.

The church was having building problems again when Larry Gates called. "How would you like to have a building where everything is paid for?" he asked. Needless to say, Ruben was ecstatic. A Baptist church had gone under, and this man was one of the last members of the deacon board. He respected what was happening with these changed lives and signed the property over, so the church made another move into Monterey Park.

### **The Fellowship**

Ruben came in contact with Prescott through an evangelist friend, Phillip La Crue. Phillip had preached in some of the churches in Mexico. He got Ruben to go down and preach. While he was there, he became friends with Sergio Gaxiola who was leading the Mexican works. Sergio started to harass Ruben to come to a conference. At first, he acted too busy, but finally he agreed to go.

Ruben had been pastoring for three years when he first showed up. His church was throbbing with revival. He knew he had favor with God. As he stepped into the Prescott church, he wasn't expecting much and was a little afraid of getting taken. His first impression came from the sounds of prayer. It sounded to him like a beehive. He looked in and saw Pastor Mitchell down on his knees in the middle of everyone else praying. The pastors he knew had always prayed by themselves and this seemed radical to him. When he noticed that Mitchell was at every prayer meeting, he said, "This is what I want".

He and Stella were overcome by the power of what was happening. The first night of the conference Mitchell preached about Solomon and how God gave him wisdom and understanding. During that service God began to speak to Ruben. He had begun to feel like there was more to pastoring than just a worship service and large numbers. He felt an emptiness that he couldn't identify.

When Mitchell started to talk about how God had given Solomon a vision, it became clear to him why he was in Prescott. God wanted him to start planting churches and move on into what He had planned for him.

That week he talked to Mitchell about church planting. Mitchell didn't try to take control of him or bring him into his camp. He just shared with him what he'd learned. He laid out a strategy for supporting a starting

work. Ruben went home that next week and sent Danny Zendejas to Oxnard, California.

Ruben kept showing up at conferences and in each one he was challenged to send out more men. More important to him, though, he finally found direction. Not the control that others wanted to exert over him, but simple guidance of practical ideas and fellowship that was what he really wanted.

Ruben's church had been started by raw zeal, with little structure. Services sometimes lasted half the night. The people loved it, but the reality was they were tired the next day. Even more frustrating was that many would shout all day Sunday and sin all day Monday. Out of fellowship with Prescott, he saw how much more important the word of God was than programs or pumped up emotions. When the Word was made the center of the service and the preaching had content, it worked deep into people's lives.

Ruben had always known that God planned on using him for great things. It wasn't fruitfulness he needed. What he needed was encouragement to do the things that God was dealing with him about in evangelism and outreach. He found a precious treasure in the challenge and counsel. Something that helped him to see God's plan fulfilled in his life.

The church moved into seven different school auditoriums while looking for a building. Finally they moved 25 miles to Norwalk where they were able to buy a piece of property. While the building was being remodeled, and they haggled with City Hall over the necessary changes. They met in a tent on the parking lot. For nearly a year, through rain, heat, and cold, the people came. They never even got a chance to settle into the building before having to remodel time after time to hold the people that kept swarming in. As of 1985, over 45 churches have been planted. The mother church has over 700 coming with more being saved every week.

Mitchell appreciated men like Ruben Reyna and wanted to help them. Many men would be drawn to Prescott's conferences. Men with a call and real ministry, men who were looking for fellowship and counsel. For many, pastoring was like walking into an unmarked field of land mines. Scattered through the field they could see the carcasses of those who had only made it part way — those who had no guide through the dangers. Mitchell cared about these men! He knew that God wanted to help and Mitchell did, too.

A group of young pastors were having coffee with Pastor Mitchell at

a denominational convention in Las Vegas. They could see the death that was in many of the pastors attending and were concerned about how they could avoid the same fate.

Mitchell told them his simple formula. When I go someplace I first ask, "God do you want me to come here?" If He says, "no", then I ask, "What can I do to help?" How powerful the church becomes when it stops figuring out what it can get and asks what it can do.

## Chapter Fifteen

### Expansion

The baby churches slowly began to break through the barriers to revival in their own cities. As each pastor and congregation developed, they became an added resource to the other struggling churches. As men gained experience they could come into a younger church to bring direction and help. The growing churches developed their own bands that they could send out to play and sent out impact teams to witness and spread the revival fire. This enlarging base of support and vision brought an increase in expansion.

Mitchell saw that he could help these churches if he could come in for an occasional service to preach. The church in Prescott was loaded with its own needs, and he couldn't afford to be gone all the time. Just counselling the new converts coming in was a full time job, as the home church continued to grow.

Through the gospel grapevine he picked up that Bob Allen (a member of the church) wanted a pilot's license and he encouraged him to go for it. It wasn't long before they were renting a small plane and bouncing into small airports all over Arizona. Mitchell could now cover in minutes what had taken hours. It was an exciting time. Once they were nearly lost outside of Gallup because the cloud cover was descending and there was no place in sight to land. Disoriented and verging on panic they finally got a fix on their location. Another time, Bob made a hair-raising landing in Nogales. The airstrip's landing lights wouldn't come on. The man waiting to pick Bob up from the airport heard him circling, so he parked his truck at the end of the runway and turned his lights on to show the edge of the black top. Hoping and praying, Bob slipped it in.

By late 1974, the Prescott church had bought a used Cherokee Six airplane. It was now possible for Mitchell to stay at home during the day and then fly to different churches in the evening to bring direction and counsel. Flying home at the end of the services, he always made prayer meeting in the morning. In this way, he could make a day stretch into what had been a day and a half.

### Better Methods

Those early churches were the testing grounds for future ideas. Mitchell had always been willing to experiment and there was much trial

and error. They tried sending people with the men that started new churches. It seemed like a great idea, but it fizzled out in actual practice. The new people who came into the church felt like they were second class citizens when compared to the old timers from Prescott. It was hard enough on the mother church to send out its best young men and their families as pastors, but if each church would require a whole congregation it would only be a short time until the home church would be without resources or strength. The greatest fault was that the young men weren't helped by having a ready made congregation. There was an inescapable factor of time and development. Even if great people came with him, the new pastor just didn't have the skills to keep and lead them. The church stalled at a small number until he personally grew. This only frustrated those that had come with him and hindered their development as well.

It was quickly learned that, just as people weren't the answer to revival, neither was throwing money at a slow growing church. Though, it was critical to support a work financially, it became obvious that if a man didn't see something happen in those first few months, all the money in the world wouldn't change the condition of the church.

Several of the first works limped along for long periods of time. Just like a body can be kept breathing and a heart pumping by extreme mechanical means, a church can keep its doors open and yet really not have any life force of its own. This kept the home church from sending out others as one or two faltering churches kept absorbing large sums of money and energy. It was difficult for Mitchell to cut their support when he knew that it would put a real hardship on their families, but it was discovered that only under that kind of financial pressure would a man finally reach down into himself and bring his full talents to bear. Out of this came the policy of cutting the financial support by one-fourth every three months, leaving the new church to carry the largest part of its expenses by itself at the end of a year. This wasn't ironclad, but if a church wasn't showing some signs of life in a few months, perhaps it was time to bring the man back in and pray for God's new direction.

## **Experimenting**

Mexico was an obvious opportunity, but a difficult one to take advantage of. It was a nation that was open to both the move of God and the move of Satan. Few were prepared to deal with the problems they might face there. Johnny Metzler was preaching a crusade and feeling strong demonic opposition. A woman had had to be taken out as she had screamed out under demonic inspiration. Metzler looked behind him to see

the P.A. floating above the stage by itself. Crowds came, but tying them in was another thing.

Jack Harris preached a crusade in the boxing ring in Obregon that drew out over 2,700 a night. During the meeting, 1,000 were saved. Miracles were everywhere. The mother of the manager of the place came one night tormented by arthritis. For 33 years she had been in pain and her body had bent more and more under the cruel torment of the disease. That night she was totally freed. She was up front dancing across the platform with joy. Yet, in spite of all the excitement, not a single person joined the church.

Mitchell knew some tough choices had to be made. They determined to never hold a meeting that couldn't be tied into a church. If the crusade lasted three days then the evangelist would spend the next three days preaching in the church to pull those people into the assembly. In addition, the church would have day classes for the new converts. Out of this the foundation was laid for fruitful crusades and the beginning of the Mexican conferences.

Nearly as powerful as the crusades themselves was the effect these meetings had on pastors. Coming into Nogales were dozens of American pastors that in visiting began to see what could happen in another country. Many pastor's lives were altered when they entered the giant tin shed in Nogales that most crusades were held in. Outside, tacos and fish were sold, and inside the owner had a small booth he peddled soft drinks from. The chairs had beer commercials on their backs and the temperature was stifling, but life radiated from the place. Excited Mexican disciples, spotting their Gringo brothers, greeted them with an excited, "Gloria a Dios!"

The music was quick and exuberant. The noise was deafening in that metal building, but what changed lives was the altar call. People would flood the front. When prayed for, they reached out with faith and took the promise literally. Many a young man left with the secret plea, "God, let me do that some day!"

## **Release**

The Prescott church thrived during all of this. Pastor Mitchell saw that if a young preacher wasn't released to build a congregation in another town, he would start to build one of his own in the home church. Here was a major reason for the splits and divisions troubling many churches. Released, these men expand the Kingdom. Denied that release, they can

destroy.

Mitchell had always believed in giving and now he saw it worked with men. As he gave out his best young men and women he saw others rise up to take their places. These weren't the leftovers and rejects but men, if anything, of greater ability. This was important if the church was to maintain its vision. It wasn't possible to keep the saints excited about the same old men and churches, but as God raised up new faces and opportunities it kept the vision fresh.

Releasing the saints did more than build other churches, it helped build Prescott itself. Every major idea to arise in Prescott came from someone in the congregation. The coffeehouse had been the idea of the young men. The Bible studies had been a spontaneous filling of a need. Groups, impact teams, and ministries for children were all the result of someone coming with a burden and Pastor Mitchell saying, "What do you need, how can I help?" He knew that if he tried to dominate those under him they could never find themselves. To be affective a man had to have the liberty to fail. As the church grew he kept that same spirit of openness to new ideas. As a result, fresh and exciting things continue to happen.

Don McPherson had an idea to form a group that would put on mini-dramas to bring home the gospel message. This developed into a great new form of outreach. In the Door, short skits of only a few minutes would make a powerful impact on those coming. Using humor or drama, they could stir the crowds to laughter or conviction.

On the streets, the results could be even more dramatic. At first, these young thespians tended toward excess. They would dress some-one as the devil and go into a bar. When the bouncer tried to throw them out, the devil would run around claiming they couldn't evict him, he lived there. Mitchell had to encourage them to stay out of the bars so drunks would stay out of the church.

The young people had a great time doing street drama. They would preach on a street corner, and when hecklers started taunting them, out of the shadows would come Lucifer himself to encourage the hecklers in their good work of mocking Christians.

Drama added a multitude of opportunities for expression. A favorite thing was to make some gospel point in a local parade. Peter Edwards had just opened a church, and called the drama team from Prescott to be in the local Christmas parade in Casa Grand.

The float had real impact. The spectators were stunned to see Christ walking by, covered with blood, carrying the cross. Since it was Christmas,

the team had thought of another touch. They had another actor dressed as Santa Claus, shouting, "Ho Ho Ho" and hitting Christ with a whip. It was a powerful picture of the secularization of Christmas. It was so powerful it almost got them tarred and feathered and run out of town.

Bill DeJedon took the drama concept a step farther and worked up a whole play of the Last Supper. A cast of a couple dozen would travel to other cities acting out this moving portrayal.

In California one of Ruben's men, Albert Valdevia, created a play called "Ese Chollo" that drew out people by the hundreds to find an answer to the violence, sex and drugs of the "chollo" lifestyle.

### **Releasing the Average**

Most pastors had a mentality that stifled the church. They either felt that no one could do as good a job as they did or felt threatened if someone in the church did do too well. These pastors wax eloquent about the importance of their people and then allow them to do only the most menial of tasks. It causes a smooth running and predictable little boring church, but hardly something to shake their community let alone the world. Everything of importance is kept under tight control. This leaves people with no spiritual expression and forces them to find their fulfillment in the world.

Mitchell believed that God was bigger than people's talent or lack of it. The church had to be released. Not just the superstars, but anyone attending with a life that demonstrated a seriousness about Christ and a talent that could benefit the Kingdom was given their chance by Mitchell.

Organizations are always trying to develop leaders. They are ever looking to promote the talented. Yet, this often is a violation of the simple foundations of the gospel. The Kingdom is not built on talent but a relationship with God.

Mitchell agreed with what E.M. Bounds said in *Power Through Prayer*. "Men are God's method. The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men . . . . What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, nor new organizations or more novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use — men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not . . . . come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men — men of prayer."

Mitchell released the people. The music scene on the weekends involved many as they played in groups or participated in drama. These

people learned to express themselves in front of others and felt the reward of involvement. The Bible studies and outreaches allowed the novice worker a chance to feel that his life counted. Slowly but surely those, that at first appeared common, began to show their uncommon abilities as they were allowed to develop.

The new pastors demonstrated this the most. The men who were being sent out were not the superstars of the religious community. The very struggle these men went through to survive, showed it wasn't their winning personalities and mega-gifts that built these churches. There were no explosive bursts of growth, but men wrestling with their limited skills and talents to help people. They made up the great middle of humanity; competent but often boring. Around them was the flash and sparkle of success oriented Christianity. In a world of gourmet religion, these were the mashed potato boys. Yet, they had a touch of God, tools to work with and an open door of the Spirit, and, more than anything, they worked!

Anyone can take the talented and personable and direct them towards success in the church. These types would have had success in any area they were involved in. Mitchell was working with men who had gotten saved with a vision in life for nothing more than enough drugs to stay high on and a roof over their heads. Mitchell tapped the dropouts and the quitters, the abused and the ignored; they were the great majority of the people who were in the church and in America.

God's power has always been released in the common. God sees potential in scheming Jacobs, cursing Peters, losers like Jabez, and kinky John the Baptists. The history of the Bible illustrates God's use of the common. Unknown women become people of extraordinary faith. Prophets often started as fig pickers, dirt farmers and sheep herders. Many of the great evangelists (Finney, Moody, Wigglesworth, Sunday, Roberts, Graham) came from the untrained core of the church labeled "laymen".

Christ himself dignified the average when he picked to be born to a young common couple, in simple surroundings, in a jerkwater town of a below average nation. When Jesus picked the twelve, he wasn't skimming off the cream of the crop. He intentionally chose those who couldn't be credited with their own success. None were high rollers. In fact, every time he meets them in the gospels, he finds men who were not even very successful fishermen. But God had a plan for their lives. Released, chastened, encouraged and trained, they would be just exactly the type vessels that God could use.

Paul wrote of the early church, "Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." (I Cor. 1:26-29)

Something in human nature always tries to escape the ignobility of the cross. Man wants dignity but God wants love and service. God has often chosen to display his grace in common form. The tabernacle was beautiful on the inside but the outside was covered with badger skins.

Glory in vessels of clay has always been the Master's way. It's hard on man's ego when God chooses to reveal Himself in altars of stone that He won't allow man to add his artistic touch too.

### **Laymen**

History shows that the great moves of God have all been lay movements. The early church, the Methodists, the Salvation Army and others have tapped the power of the average and the lay worker to move nations. Only this is a force large enough to bring the explosive growth of a move of God.

John Wesley said, "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the Kingdom of heaven on earth."

Mitchell didn't care about the attempts of man to win acceptance. He wasn't out to impress but to inflame. Education never was the key to the gospel and it never will be. Men need to study and grow, but there is no magical endowment of power in Seminary. In fact the whole concept isn't scriptural and it leads to exclusivity and breeds a spirit that hates personal sacrifice. He chose to work with the common: the chosen.

These common men faced the impossibility of their task as they labored to overcome their handicaps. Mike Maston had been sent to the city of Tempe, Arizona. The church was located a block from the largest college in the state, a school known for its parties and money. He was only 19, and far from rich or intellectual. He wasn't a natural fit, but he learned to pray. He battled himself and the city, and a work started to form. It wasn't built on his talent, though time caused him to grow into a man of exceptional talent, but through his belief in God's promises.

Greg Johnson had been sent to Yuma. A city on the Mexican border that was as hot as the Sahara and had the sand dunes to prove it. There,

he fought for his life. He wanted to preach but when he got too excited he found himself afflicted with a distracting stutter.

He knew he was his own worst enemy. He had a temperament that, when goaded, could make a rattlesnake seem pleasant. He'd managed to offend most of the Christians in town who had come to visit. It probably hadn't encouraged his own people when he opened the Thanksgiving service by saying, "OK you turkeys, give!"

His favorite expression in those days was, "friend", delivered with a glaring squint and pointed fingers. You couldn't help but feel he didn't really mean it.

People came but didn't return, and he was near starvation as support was cut back. The pressures of ministry had stretched his emotions to the breaking point. He stood up one Sunday and told the handful who were there that they could all backslide, but he would keep serving God and left the pulpit in tears. Immediately he was tested on that determination, when his brother called to offer him a job paying big money. The only catch was he had to quit preaching and leave the insanity of Christianity. His wife didn't help when she told him at the same time it was her or the church. After two years, the church itself wasn't even doing well enough to die. He'd sit in the back before service and stare through a crack in the door hoping more than the typical 4 or 5 would show up.

In spite of it all, he couldn't quit. He told his brother and wife he was staying and forged out a strong ministry and a gripping style of preaching.

None of the men started as winners. When Brother Mitchell sent men out they often didn't appear to be prepared. By the time the church has a man polished and ready the opportunity is gone. Mitchell took them to a place in their lives where God's hand was evident and then released them to fly. The astounding thing was that this release caused men to begin to show talent and ability that had never been in their lives before.

## **Strengths**

Several unique strengths began to be evident that were built deep in the foundation of the fellowship. The men themselves weren't even aware of many of the things that caused them to be strong, but those from outside could see these spiritual props and their power.

The fellowship and unity of purpose were too often taken for granted, but of tremendous importance. These young pastors had never been in the heartless competitive environment that most churches functioned in.

Conferences became times where their fellowship would seal them together again and again in vision. The pressure that they put on one another was constructive as they challenged each other and brought encouragement.

The use of outside ministry was especially beneficial. During a revival meeting, God could bring strength to the church and also to the pastor.

The Flagstaff church was starting to see some growth when Johnny Metzler came to hold a meeting. Metzler was flamboyant. He dressed in the style of a Los Angeles dandy. His hair wouldn't have been disturbed by a tornado as it was glued in a sweeping pompadour. Flowered shirts, platform shoes and jewelry hanging from his neck and fingers set off his attire. This conflicted loudly with the back to nature look of Flagstaff, a college town full of hippies drawn to the small mountain community.

A few days before the revival started, Larry Huch had gotten saved. As a sinner he had done everything that he could think of. He was a college football star and Golden Glove boxer who had given up athletics to chase after drugs. Over a year had been spent smuggling cocaine into the country from Colombia, South America, and shooting it into his veins until he was strung out and desperate. Trying to get free, he'd drifted into Flagstaff with two friends. A movie had drawn him out to the church to get saved the week before and his own desperation had brought him back to the revival.

Metzler was almost too much. Here was the picture of everything that Larry's vegetarian "earth child" heart despised. Larry was mad and wanted out. During the service Johnny called out several ladies and as he spoke to them he laid his hand on their heads and they fell back into the pastor's arms. This was too much for Huch to take. He told God, "If you expect me to believe this, have him call out someone that I know and can trust"

At that moment, Metzler pointed at Larry and said, "Young man, come up here. You just asked God for something." Larry walked up a little nervously and Johnny reaching out touched his forehead and with a cry from the heart for God to show this man who He was. Huch was propelled back as if he had been kicked by an elephant. He landed halfway up the aisle speaking in tongues. Larry was never the same. He started to go for God and was out street preaching the next weekend.

That same supernatural touch that Metzler imparted on that first revival evening has stayed with him as he has gone into the ministry, pioneering churches that grew explosively in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Adelaide, Australia.

God was building his church by the use of many, not one. Nothing like this could have happened but for the men who linked themselves together with another pastor and believed God to touch people in these struggling works.

Each church helped those around them and built an undergirding of strength. A pastor in a city could take his people to visit another church in the same city and not have to fear having them ripped off. His people, in turn, could be fired up as impact teams from other churches came into town to help.

Even the greenest of pastors saw their people built as men of greater experience came in and preached revivals that challenged and strengthened. People would be changed as they went to conferences and discipleship meetings outside their church. This brought a tremendous stability and subtly worked into them vision and principles of service and commitment.

My church in Payson, Arizona was struggling to survive. As an inexperienced pastor I was bumbling through the first few months, deftly defeating more of my goals than accomplishing. Finally a handful were beginning to filter in, but I couldn't seem to lead them to the most basic foundations.

Doc and his wife had come to a service showing a desire to get right with God. I was thrilled and took them out to have coffee and try to pump them up enough to get them back to the next service. The couple were thinking of moving. They said the town of Payson was getting too big — it was up to 3,000. Stunned by this unbelievable confession, I told them to hold on and see what God could do. Seeing the time was getting toward 10:00 I expressed concern about keeping them up too late. Doc then informed me that he normally went to bed at 6:30, so he could go hunting and fishing in the morning before work. Shocked, I said, "You'll have to learn to stay up later than that, church doesn't even start till 7:30."

Doc brought his best friend with him to the next service, Dave Stephenson. Both of these men's wives started to come for no other reason than they were tired of going to bed at 6:30, and enjoyed getting to stay up till 8:30 and 9:00. Neither wife, though, would get saved.

It was time for the Prescott conference and the church loaded up cars and made the hour and fifteen minute drive over the hill to catch a service. In one night what I hadn't done in a month of preaching finally took hold. The wives were both saved. Several in the church were filled with the Holy Ghost. Dave Stephenson had been surly in disposition, and not overly

co-operative, but during that service everything changed. Afterwards there was a tangible presence of God that surrounded him, and overwhelmed any person that stepped near him. His voice box was a surgical Mickey Mouse job of stretched skin that he was told would take little abuse, yet that night it was touched and he was called to preach. The church was revolutionized. As the pastor, I was still doing a better imitation of Gomer Pyle than Paul the Apostle, but God intervened through the impact of others' ministry.

### **Evangelism**

The vision had been birthed out of a simple desire to see men and women saved. All the advances were out of this simple tap root. The first churches had been planted because of groups going out to witness seeing the obvious need for churches to help these receptive people, in cities all over Arizona. The outreach to other nations unfolded from a simple desire to lift up Christ and see the whole world drawn unto Him. Out of this flowed one simple purifying motivation: reaching out.

This wasn't just a vague goal, but a practical plan. One of the greatest strengths of the fellowship was just in having some idea of what to do to reach people. These men went out with a practical understanding of how to show a movie and run an outreach. They weren't just guessing how to get people saved, they had done it. They had been pressured in the home church to produce. By the time they rose to leadership as disciples they were not only working a job but going 5 and 6 nights a week in the church. This gave them a spirit of doing. They were geared to work, and that momentum of a life poised to smash forward had impact.

The churches looked for any open door for outreach. In Flagstaff, Ron Jones was frustrated at getting people to come into the building and he determined to go out to them. The local theater was showing its first x-rated movie, and he determined to stir the mud. He loaded the piano in the back of a pickup and headed for the theater.

As the movie dismissed the crowd came streaming out to be con-fronted with a gospel barrage. The saints were singing "Power in the Blood" while Becky Weidinger pounded on the piano in the back of the truck. Jones let Joe Weidinger loose with the mike. He leaped to the challenge. Pacing back and forth he scorched them with blasts of indignation. "You came to watch your dirty movies and get off on your filth, but the blood of Jesus will set you free ...

The crowd was shocked to find Christians outside. Some hid their

faces with their coats, ashamed to be caught there. Others hid inside behind the popcorn machine afraid to face the message. It stirred up the saints and the community. It was only the first of many assaults on the gates of Hell in that small mountain town.

Hank Houghton was in Globe, Arizona and wanted to get involved in the Copper Days celebration. He heard about a big dance and got permission for the church band to play during the other band's break. They showed up in a room filled with rowdy miners and their women. The band was a three piece rock group called "Crimson Ram." ("Crimson for the blood of Jesus and "Ram" because they were going to ram it down your throat.) They lived up to their name that night. It was an outlandish scene as people responded to the message.

After church one Sunday the band played in a local bar. The other group tried to get back on stage after their break but Crimson Ram just kept testifying and playing. These men didn't see the church as the goal of their effort but a force to be mobilized to touch a lost world.

This doesn't mean that they had found a simple means of reaching people. There's no such thing, and not every outreach was a great success. Greg Johnson had planned an event to shake the city of Yuma. Impact teams had gone out with thousands of flyers before the meeting. A building had been rented in what looked like a ripe area of town. Larry Reed had brought his bus to town. Driving around the city, he announced through powerful speakers mounted on the roof the opportunity of a lifetime. That evening, what was hoped to be a turning point of the church, was nearly its destruction. Four people came. Greg didn't know whether to weep or curse as he thought of the wasted time and money. Through experiences like these, men learned that it helped to pray and get the mind of God, instead of doing things just to be busy.

Some of the wealthiest men in America are those who risk their fortunes looking for oil. These wild cat drillers push bits into the earth, and though they come up with dry hole after dry hole, they somehow rally and scrape together the cash to go and dig one more time until they strike a gusher. These young men had that same kind of spirit. Crushed for a time, they would pay off the bills from the last failing attempt to stir the city, and try one more time.

Going door to door, they might hit every house in a small community and still not get a single convert, but they knew what they had to do. The following months would be filled with the effort repeated again. Concerts and movies were set up in parks in spite of wind and rain. Ladies' fashion shows were held where the women dressed in the styles of their past lives

and gave their testimonies of how they were changed. Other churches in a city would often feel threatened when one of these young men started showing movies and holding concerts. They would try to do the same thing and for a while the town would have an orgy of evangelism, but when they saw the effort and expense that was involved most other churches would return to the status quo. Quitting wasn't an option for the young pastors of the fellowship. They knew it wasn't any easier for their brothers in other cities and went out again. Slowly the churches grew. Sometimes the investment seemed outlandish, but only if you didn't consider the worth of even one soul redeemed.

### **Unique**

Christianity loves to talk about setting people free, yet the facts contradict the talk. In the schools of Christian expression there is a sameness to most groups. You can often spot the doctrine and denominational affiliation by the shaking of the hands, the mellowness of the worship, or the repeating of the same few phrases and scriptures. In the men out of Prescott there were many things that were similar. Some of the men have a style and delivery that makes them seem like clones of Mitchell. This is a natural result of discipleship. Yet, as men were released, several began to develop unique deliveries and expression. Shouting, talking, standing, leaping, running and pacing they began to blend their personalities with their message.

Harold Warner was the preacher's preacher. His sermons religiously followed three points and were studded with scripture. He was the consummate planner. His church was a fine oiled machine. Outreaches were pulled off with clockwork efficiency.

Ron Jones was much more spontaneous. He was likely to walk into the pulpit with a just birthed message still hot from prayer. Not one to plod methodically toward a distant goal, he would force through plans that, though rough in execution, were bathed in life. He spoke of faith and the possibility of God. As a preacher, he was a wild and uncontrolled explosion of gospel power. In Sierra Vista, he pioneered a church in a small Pepsi stand. It was soon so crowded that they could barely breathe. People filled every open space. They moved the services to a local motel. Jones liked a service with life. He sang them to a fevered pitch and then fired his gospel guns. It wasn't long until the motel began to complain that the church was louder than the bar. Larry Reed came for a meeting and stoked the furnace of revival ten times hotter. People were dazed by the moving of the Spirit. Some came out and fell into the seats in the lobby,

while shouts and hoots came from the service. The management said he'd have to leave. Ron was mad. He asked them, "Well, I suppose no one's ever come out of the bar drunk?" Their only answer was, "Mr. Jones, you're a church." He moved the services into a tent and built his own church. Time brought a refining that birthed a tremendous communicator who could walk into any situation and speak words that harmonized with the hearts of a generation.

Hank Houghton was the fighter. His style was aggressive and his method was to go for the throat. In his church, a visiting pastor could preach his most scorching sermon, only to be mobbed by people after the service thanking him for the encouragement. When threatened by the police in a small local community, Hank threatened back. Daring them to arrest him, he brought cameras and tape recorders and preached. When they did arrest members of the church, he fought them in the courts until they cried "uncle" and begged to be left alone.

Jack Harris could preach with fire but his style moved towards vision. Speaking slowly, but with thought behind each word, he would challenge those who listened to greater sacrifice. He personally saw more miracles than nearly anyone in the ministry but he spoke less of faith than of personal sacrifice and vision for a world that was lost.

Bill Coolidge was the intellectual. His sermons, full of dry humor and powerful phrases, were delivered with masterful timing. Greg Johnson could leave a crowd in stitches as he took a scripture situation and painted a hilarious side to the most dramatic of events. These men haven't been punched out of a gospel cookie cutter. Each man has built a ministry that bears the marks of their own unique personality, but above all they lifted up Jesus.

## Chapter Sixteen

### Opening and Closing Doors

In 1977, the first of the second generation churches went out. Up until that time all the men who had planted churches came from Prescott and had been shaped and molded by Mitchell directly. These 23 churches were doing well but many said it was only because of Mitchell's impact, and that it would die out when he wasn't handcrafting the men.

The Flagstaff church would prove this idea wrong. They sent Joe and Becky Weidinger to Winslow, Arizona, a city of 10,000 set in the high desert of Arizona. The town survived off the railroad and route 66. It was far from an ideal city to prove a crucial principle, but hungry people began to respond.

At about the same time Harold Warner sent Kim Pensinger from Tucson to the copper mining town of Morenci. Neither of these men had ever spent time alone with Pastor Mitchell. A few minutes of casual conversation here and there was the only contact with him they could claim. They both had a great respect for him but their development was totally involved in what had happened in their home churches. That was all they needed. Both churches not only succeeded, but raised up men out of the congregations that are in the ministry now.

The fact was that it made no difference that they didn't come from Prescott. They were just like those going out of The Potter's House. They suffered the same disappointments and false expectations, but they also showed the same determination and won the same victories. Their loyalties were just as strong and they had no need to be fine tuned by Prescott or to even call Mitchell. The men who had planted them worked with them. They identified, not with some headquarters, but with their own pastors who had served them and launched them.

As the fellowship churches grew, the Prescott building was physically unable to hold everyone who wanted to come to conference. Lines began to form hours in advance of the services. People would bring chairs, blankets, games and coffee to burn up time. When the doors opened an hour before services, chaos reigned with people being tram-pled in the rush for seats. Things had to change. Mitchell was forced to cut back on who he invited. To keep everyone happy, the Tucson church had a conference of its own. What started out of necessity turned out to be a tremendous blessing. Conferences started to spring up in various large churches around the country.

The conferences outside of Prescott helped the other churches to catch the impact of reaching the world. They became a natural place to expose others who came from outside to what God was doing in the fellowship. The decentralization also broke down the "Mecca" mentality that has to control and claim credit for everything.

In the gatherings was a natural flow of leadership that related to function, as the large church became a resource for the smaller churches in its area.

As time went on, conferences began to be established in each new area the fellowship entered. Out of these conferences came a tremendous acceleration of the vision by de-centralizing and releasing it.

### **Australia**

In 1977, God opened a door into Australia. An old acquaintance of Mitchell's was in charge of Foursquare's Australian churches and knew about what was happening in Prescott. He asked Mitchell to come and speak at their national conference.

The Prescott church at the time had no intention of going into the world. The idea had been drummed into every denominational pastor's head that only a large organization had the resources to reach another nation. Mitchell never imagined that little Prescott would make impact outside the Southwest and Mexico, and just took it for granted that you had to funnel men and money through the system. Yet, here was an interesting opportunity and Mitchell stepped into it, not knowing it was a door of destiny.

Stepping off the plane in Perth was exhilarating. Australia was a nation that was alive with potential. Perth was different from cities in the United States. It was clean and had a fresh feel about it. The tropical climate made for a "laid back" atmosphere and yet the place was filled with people and resources. Mitchell knew that he had the ideas and resources that were needed to make impact on this lovely coastal city.

At the time, the whole nation was caught up in a stir over flying saucers. Sightings were coming in from everywhere and the nuts were filling the papers with accounts of travels to other Galaxies. Every day there was another article as newsmen milked the story for all it was worth. Mitchell was scheduled to speak in a church before the conference started and saw a great opportunity in this. Contacting the pastor of the Morely church, he laid out a strategy to promote the meeting. They printed up

some flyers about prophecy and flying saucers and put an ad in the local paper. As simple as this was, nothing like it had ever been done. For the first time, the church went out to a local shopping center inviting their neighbors to the meeting. Up until that time the church was lucky to get out 125 on Sunday, and it blew their minds when over 300 packed into the building. No one in Australia had ever seen anything like that done. The only formula had been to sit around hoping someone would stumble in. The most aggressive churches seldom sought out adults. They would beat the bush for kids on the chance that some kind of spiritual osmosis would rub off of them onto the folks. Here, with Mitchell, was a direct assault on adults and proof that they would respond.

The revival stirred the pastors in Australia and they came to the conference expectant and open. When Mitchell spoke at the conference he sensed that a real problem existed in these churches with giving. The man that had started most of the churches built into them a poverty mentality. It was considered a mark of spirituality to be barely surviving (and by that standard, most of the churches were super spiritual). The people had no reason to give in that kind of environment and developed a liberality that would have made Scrooge look generous. Mitchell knew that this alone would kill all hope for revival. He took the bull by the horns and preached on money. At the end of the service he raised an offering and more money came in on that one night than had ever been raised in a whole conference. The pastors were amazed.

It was obvious to Mitchell that he had something Australia needed. He could sense that a rock band would have tremendous impact, and one thing Prescott had was bands. He went home and immediately organized a trip for the group Eden. All the members of the band were now preachers but they got others to hold down their churches and flew down under.

Mitchell's timing was perfect. Australia was following in the wake of the youth revolution that had passed through the States. What had moved America several years earlier through Woodstock and music was now moving Australia. The group's experience was astounding. The place was as ripe as Prescott had been in its early days. The band was a sensation everywhere it went. People bombarded the members for autographs.

In the little town of Collie, the whole city got caught up in the event. Streamers lined the city streets and people came from miles away. Schools all over Australia opened up for concerts, TV stations did interviews and during those ten days over 700 people gave their lives to the Saviour. It was a revolutionary challenge to the Australian churches of the possibility

of what could be done.

The pastors were stirred and the church in Morely jumped to over 300 people as it began to implement what it had heard and seen. It was an exciting time.

God had spoken to Mitchell before the group left the States that Ron Burrell would come back from the tour ready to go back to pioneer in Australia. When the plane landed Ron called and things began to be set in motion. The blinds were removed and Mitchell realized that "little" Prescott was more than capable of responding to the world's needs.

### **Conflict**

Mitchell was a man with a purpose. He never had been one to do things by tradition for tradition's sake. He was too practical for that. He wanted to do what worked. As the Prescott church and fellowship continued to grow, it began to put pressure on the organization it was a part of. Mitchell wasn't concerned about doing the denominational soft shoe and didn't seek the approval of the traditionalists and power brokers. When he saw a knotty problem he wanted to get it untied, and if it wouldn't untie, he would cut the knot. God opened doors and there wasn't time to play games. This attitude couldn't help but create some tension, no matter how productive it might be.

Mitchell's first response to criticism was to try and convert the critics. Failing that, he just ignored them and went on. There was nothing that he could have done that could have made them angrier. Unproductive men had put in their time and risen to run small minded fortresses of power. After cow towing to others in their rise to authority, they couldn't believe that someone would be so bold as to ignore their wishes. They huffed and puffed but the spiritual house wasn't about to be blown down.

Mitchell's philosophy was simple. Live and let live. He had no intention of changing everyone to fit his mold. He did feel a need to speak the truth. It was obvious that the churches around him needed a touch of life and a re-evaluation of the methods that were stifling them. The revival that he had enjoyed, he knew was for the whole church. The prophecies he'd received talked of rebuilding broken walls and he spoke out for what he believed.

When the Bible college asked him to speak, he talked about the drawbacks of Bible school. This shocked those who had asked him to come, even though they had known his feelings on the subject before

they invited him. One of the students came up afterwards and said, "You have the fire and we have the books" The problem couldn't have been summed up better. He didn't start a move to abolish the school, he just stated why he wasn't involved. Truth can be a hard thing for some to deal with. The accusations started. Wild rumors began to circulate. The first pressures began to be felt that revealed that though he might not be trying to change others, others were going to attempt to change him.

Mitchell didn't care. He wasn't bound by opinion and he was immune to bribery. When a climb up the leadership ladder was offered, he shocked them by saying that the greatest call a man could have was to be a pastor and he wasn't stepping down to something as menial as an administrator. Adding salt to the wound, he stated that he didn't believe any leader should hold a position that was not tied to pastoring. These secure bureaucratic offices caused leaders to lose touch with the ministry and the needs of people. Needless to say, this was about as tactful as Jesus calling the Pharisees hypocrites. He continued to pay his tithes and keep in touch, but the boys upstairs couldn't help but feel that this was a man who wasn't tame.

It has always taken a person that is more committed to truth than cooperation to barrel through the empty traditions of the church. History shows that the pressures of the world begin to bend the church away from the gospel standard to a pattern more pleasing to man. The battle with Satan often brings a loss of perspective and a demand for a fresh view point and a re-evaluation. Change, though, is never something that is easy. The disciples themselves had difficulty seeing the way Christ pointed. They drifted back into Judaism and a corruption of the gospel that would have kept it narrow and parochial. It took a Paul to openly accuse them of duplicity and refuse to bend to concepts that he knew were unproductive.

The prophets were seldom popular as they walked into secure little cliques of men, set up for life in the religious structure and began to throw around vituperation and accusations. The question wasn't whether what they said caused trouble, but was it the truth? Jesus was an incurable boat rocker himself. His words either made friends or enemies; but there was no middle ground. It's often the same today. Mitchell didn't care who he offended, if the message was right. There wasn't time to debate or argue. He stated what he believed and moved on as others sat stewing, offended and unwilling to listen or change.

The men Mitchell sent out had the same salt that he had. They didn't mind making waves and if they didn't like something they had the audacity

to say so. That was what they were and there was no desire to be anything different. Tensions which had begun to build snowballed as the fellowship experienced explosive growth.

In a few short years, these young men were experiencing the kind of growth that had taken most Pentecostal churches decades to achieve. Churches were beginning to break into the hundreds in attendance. More and more churches began to send out men and there was no system of control that could keep pace with the revival God was sending.

These pressures were vital learning tools for the fellowship. Out of the tension came an understanding of what God wanted them to avoid. Subtle political mentalities and institutional structures that would hinder what God had for the future were marked down to be avoided. The pressure only caused the churches to be honed to a truer edge and a finer striking force for God.

### **Simplicity**

Mitchell was being drawn towards the simplest of structures. Life couldn't stand too much restriction before it died, but released to follow its natural destiny, it developed according to the path God had placed in it. Mitchell intentionally kept the vision of the church simple and he kept the church itself simple, too. He refused to follow the lead of the super churches that built layer after layer of structure inside the church. He broke every rule of church administration when he ran 500 people and oversaw dozens of new churches and refused to have even a secretary. This was a radical concept.

If Peter had been born in the twentieth century environment the history of the church might have been radically different. When Jesus told him, "Feed my sheep," he would have put together an ultramodern sheep pen. Heated pens would have provided protection from the environment and conveyor belts would have brought the latest dainties straight to the pen. The wool would have been hand combed and the most sanitary of conditions would have prevailed, while classical music was piped in to soothe their nerves. Sheep, though, can be fed by simpler methods.

Mitchell had a reason for avoiding the complex systems of his day. Jobs and programs that originally started with good intentions soon developed a life of their own, draining a church's energy. First a church added more and more people on staff, and then created busy work to keep them from loafing. This created a mentality of professionalism and robbed the body of its expression. Programs that started simple had a tendency to

escalate and then begin to choke the church and absorb the pastor's time. Soon he would be barricaded in his office, protected from people by an impenetrable wall of secretaries. A man who started with a desire to preach would soon find his time filled by running endlessly around the administrative treadmill of church busy work. Mitchell felt the church was strongest when it was lean and mean. He even refused to have his home telephone unlisted. He was the pastor and he felt a pastor needed to be available.

He wasn't drawn towards the professional approach to ministry, where a church builds its reputation by the number of specialists in music, youth, counseling, management and whatever else it can afford to pay for. Mitchell's only staff members were an associate pastor who shared in the preaching and was available to the people when Mitchell was gone, and a young man being trained for ministry who ran the Door Scene. He saw no reason for more than that.

This approach meant work, which scared away many of the observers, but the power that it released in the church had great appeal to others.

### **The Neville's**

Mike and Larry Neville were birthed in Pentecost. Their dad, Jack, had been a tent evangelist who traveled the Bible belt preaching deliverance and the Holy Ghost. The two boys were raised playing guitar and driving tent stakes. Their dad wasn't the most successful evangelist or pastor on the sawdust trail, but he did a good job raising his boys. Neither of them were caught up in the sin that gripped the generation they were a part of, and both learned first hand what real love and discipline were.

Mike was filled with the Holy Ghost at 18 and it set him on a path towards ministry. At 21 he decided to hit the evangelistic trail himself. His younger brother Larry, who was 19, dropped out of school and the two of them took off together.

The style in those days was short on content and high on emotion. It wasn't uncommon to only preach 10 times during a six week long revival. Most of the services they just prayed for people and filled in the gaps singing and shouting. Most churches figured it a mark of the moving of the Spirit if there wasn't any preaching, and what was said was filled with emotion packed illustrations.

Standing on the platform, these two novice evangelists looked more like used car salesman than men of the cloth. They dressed in dinner

jackets and opened their revivals by singing, "We are the Neville brothers how do you, do you, do? We came to preach to you the old time gospel how do you, do you, do?" The girls lined up to ogle these eligible gospel bachelors, and it wasn't long before both were married.

After they got married, they stayed close to each other but finances forced them to go their own separate ways in preaching. Mike had pastored two churches for brief periods of time but was mainly evangelizing when he stopped to visit his father-in-law, Don McCammish. While he was there, Greg Johnson called looking for a meeting. Don had been just telling Mike about these great churches in Arizona and since he was booked to preach somewhere else the week that Greg wanted, he handed the phone to Mike, who found himself headed towards Yuma, Arizona.

From the first contact, he knew something was different. Greg took Mike with him as he went to do church business. Greg was wearing a tank top and cut-offs. This went against all that Mike had been raised in. He wouldn't have been caught buying a hamburger without a tie on and didn't know what to think of this unconventional style.

Through contact with Mike, Greg met and scheduled Larry Neville to come and preach. Larry was open to change. He was tired of the indifference that dominated so many churches. He was in demand and had meetings booked for the next two years, yet he was troubled. Several times he'd gone to a church and seen a tremendous move of God only to return a year later and find every one of the new converts backslidden. Out of frustration he cancelled every meeting he had scheduled and determined to find what God wanted. It was during this time that Greg called. The Lord spoke to him to go, so he went.

Larry knew that this was what he had been looking for. Here was a vision to reach those that other churches were ignoring. He went to preach in Prescott, and, while talking, Mitchell looked him in the eyes and asked, "What can I do to help you?" Larry had preached in multitudes of churches and yet these simple words staggered him. Many a time he had had to prove how he could help, but in all of his ministry no one had ever asked how they could help him.

Larry began to share what he wanted to do and he soon decided to move out to Arizona. At first he held meetings around the fellowship, but it wasn't long 'till he took a church in Phoenix. Larry was like a piece of the puzzle that slipped into place. He knew he'd found his niche.

From his early days, Larry had had a burden for the world. As a

young minister he'd gone to Africa, Europe and India. The world was all he could think about, and he found others of like mind. When he preached a revival for Jack Harris in Farmington, New Mexico, they spent half the night talking about going to India. As morning came they called Mitchell to volunteer to go. It wasn't the time then, but in 1985 both of them were able to fulfill that vision and minister in India.

### **Downey**

Mike Neville had always wanted to pastor, but nothing had ever worked out. He'd filled in a couple of times for other pastors, but always went back to evangelizing. The more that he traveled around, the sicker he became of the type of churches he saw around him. The independent churches he was traveling in were too often full of crooks, and he decided he was ready to try his hand at building a church. He knew that a church should have revival all the time. The problem was that he wasn't sure how to do it, but what he saw in the fellowship showed him it could be done.

Mike got a call from a church in Southern California that he'd preached for. They liked his humor and guitar playing. The church was running about 40 people and asked him to come (more because of his wife's piano playing than his preaching). It was a church that had problems. At one time it had run 300 people and had bought property in Downey, California. The pastor had run into problems and Neville was elected to pick up the pieces.

The people who voted him in were related to the old pastor and soon dropped out. In fact, everyone but a handful left. Those who stayed weren't startling material. Johnny Dorris had been going to the church for some time but was ready to quit, himself, when the previous pastor got him to make a commitment to stay for a year and help the new pastor.

When the Neville's came to visit Johnny and his wife, Pattie, they were watching Lenny Bruce on television. Johnny intentionally left the foul show on. This was the "best" couple in the church.

The church was located in a Hispanic neighborhood, and Mike decided they needed to reach these Mexican folk. His Okie heritage gave him no clue of how to do this, but he'd seen it was possible in the dynamic mixed churches in Arizona. When he told his church they were going to win Mexicans, twenty people left. Slowly, however, the church began to grow again.

A turning point was when they took their choir to sing in Harold

Warner's church in Tucson. His people were impacted by the praise and worship. On the ride back, the question that kept coming up was, "How can we be like Tucson?" When they came back they wanted to praise and hit the streets witnessing.

You couldn't find more of a hick than Mike. There he was in Los Angeles in cowboy boots, singing country western songs to vato locos, and the miracle was they liked it. He had never done drugs and yet he saw many who had, freed and turned around for God.

His contact with the fellowship was through fellowship. He preached for the men and talked with his brother, Larry. At first he was suspicious. He had seen a lot of crooks while evangelizing and had almost given up hope of finding the real thing. As he preached for the fellow-ship pastors, went to their homes, and became friends with them, he saw that they were real.

He never joined up or signed a card. There was nothing to join; he just got involved. Conferences changed many of the people in his church, and challenged him to begin planting churches. It wasn't long until his church was exploding and men were being sent out on a regular basis.

They began to hold their own conferences while still staying involved in Arizona. The Downey church grew to over 500. Their conferences have over a thousand coming and over 25 churches have been started as of May, 1985.

## **Europe**

In 1978, Pastor Mitchell got an invitation to speak at a conference in Europe. This was a chance to see the fountainhead of Christianity. The problem was that dry rot had set in.

An old acquaintance from Bible school was working with some home fellowships and wanted Wayman to come over. Upon arriving, he found that there was really nothing concrete happening. The conference itself never drew over 15 people and they had never been exposed to anything but a low key teaching style, but Mitchell wasn't defeated. He counseled the man to find a location in which to build a center. He told him he'd never make impact floating from place to place, but Mitchell promised to help if he'd settle down and build something stable.

One of the Bible studies was in Steinvik, Holland. A man who attended the study had some land there and the group wanted a pastor. The city was small and traditional in outlook, but it was a start. Mitchell

returned for a conference in Steinvik. The crowd was minuscule at about 30, but it wasn't the numbers that moved Mitchell. If he wanted crowds, he could have stayed in the states. God impressed upon him that this was a door into a whole new world. The opening was small, and there were obvious problems, but he got involved.

He knew that to reach a nation someone had to take the title deed, by faith. It was necessary to gain a beach head in the country to defeat Hell's dominion. God worked through nations. Redemption was linked to physical territory and these small groups were the keys to any hope of greater future revival.

The original pastor turned out to have some tremendous problems. Violations of morals had happened and the church was on the verge of collapse. Nineteen year old Rudy Van Dierman stepped out of the congregation to take over the small flock. He had been the one that brought the original people together and now he was the pastor. The church had different foundations and ideas than the Prescott church, but Mitchell supported the work and sent men over to help. The first 15 months were a nightmare for Rudy. Marriages were scared and problem after problem seemed to come up. During that whole period not one person was saved. Especially critical, Mitchell started bringing Rudy over to America for the conferences in Prescott. These times renewed Rudy's vision and let him see that these unfruitful times were actually God laying a foundation for the future.

Many of the ideas that worked so well in the States did nothing in an indifferent Holland. Rudy decided to show some movies after hearing reports in the States. He put out 6,000 flyers, 100 posters, ads in the paper and rented an auditorium. One Hundred people came out the first night, 50 the second, and 20 the third. Not one of those that came got saved.

Rudy had a rock concert, and blanketed the city with announcements. One back slider came out. Rudy was desperate and started to pray. It was then that he saw that the key to the fellowship wasn't in the techniques. It lied first in a right foundation, and Rudy started to build that into the people. He saw also that people don't respond to things but to life. What he saw in Prescott was the life of God. Life couldn't be put into a guitar amplifier or on a screen, it had to be put in the heart. More, Rudy saw that the success that was there wasn't a result of something supernatural but of work.

Rudy determined that he would give himself to building God's house. There was nothing easy in Holland. He hit the streets like other people go to work. He knew that he couldn't tell others to take in people till he did,

and so he brought some men into his home and the work and faith began to pay off. The church moved a few miles to Zwolle and began to grow. It wasn't an explosion, it was more like a man clawing his way up a steep cliff, but a young man touched by God had found his purpose and was determined to touch his nation. The people caught the vision and sent a man to Arnham, Holland. Then it reached into England with a couple from the congregation. Not content to just reach his own area, Rudy took the responsibility for the European conference and became a rallying point for an assault on Europe. It took several years to see this come to fruition, but it started with just a desire on the part of Mitchell to help.

### **Thetford, England**

England opened in a similar way. Chris Davies, though born in England, had been raised in the States. It was while he was serving in the U. S. Air Force in England that he got saved and began to get a vision for his mother country. He was burdened but had no clear idea what to do about it. He started some Bible Studies that he planned to have evolve into churches but was rudderless as to the proper direction to take in accomplishing this. He had a burden for his nation, but trying to fulfill it had nearly destroyed his marriage and left him one frustrated Englishman. He came back to the States several times looking for leadership, but it was hard to find anyone that wanted to take any responsibility for him and his wife. When he talked to denominational headquarters they told him to go to Bible School. One leader said that he was wasting his time in a nation like England that had historically rejected the gospel. He was told straight out that he was last on the list for any kind of help, and to expect little more than that they would pray for him. During the years, the only people that came over were some teen age "taste teams". They were to help on the streets but ended up turning the Davies into tour guides and baby sitters.

His wife was mad at the unconcern and the sacrifice. It seemed like no one cared and they were both rapidly coming to the conclusion that it seemed that way because no one did. It was at this low point that he heard about Pastor Mitchell and was sent a ticket to come and meet him at a crusade in Spain.

He sat down and told him his problems. Mitchell looked him in the eyes and said, "Here's what I'm willing to do" He offered to pay his way back to the Tucson Conference to get a new perspective and work some things out in his home. Chris couldn't keep the tears back. Someone seemed to care.

The trip over saved his marriage. At the conference there was a complete change in his wife Denise, and Chris began to see what might be the key to fulfilling the prophecies and visions that, till now, only seemed to mock him.

Pastor Mitchell came to preach for him in August of 1982. He found an unorganized home study that was headed nowhere. It was everything that Mitchell wanted to avoid. They sat around in a little circle singing Sunday school songs and doing kiddie hand motions. Yet, Mitchell saw in Chris a man who had paid a real price, and had brought together a group of people.

Mitchell walked in and took control for one service. He shook them up when he told them to stand, and then directed them to line their chairs up in rows. He said, "I'm not going to teach or dialogue tonight but I'm going to preach and I want to be able to look you in the eyes" He wasn't there to coax or plead but to speak as a herald.

At the end of the service, he challenged that group to stop being just a group and become a congregation. When he got together with Chris, he told him he ought to stop the kiddie stuff. Men won't come when you play little games, but if you get people to pray and praise God, they will move this city.

Chris had been waiting for this kind of direction. He'd done what others had said to do, with little success, and was open to something new. It wasn't Mitchell who turned the church, it was Chris who latched onto ideas generated by the Spirit and saw them bring his vision into fulfillment.

A church which had been mellow to the point of death began to throb with a divine militancy. Here was what Mitchell saw as the hope of the church: God helping Prescott to be a resource for pastors around the world. Mitchell knew that this process was the key to continuing life.

It would be easy to just build a few churches and then spend time traveling around the group keeping them in line. The world was too big for that and the opportunities to large. The future wasn't in numbers or in the size of openings, but in releasing men to the will of God. One lost and struggling sheep salvaged and redeemed was worth all 99 fat and woolly ones safely planted in the security of the pen.

Everyone talks about winning the world, but the bottom line is that only a few are doing it.

## Chapter Seventeen

### Philippines

1979 brought the Prescott ministries into contact with an important part of their future. The developing of the church in the Third World. Some Foursquare missionaries had invited pastors Mitchell and Harris to come over and do crusades in the Philippines. It wasn't much fun for them. They felt resistance to the idea of crusade ministry. Many of the missionaries were opposed to evangelism and altar calls and little or no preparation was made for the meetings. On top of all this, the places that had been picked for them to stay seemed designed to present the Philippines in the worst possible light.

The meetings themselves bordered on disaster. The sound equipment was little better than yelling and the only advertising was what they brought with them. Yet, there were some contacts made, and Mitchell caught a vision of a strategy to reach that nation.

He set up a return meeting and, this time, brought equipment and advertising with him. He felt God dealing with him that movies would work so he brought two with him. The strategy was to show part of a movie to draw out a crowd and then minister to them before finishing the film. The first night, it was obvious they had hit on a tremendous tool. In a church designed to hold 200, 700 were crammed in and many more were turned away.

The pastor stood in front of the biggest crowd he'd ever seen and began to take an offering. It was a disaster. These men had never learned the simplest methods of winning the lost.

The next night they showed the movie, "A Distant Thunder" and the response in this backward community to the film was overwhelming. During the movie, the audience was audibly moaning as the story developed. Toward the end of the film, large parts of the crowd were weeping and the whole place was under conviction. The Philippino pastor knew what to do this time, and stepped up to the mike and called for those who wanted to get saved. The workers were swamped with hungry souls. Several pastors were excited and began to tie on to evangelism, with their churches jumping by hundreds in attendance.

### Trouble in Paradise

The response was positive and the opportunity obvious, but the

exposure to the unquenchable needs of the world was hard to adjust to. Mitchell had brought several of the young pastors with him. These men had been excited about winning the world . . . until they saw it. Manila looks beautiful on post cards because the heat, humidity, and smells are omitted. These men were oppressed by the poverty they saw. Guilt swept over them as they saw how much they had compared to the needs of others.

The press of humanity was shocking to their western minds. Every-where they looked there were people pushing and shoving against each other. The whole environment seemed to be filled with an underlying violence. People were struggling to survive. Plants ate flesh and insects drank blood. Before long this began to wear on their nerves.

When Hank Houghton got off the plane from preaching in the Philippines, he shocked one of his disciples. Excitedly the man asked how he'd liked the Philippines and Hank shot back, "As far as I'm concerned they can all go to hell!" Harris returned to tell his excited men, "It's hopeless. We're fooling ourselves to think we can win the world. The task is too big." He was gripped by fear at the thought of taking his family to live there when a mere two week visit had shaken him so deeply.

Several men were not your typical white Anglo Saxon Protestants, and yet, they found themselves experiencing prejudices and attitudes that made them uncomfortable.

Ernie Lister thought he could cope. He was a Navajo Indian. He'd lived on the reservation. At first glance he could pass for a Philippino himself, but looks weren't the critical issue, it was culture. One night as he went out for a walk to try and find his bearings, he looked up at the heavens which had filled his life on the reservation; stunned to see that even the pattern of the stars was upside down here.

Here was a challenge similar to the one Jesus gave His disciples. Jesus had told them to go into the world, and they nodded their heads, "yes" and dreamed of crowds and excitement. It seemed like fun. But when the reality came to pass they faced their own narrow Jewish prejudice against Gentiles, and the strangeness of unclean customs and people.

These young men were feeling the very real forces that caused most American pastors to talk about the world and yet do nothing to reach it. The world of reality was different than the world of dreams. It was full of unclean smells, foods that attacked the digestive system, prejudice that ran both directions, and real fear of strange people and situations.

Time did wonders at causing the pain to recede and the vision to rise

again, bringing these men to a place where they were willing to go again, but each time they arrived it was a tremendous shock to them as well as an opportunity. Yet, the local preachers being helped and the multitude of souls saved made coming in worth all the hassles and pressures.

As the pastors traveled into other nations they had no desire to capture these works and men. Even if someone did try to join up there was nothing to join . . . except a vision for the world.

What the fellowship did have was scriptural truth and tools for evangelism that were above culture. They were truths that were meant to be in every church in the world. These foreign churches didn't need to be turned into American clones. It was critical that they were allowed to present the gospel in their own unique way. Language, instruments, clothing styles, buildings, and equipment were all unimportant, but many churches needed help to see what was important.

### **Evangelism**

These churches were blinded to the most obvious methods of touching their own nations. Acts 15:14 states the purpose of God, ". . . how God at first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name" Yet the churches act as if they have no idea why God put them on the Earth. In each nation the powerful force of human flesh in rebellion against God has warped the gospel away from its roots.

Most churches are hiding inside their own four walls. Pastors seldom challenge workers to reach even their neighbors, and the churches know nothing about available evangelistic tools. Pastor Mitchell could come in and shake churches by no more than saying it was possible to reach the lost, and showing them how to show a movie or run a revival and promote it.

Crusades were especially effective in the Third World. The denominational missionaries parroted empty warnings about how this kind of evangelism had passed away and claimed that the only effective method was to go door-to-door or friend-to-friend. The facts remained obvious, though, that a crusade could make a great impact. A crusade can stir tremendous number of people, and if it's handled right, many of these can be drawn into the sponsoring church.

Simple things like street preaching, confrontational witnessing, and a priority on soul winning are revolutionary concepts to many Third World pastors. As these pastors see the power of evangelism

demonstrated and are personally challenged to do it, many do a spiritual about-face.

### **Altar Calls**

The carnal nature is offended by waiting for others. In a fast paced, fast food age people like their religion in small doses, and an altar call is anathema. It may mean the difference between heaven or hell to others, but they're worried about the extra ten minutes it costs them. Just as horrifying is the thought of having to publicly declare that there are any problems in their lives. The difficulty and embarrassment are the very reasons that a public declaration is so necessary.

Truth is presented in some form in most churches. What most don't do is to force people to make a decision as to what they are going to do about it. It would be foolish for a vacuum cleaner salesman to bring a powerful presentation of his product and then walk out at the end with-out ever giving the customer a chance to buy. Yet the church does this week after week and somehow considers this wisdom.

Mitchell was out of the American West. The sinners he dealt with were as wild and untamed as the maverick cattle the west was founded on. You didn't change their lives by a momentary connecting of the eyes or a nod of the head. They needed to be roped, hog tied and have a brand thrown on them.

The fellowship's strength isn't talent or appearance. It is its willingness to repent. At conference in Prescott, the altars are filled not with parishioners, but pastors. Men who have an openness to God and want to be right.

As the churches moved into Europe, Australia, and the Third World, they found people who had never been forced to a point of decision. This also meant they had never been given the assurance that comes with a public commitment and prayer with another believer.

At first tremendous resistance would rise against altar calls and pastors would declare how it wouldn't work with their people, but the Holy Ghost would make it work.

In India, at a pastor's conference, the leaders had been somewhat cool to Pastor Mitchell until they saw the response from the visiting national ministers. At the altar, pastors were getting right with God. These normally shy and restrained men were kneeling in the dirt in white pants weeping and crying out to God. It's hard to argue with what God does.

The New Testament church wasn't sure about Gentiles. If it had been left up to the disciples the church would have stayed Jewish, but they left room in their lives for God to speak. Peter had to have a vision replayed three times to even go visit a Gentile's house, and when he finally went to Cornelius's house he was afraid to go alone. What changed Peter and the church's attitude was when they saw that God had filled them with the Holy Ghost. He chose to call these people his own. When God is given a chance, He honors the use of altar calls in His church in this same dramatic way.

As people come forward at the end of a church service and deal with God, two things happen. First, those who have been convicted have a chance to deal with what has been said and are individually ministered to by others in the congregation. More important it gives the receptive heart a chance to meet with God. God can do more in a couple of minutes at an altar than a pastor can in weeks of preaching and counseling. Second, it knits the congregation together as they pray for those that God is dealing with. They become part of the birthing process. Most hospitals in America now encourage husbands to get involved with the birth of their children. There is a special bond and sympathy that comes from that experience. The same is true of the church. Something is lost when the spiritual birthing process of salvation and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost are moved into a back room.

### **Praise**

The carnal human nature hates praise, and unless it's held in check by the Word and the Spirit, the church has a tendency to drift toward an acceptable liturgy. No one wants to be different and Christians are no exception. The reasonable thing to do is to develop a non-offensive type of worship. History records every revival as filled with worship and praise. But over time, hand clapping is replaced by cantatas and shouts are replaced by yawns. The problem with this is that the Scripture clearly calls for a demonstration of love and worship that runs in opposition to the mellow and the lukewarm. As the fellowship came in contact with new churches it was to challenge them to real praise. Not a feminine pattie-cake, but an unashamed commitment of the heart.

In Holland, Rudy Van Dierman had real trouble with this. The Dutch people are restrained and cool by nature. It seemed that the exuberant praise he saw in Prescott would violate their national character. Only over time did he see this wasn't a problem of culture but of a carnal nature. At a conference in Prescott, Mitchell preached on David and the glorious

praise and joy he exhibited as he came into Jerusalem with the ark. When David was mocked for it by his own wife he responded, "I'll be yet more vile."

The Holy Spirit spoke to Rudy and he knew he needed to get his people to praise. He returned determined. In a short time he saw this simple act of obedience change the character of his people's lives. These restrained people soon were filled with a burning zeal. The coolness in worship died off, and in its place came a fire that released the people to boldness in every area. Soon men were talking about being called to preach. Far from driving people off, it caused them to be different than the world around them and be the answer to many who were looking for something alive.

People are called to praise in every culture.

## **Prayer**

Another thing the church talks about a lot, but doesn't do, is pray. The three things that Brother Mitchell claims are most critical in the building of a church are prayer, prayer and prayer.

At one of the first pastor's conferences in the Philippines Pastor Mitchell preached on prayer. This was typical of what others preached at conferences, and his words made little impact until the next morning when he showed up at the official prayer meeting. Though it was called a prayer meeting, there was little prayer. Since the ministers were sleeping on the floor of the church, they were all there. A man stood up and led choruses and gave little exhortations. It was obvious no one was going to touch Heaven this way. Mitchell grabbed the man in charge and said, "We're changing the program, I want you to get that guy off the platform so we can pray!"

Mitchell and Harris knelt down in front of hundreds of pastors and workers and started to pray. At first everyone just watched, but as time passed, they started to join in. One Philippino supervisor came up and told them that he had pastored for 25 years and "I've never before seen an American missionary pray."

Jeremiah 17:5 says, ". . . Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm ..... The pastor and church that doesn't pray curses its own future. Without prayer, crusades, films, and revivals all become just another lifeless gimmick.

## **Money**

Jesus linked heaven and Earth when He told His disciples that two Kingdoms exist: God's and Mammon's. The church isn't freed from the dangers of money by being poor. It is only handicapped from doing the will of God.

Many churches are afraid of the danger of pastors having too much and buying fancy cars, or gold bathroom fixtures. The church needs to be just as afraid of the people having too much. Jesus spent a lot of time attacking those who attended church and were bound by greed. In the Old Testament God linked His presence and blessing to the bringing in of the people's tithes and gifts to His temple.

Many pastors are afraid to approach the topic of money. Carnal motives cause people to put pressure on the church to avoid this delicate subject. The pastor feels guilty about taking offerings and often tries to carry the weight of the church by his own family's personal sacrifice.

Without funds buildings are run down, evangelism is impossible, and church planting is an unfulfilled dream. The first thing that Mitchell learned to attack was this poverty mentality.

He didn't come for money. The fact was that everything he did cost him something, but if he could reach the world from Prescott, then anyone could obey God if they, by faith, allowed God's Word to work with people and their finances.

In the Third World, this was especially critical. A subtle beggar mentality often arose in pastors and churches that felt they couldn't raise what was needed to evangelize their land. On first contact the visiting pastors often had to turn away outstretched hands. Most Third World churches had been built on a welfare system. Missionaries built on a foundation that could never be supported by the national church and things were kept going only by a financial fix from overseas.

It would have been easy for Prescott to give them what they wanted, but it wasn't God's way. Pastor Mitchell challenged them to believe to meet their own needs. He was willing to come in and help with finances at critical times, but each church must learn the dignity of meeting its own needs. The fact is that churches are handicapped if they are not allowed to bear the weight of winning their own nation.

This was a truth God led Prescott into. It was hard to sit comfortably at home and watch people in Mexico struggling to get to church without cars or adequate transportation, so the Prescott church gave them a bus

with a brand new rebuilt engine. They ran it without water and it ended on a scrap heap in Hermissillo. Then they bought them a van, and a pastor loaned it to two kids in the church who killed a man in an accident on a bridge. Only when something was paid for by the people does it have the value it needs to be a blessing. This doesn't mean that the churches never help each other. The Mexican churches have helped churches in the States, and American pastors have helped their Mexican partners, but just like every new church must learn to be self sufficient so must each national church.

A major change occurred in Mexico when the church in Nogales raised money for new carpet. They didn't have to have it, but they wanted it so the people sacrificed to put it in. Some fasted for a week: others sold things. No one else paid for it. It was theirs and they were proud that they paid for it. Soon they were planting churches at an explosive rate as they learned that they didn't need to look to anyone but God and their congregation to meet their needs.

### **Masculine Image**

The church hasn't always taken its call to win the world seriously. Many times the only ones willing to go overseas are women who have no outlets for ministry at home. This has led to a highly female profile in the Third World.

Even in Europe and Australia, there is a loss of a masculine image. When Mitchell went to Australia the first time he was shocked to find that the men seemed to be wimps. He wondered if there was something broken in the national character that caused this. It was only after longer exposure that he saw that the problem wasn't the men in the churches, but the leaders. No man is greater than his teacher, and the church was pumping out effeminate leadership.

Mitchell made as much impact by just being who and what he was: as by anything he said. Here was the new image that many men were looking for.

### **Discipleship**

Everyone talks about making disciples, but few are doing it. The Christian Fellowship Churches have created a powerful platform to speak from about discipleship. Hundreds of churches have been sent out. Men are going into the world at a rapid rate.

Mitchell has been able to share with other pastors the possibility that lies in release as well as the dangers. This was no simple cure-all. Discipleship is hard work just like parenting is, but it offers great fulfillment, and is the hope of the church.

## Chapter Eighteen

### **"And God multiplied the church."**

Many in the religious world ignored the ideas Mitchell had because they felt discipleship and church planting were too slow. At first the growth did seem to move forward at a snail's pace, but each year has brought an acceleration. Like the river flowing out of the New Jerusalem, the farther it gets from the source the deeper and stronger it becomes.

In 1970, when the Mitchell's arrived in Prescott, it looked like they were committing spiritual suicide by taking another little dying church. That year God moved and the growth was enough to keep most pastors excited for the rest of their lives. Mitchell was excited, but not contented. Here was one of his most useful traits. He could see God's hand in small steps forward. He gloried in seeing one soul saved, or in a troublemaker changing into a helper. Yet, without becoming dissatisfied or losing track of the everyday work of God, he dreamed big dreams and pushed himself forward to see greater things in the future.

1973 marked the launching of the first churches. By the end of that year three novice pastors were floundering in different cities, and absorbing vast amounts of time and money. Like young eaglets when mom returns with food, these pastors pestered Prescott. They screamed for attention, letting mom know they were starving, pleading and begging for help while producing little more than a nuisance. This part of church planting appealed to few. It would be comparable to trying to talk your wife into having a baby by taking her into the delivery room in the last moments of a birth, and in between the contractions and screams asking her if she doesn't want a baby too.

The next few years were marked by launching new churches every few months and training new men.

It was in 1977 that the acceleration rooted in discipleship began to be apparent as those first churches to be planted began launching their own men. Now it wasn't just a single body attempting to fill the earth, but three churches; Prescott, Flagstaff, and Tucson. By that summer there were 25 churches out. In addition, Ruben Reyna and Mike

Neville were starting to get involved with Mitchell and the idea of church planting.

Each year increased the number of mother churches, and therefore, the number of works being sent out. This was a slow process, but it was

unstoppable. By 1980, the number of churches out of Prescott reached 75. Ruben had planted his first church in 1978 and had four others out by 1980. This was the year that Mike Neville launched the first pioneer church out of Downey as Johnny Dorris went into Ontario, California.

It was this year that the first fourth generation pastor took a church. When Dave Stephenson took the Payson church, he was saved and disciplined under a man who was saved and disciplined by a man who was saved and disciplined in Prescott. The chain was lengthening; but the quality was the same. Dave was a top flight young man as loyal as any in the fellowship, and just as qualified. Discipleship and the release of the church wasn't just a hope, but a proven reality.

In 1983, many more of the churches were coming on line to plant churches, over 165 works were functioning. Reyna and Neville had planted another 23 works in addition to these.

As the summer of 1985 rolled around, the multiplying impact of the fellowship was becoming obvious. Over 250 churches were directly related to the Prescott church. Ruben Reyna had 45 churches out, and Mike Neville had another 25.

These churches were literally beginning to span the globe, with 35 churches in Mexico, 21 churches in Australia, 13 churches in Europe, 5 churches in the Philippines, 4 churches in Canada, and churches in Guam, New Zealand, and Japan.

It has become almost impossible to keep track of all the new works starting. Whole states begin to be rapidly filled with new fellowships and every year more congregations are sending out workers for the first time.

### **Pathfinders**

In history there have been many who laid out paths for others to follow. Davy Crockett found a trail through the Cumberland Mountains that opened a whole new part of the continent of America. Others laid trails that led to their destination, but they were often far from the fastest or shortest routes.

One of these was Lansford W. Hastings, who, in the opening of California, became a man of infamy. Being there in the earliest days, he became a leader by default, but he seldom led the right direction. He wrote a book on the trail to follow to California without ever going there himself. He led hundreds of people down impossible paths because he wanted them to pay \$10 a head for his guidance.

It was Hastings who talked the Donner party into leaving the safe route for his. That decision led to cannibalism, slow death and immeasurable suffering. A handful made it to California, but only a fool or a madman would pick a trail that forced them to eat most of their relatives to get to their goal.

In the same way, the church has been following paths, not because they were the best or the fastest, but because somebody had laid them out and everyone just kept traveling down them.

Mitchell was looking for new spiritual paths. He'd followed too many dead ends that had been laid out by others. He was tired of going in endless circles and wanted God's direction.

He stood at a critical crossroad. He could lead the men towards greater control or towards a loose fellowship. There was obvious appeal in control. Subtle pressures worked to say that nothing could be accomplished without his guidance. Logic seemed to point to the more efficient use of men and resources that would be utilized if everything was controlled. Besides, hadn't God put these men into his hands for him to direct?

God intervened at that moment of time. Mitchell was visiting Australia in November of 1980, preaching for Greg Johnson. That night, in a motel room, God called Mitchell to go to Perth, West Australia, to pastor. For most of the night, God began to make clear what he wanted with him in the future. The Spirit brought back those prophecies that had been spoken over him, reminding him of his early call into the world.

Isaiah's promise of "repairing the breach and restoring of broken walls" began to make new sense. As he looked at his Bible, he saw afresh the promise that God would cause him "to raise up the foundations of many generations." His future wasn't in controlling but in releasing. The greatest work still lay ahead.

That night God spoke to him several promises out of scripture that would be his if he would step out in faith and follow: (Isaiah 61:5) "And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plow men and your vine dressers." (Isaiah 60:5) "Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee."

He knew that his future was linked to Asia and its teeming millions. Mitchell could see that he was called to throw fire into the world. He had a nice thing in Prescott. The church was throbbing with revival, and the

men would do whatever he asked. He wasn't a kid anymore and it seemed logical to stay put, but God was saying, "Go" He would have to trust God with what had gone before; too much still lay ahead.

That night he saw the key place that Australia would play in world evangelism. It was a paradise on the edge of a pit. Most of the large cities of the world were black holes absorbing the life around them. They were drawing in the multitudes and then chewing them up. Australia offered a place of resources and sanctuary on the edge of this world. One third of humanity sat just a few hours away by plane. Australia had a good economy and was an excellent base to work from. The nation was a melting pot of peoples, nations and races which gave the people a more international outlook. Many couples had passports from all over the world and had access to nations which Americans could never enter. It was a natural for world outreach. Mitchell purposed to respond to the challenge.

### **Developing Leaders**

He began to prepare the men in the States to take over the leadership that would be left to them. Decentralized conferences had already started shifting some of the load to new shoulders. Mitchell accelerated the move.

Special leadership meetings were developed to challenge and spark these men. Speakers stimulated their thinking and discussions focused what God expected of them. The leaders Mitchell picked were men that God was separating out to be a help to those around them. They pastored churches with resources that could benefit the other churches in their area. He began to drill into them the attitude that they were where they were not to be served but to serve. Churches that were being planted could find help from these key churches. They sent groups, gave counsel, and hosted conferences. The Prescott church began to send out more and more men who didn't even look back to Prescott for help, but relied on the leadership that was close to them.

The usefulness of hydroelectric plants doesn't lie in one big enough to run the whole world, but to have many small ones to meet the local needs. The Third World is crippled by debt from giant power projects that have turned out to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Bigger is being discovered to not always be better.

In Arizona, Hoover Dam generates tremendous power that is shipped to California. There, each city has a power station that harnesses this and sends it to the streets where transformers send it into individual homes. In the same way each leader and conference in the fellowship became a

generator of spiritual power. Direction and challenge were generated and channeled to other key churches that filtered this to individuals who touched their cities. These leaders became key sources of help to their area. As they divided and multiplied, there was a great acceleration of vision.

In the Prescott conference, Pastor Mitchell began to take a low profile by seldom coming to the platform. He began highlighting the men who God had raised up. These men rose to the challenge, and a new surge of growth showed God's confirming of this direction.

This had its dangers, and problems did arise. Not all the men were motivated by the same vision or intensity. Some were thrust prematurely into roles they weren't able to handle. In these leaders, there was a wide diversity of hopes and beliefs. Some of the men were consumed by vision and only wanted to win the world, some were developers of resources and builders of churches. Others were led towards structure and because of their personality wanted things controlled and orderly. When channeled through one leader, they had been forced to function in co-operation. When released, one had to trust that the contact and collision of wills would create a responsive fellowship, and not a battle of egos. Yet, this was the future, and the men stepped into it. Leaders never seem ready to lead. At first none of the men had seemed able to pastor, and it wasn't surprising that the job before them now seemed too large also. Mexico was released to Mexican leadership. Men who had been planted out of 2nd and 3rd generation churches were reminded that Prescott was not a denominational headquarters. They were to look to the leaders that God had linked them with for direction. As a church rises up with resources it should naturally begin to serve those around it. This service is what builds confidence in leadership and makes submission to their authority easy. When a man serves those around him, he doesn't need a denominational structure to enforce his power.

### **Australia**

The Perth church had started with a surge of growth. From the day they finally opened the door of the building, 60-70 people were coming, and it grew rapidly to over 100. It soon became obvious that great distances caused problems for men. The couple that had originally gone over lost their bearings, and Greg and Robin Johnson had to replace them in Perth. The church was about 9 months old when they arrived. The transition wasn't easy. The church fell to 90 people, but it was a healthy regrouping and weeding out for the church.

Australia was a beautiful place and the Johnson's should have fit right in, but it wasn't that easy. Many lessons were learned from those first couples.

Culture shock was real. They spoke English in Australia, but they thought different, laughed at different jokes, and had their own prejudices about Americans.

The hardest thing was the isolation the pastor faced. It was only when they had left the fellowship and support that they realized how important the whole environment was to the men. It became obvious that these couples needed to be brought back to the states a couple times a year if they were to maintain their vision and thrust. This wasn't inexpensive but it was vital, at least until a base of fellowship and ministry was developed in that land.

The Johnson's spent 22 months in Perth. During that time they saw a tremendous foundation laid. Several struggling Australian pastors shut their churches up and just came into the Potter's House. These men began to change from the cream puff style of their training to men of real fire and determination. Here was the proof that if someone would come into these nations as a pattern God would turn them around.

Lynn and Linda Litton had come over to help the church get started. Lynn had been on his way to Australia to start a pot farm when he stopped to visit his brother in Prescott and got saved. He finally made it over, but it was to plant gospel seeds instead of marijuana.

He was a hard-headed, determined man. Serving in Vietnam, he'd been a tank commander, and bore blue marks under the skin on his face from powder burns when a mine went off and destroyed his hearing and one eye. Even as a Christian he was a little intimidating at 200 lbs., with fiery red hair and beard. Lynn was a fighter but no one was sure that he could be a preacher. Somewhat distant from others in Flagstaff he had decided that he was going to learn to lead sinners to the Lord. A hippie came to the front and since that was Lynn's back-ground he figured this was a good guy to start with.

He went up to the altar and leaned down to pray for the guy. As he bent over his hand caught in his long hair and yanked his head into the altar. A look of terror filled the young man's face as he looked over at Lynn, and wondered what this guy was going to do to him. It was less than a great start. Lynn was nervous but pressed on in. He put his arm around the sinner's shoulder and, looking in his eyes, meant to say, "can I pray for you," but instead came out with "can I play with you." His start

as a spiritual leader was less than startling.

Few encouraged him at first. He was determined, though, and he was sent out of the Perth church to pioneer in Geraldton. Lynn became a real leader, and the church became a solid work that sent men out to touch Australia.

## **Mitchell**

Pastor Mitchell came over to take the Perth church when it was running about 140. He and Johnson merely traded places. Greg had come back to conference planing to ask to be assistant pastor in Prescott. He was shocked to find himself taking the leadership of Prescott and Mitchell taking Perth.

Pastor Mitchell and his wife fell in love with the land and the people immediately. While others saw problems with culture, all he could see was a great spiritual open door. The church vibrated with life. At first the Australians had been hesitant to praise, but that soon broke down. Their praise was the most radical in the fellowship, with people rattling seats and whistling. Mitchell finally had to preach against excess to bring things down to a dull roar.

The city was a natural for outreach. People on the weekends flowed out to malls that were wide open to preaching and literature hand outs. Beaches became outreach points. Strangest of all was the lack of any kind of competition. In the States there are churches competing on every corner, but Perth was a spiritual wasteland with no one that believed in the full gospel message. Mitchell cranked the church up into high gear.

He and his wife had been there three months when they had a simple fellowship at the church on a Sunday afternoon. Pastor Mitchell bought buckets of chicken and they all had a feast. Afterwards he pulled out a map and told the congregation, "Our vision is to plant churches. We have Geraldton out and that's great, but you tell me where you would like to go"

Thirty five places were called out that afternoon. Many were in Australia, but some represented places outside the nation; Hobart Tasmania, Singapore, Glasgow Scotland, and India.

Mitchell told them, "OK. If were going to do this that means that a lot of you are going to have to be those that go. That means that we are going to have to enlarge our financial base. We've got to have more people and a larger facility."

As they talked of these simple ideas and goals, something changed

in that congregation. It wasn't Mitchell saying, "This is my program-you have to join," but it was their ideas and input. That day the vision was implanted.

As the church reached 190 they held their first conference in Perth. It was a crucial period. Mitchell invited the other pastors and shocked everyone by offering to pay for their motel rooms and food. He'd learned that the biggest part of the week was the fellowship that came as the ministers were challenged, stayed and ate together. His church only had 200, and the Australian pastors couldn't believe he could do all of this. They were even more shocked when he launched churches into Port Headland and Adelaide on the last night. Good Australian men were tying in. Frank Mitchell was salvaged in that conference. The Dyers had come in from an Abo camp. Carvelle had come in from Mandarin, and Steve O'Keef came in from Midland.

This was threatening to the organization. They could see that this church was going to take Australia. It had alienated them when a man had come from the U.S. and been successful, and now that Mitchell was there and holding his own conferences, a division started. Mitchell still went to the national conferences, but the openness of the other pastors soon changed to opposition.

Mitchell wasn't going to be stopped. During the 15 months that he was there he saw 5 churches planted and the Perth church grew to 250. Men were being prepared that would not just take Australia but the world.

When Mike Mastin took the church from Mitchell, the Australian churches went on to plant men in England and Germany as well as 18 churches in Australia.

## Chapter Nineteen

### Larry Neville

Larry Neville had been stirred for the Third World for years. As an evangelist he'd bankrupted himself to be able to go to India and other places. He saw the need but wasn't sure how he and his family could respond to it.

The fellowship had appealed to him because of its dynamics of revival, and he had jumped into it with a complete commitment. At first, he went around the churches as an evangelist. Then a church opened in Phoenix. For the next several years he learned that getting revival and making disciples is harder than believing in it. He beat his head against the city of Phoenix. With nearly two million people around him, his frustration boiled at being unable to find only a small core of people that wanted to really serve God. The church finally began to blossom and develop men at the very time that Pastor Mitchell called him about coming to Prescott to work with him as his assistant.

This became a turning point. There, he saw first hand how Mitchell operated and worked. They built a relationship of trust and understanding. More than this, Mitchell began to fire up his vision for the world. After prayer in the mornings, Pastor Mitchell and Larry would sit over a couple of cups of coffee and talk about the needs of lost masses of humanity. It excited and scared Neville. He wasn't a young romantic kid now. He knew what the world was like and the fairy tale visions of revival were tinged by the reality of poverty and need. He had an accepted ministry and a solid future in the States. He knew that he could build a strong church and financial base. He was afraid of going into the world and being like others whom he had seen — broke and begging. He wanted to convince himself that God wanted him to build a big church and then fly overseas several times a year holding crusades. But, as Mitchell would talk he was stirred, and found it harder and harder to justify he and his wife's attitudes about being part-timers in world evangelism.

When Pastor Mitchell went to Australia, Larry read this to mean that the door was closed on his going overseas. He figured that this was his opportunity to build a church to reach out from. As an evangelist, he'd found the most beautiful city in America; Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He figured if he was going to spend his life in a city, he might as well enjoy it. He and his wife went back to Pennsylvania, and there, among German food, picturesque forests, and Mennonite farms, pioneered a church. The

first year was a success. Great people began to come in. It was all that he had dreamed of, but something just wasn't right. He and his wife sacrificed to buy their little dream farm house. They told themselves that this would make them happy, but it wasn't that easy.

Larry came to the summer Bible conference and on Thursday night the Tucson choir sang "Go Ye Into All The World." Then, as they sang out "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of those that bring good news," his fantasy fell apart. During the song God spoke to him and said. "There it is. What are you doing in Pennsylvania?" That night was a battle. He didn't take his ride back to the motel, but ran the 2 miles. He wanted to do world evangelism, but he wanted to do it from Lancaster, not from Manila. He wrestled with God that night and God won.

The next morning he went to Mitchell and broke down and told him, "I'll go."

### **The Philippines**

The fellowship churches had been involved with this island nation for several years. Crusades and pastor's conferences had been held. These were always exciting events.

When Harry Hills led a team into General Santos on Mindanao, astounding crowds of over 10,000 came out. The problem was that the communists were upset by the interest. This was a hotbed of rebel activity, and everyone was a little nervous.

Harry was preaching away in the choppy style of a man being interpreted, but the people were wrapped around his little finger. Suddenly a motorcycle circled the outside of the crowd and a machine gun fired. Half of the crowd fell to the ground and the other 5,000 started to run.

Harry was so busy preaching he really didn't even know what had happened. He looked around for support and found his best friend and back up man, Joe Campbell, lying behind a concrete wall hiding from the gunfire. Joe caught Harry's eye and yelled, "Keep preaching, you're losing the crowd!"

Harry couldn't help thinking that it was easy for him to say that, lying there safe, but he kept preaching and the crowd drifted back.

It was obvious that God was involved in the Philippines. It was just as obvious that there was a real need for principles of evangelism and discipleship. As contacts with good men had been made, the fellowship had even sponsored the starting of a couple of churches. However, it was

growing clear that a lasting impact couldn't be made from a distance. There needed to be a pattern right there in Manila.

Discipleship takes contact. In some cases, as with Chris Davies and Rudy Van Dierman, this could be done by bringing them to conferences and sending over preachers to their churches. The Philippines were going to be a different situation. All the pastors there had seen was old dead religion. Many American missionaries going overseas have no practical experience in ministry. They walk out of seminary and into leadership in a foreign country. Most are non-aggressive intellectuals who try to move fiery cultures with low key "sharing". It wasn't the same thing to bring a Third World pastor to a conference in the United States as a European. They often went through such culture shock and disorientation that the impact was lost or negative.

Someone needed to go who would break down the intimidation of the west and build dignity and a relationship. Jack Harris was talking with a couple of Philippino pastors who had been brought over to the States. As they were talking about the needs in that land, Jack casually expressed how much they loved the men and people there. The Philippino pastor was stunned. Tears came to his eyes. Jack asked, "What's wrong?"

The pastor replied that, in the years of his ministry, he'd never had a white person say that he loved him. These were the kinds of barriers that only time and contact could breakdown.

A large number of those sent overseas were administrators and educators, many from liberal churches who built wrong mentalities and patterns. They needed to see a pattern of evangelism.

Larry Neville felt that God wanted him to move his family to Manila and work with Sammy Morris. Sammy and his wife had pastored for 6 years and were up and coming leaders in the denomination. At a pastor's conference, he had heard Pastor Mitchell preach, and it changed his life. He knew this man was different than any he had met before. He began to pray that a man like that would come over to them. When Larry came, he put himself under his direction.

The cultural problems weren't always easy to deal with. Even to those that spoke English, words often carried different meanings. One American pastor talked about "uncovered women" from Corinthians. To the Philippinoes this meant that she was naked. Larry would leave prayer in the morning and tell Sammy, "See you later." Sammy would wait around for him to come back and wonder why Larry had lied. He told two young men he was sending to the printer, "Go catch a bus!" Their direct

interpretation of the command could only mean that Larry wanted them to commit suicide. It seemed strange when Larry would say, "I'm going to run home" Sammy thought it would be better to drive the 6 miles. In spite of it all, the communication and intimidation barriers began to break down and things began to move.

Larry's time pioneering in Phoenix and Lancaster hadn't been all wasted. He knew how to raise up a church, evangelize, and work with men. He got off the plane firing his gospel guns and hit the ground running. He wanted to raise up a pattern church that could impact the hundreds of pastors who were responsive but confused as to the direction to go. The Third World had a hunger to learn and many were tired of the unproductive ideas around them.

Larry knew that what was being done in the States would work even better in the Third World. Those nations are closer to the lifestyle and the culture of the times of Christ. The New Testament patterns freed them from the impossible requirements of trying to raise up expensive training programs, buildings, and institutions. Larry zeroed in on the core that was beginning to come. Whatever that first few became would be copied by all those that came afterwards.

The first few months saw 30 coming. At seven months, things started to break and it moved to over 70. That first year was spent building into them evangelism, giving, praise and vision.

It was hard to see how these people could even live. The most anyone made was \$100 a month, and the majority made a fraction of that. It seemed unjust, and he had to remind himself over and over that we live in an unjust world. We can't change the economy of the world, but we can give the churches of the world the dignity of the gospel. They seemed to survive on nothing from his American perspective, but he challenged them to carry the expenses of the church, and they did!

As time passed, it became obvious that there was no difference between the men there and those in Prescott. They had families, worked, and supported their homes and church. When challenged to live the gospel, they did it. These men were just as tremendous as any in America, Mexico, or Australia.

The church had a Philippino distinctive, but the praise and the commitment were just the same as the other churches in the fellowship. For the people to just come to church was a formidable task. Few had cars, and so they were forced to ride "Jeepnees" or walk. In that land of storms and hurricanes, people have real hang-ups about the rain. From childhood

they are taught that if they go out in the rain they'll get pneumonia. Against unfavorable odds and prejudices, the church grew. The longer they came, the more committed they became. Seventy per-cent are forced to walk to church and they now bring their kids, rain or shine, to hear the Word of God.

In addition the saints have a real vision to evangelize their city and nation. Most mornings, teams will gather after prayer to go out to preach on the streets. In the evenings, films are taken to parts of the city where mini crusades are held.

### **Teams**

One powerful tool has been the use of teams. Just as Paul came into an area with a group of pastors to reach it, teams are used today. They don't have to live there because of jet planes that allow them to come and help the workers that are already there. In a team, an experienced pastor brings several pastors with him. These pastors pay their own way, plus the expenses of the crusades and minister to the ministers that attend pastors conferences. At night they hold crusades to show these ministers what can be done.

The crusade teams that come in from the States each month is revolutionizing pastors. New doors open every day for new places of out-reach. Conferences have such draw that they have to be limited to a few hundred pastors and workers to keep them beneficial.

It's always an adventure. A crusade in Manila is far from hazardous duty, but as you leave Manila, you move into a more and more adventurous climate. Thousands come and miracles are so common that they can never be fully recorded: blind eyes open, cripples walk, the deaf hear, tumors dissolve and heaven descends, but it's still in a foreign land.

Harry Hills and Hank Houghton will never forget being 8 hours from shore in a boat in which the outriggers were being torn apart by the rising tide. In times like that men can't help but begin wondering what they are doing there.

Another time Harry arrived at the meeting so sunburned that he made a boiled lobster look uncooked. Lying paralyzed in the hotel by pain, he had to face the added insult of having to barricade the door against the prostitutes yelling for "Joe" (the Philippino nickname for Americans) to open the door. He couldn't help wondering what a man of God was doing in a place like this.

Jack Harris came to pray for the sick. He laid hands on one person with a case of pink eye only to wake the next day with his eyes swollen and inflamed with that same disease. Ruben Reyna caught an infection that made his lips swell like grapefruit and "God's man of faith and power" found himself unable to even control his mouth's drooling.

The teams often found themselves in primitive situations; sleeping two to a bed in suffocating tropical heat was far from romantic. If one rolled too close to the mosquito net, he would wake to find himself nearly devoured, with mosquito bites on top of mosquito bites.

Larry Huch led a team in with Lynn Litton and two other Australian pastors. They slept in the only house in town with electricity. It had one naked light bulb. Their food scared them, but the worst thing was the latrine. There, in a room, was a covered hole in the floor surrounded by large jungle spiders. The preachers took precautions. They ate pills to stop nature's call, but even the most powerful medicines must break down over a week and one morning Lynn found himself unable to ignore nature. He slipped into the latrine with care. Clearing an area of spiders, he nervously looked around. Larry had been waiting all week for this. Taking an old coconut husk, he climbed up to a hole in the roof and just as Lynn was beginning to feel safe from spiders, dropped the husk down Lynn's back.

These were the things that kept the men sane. These and the tremendous miracles that God worked. In two years the church in Manila was running over 150 committed people. The leadership and direction of the church are almost entirely in the Philippino pastor's hands and four other churches have been opened.

Crusades and conferences were having tremendous impact. The teams were touching hundreds of pastors and tens of thousands of people, and within a short time it would be feasible to reach thousands of workers and hundreds of thousands of people each year through conferences and crusades.

## **Separation**

Pastor Mitchell's love affair with the denomination had always been a strained one. What little ardor there was seemed to all be one way, with the organization, like a pampered beauty queen, designed only to take. Mitchell knew that God wanted to use the ideas of the fellowship to stimulate other churches. He remembered the prophecies God had given about rebuilding and restoring and did all he could to reach out, but

barriers seemed to be thrown up everywhere.

In the early years of the fellowship several of the denominational leaders had been responsive and helpful, but as these men began to retire or pass away, it became obvious that those who were coming into leadership weren't looking for the kinds of change that Mitchell represented, and were less and less willing to allow others the right to be different.

The first conflicts arose as men began to start churches outside of Arizona. The pastors were placed under denominational leaders that were difficult for these young men to respect. They weren't trained to cow-tow to a title for a title's sake, and were just ornery enough to rock the organizational boat.

Joe Weidinger took a church in Pueblo, Colorado that was a basket case. In the next few months many new converts started to flow into the church, but the problem was they were Mexican and Puerto Rican. Some of the old timers weren't excited about what was happening. After all, they had built a nice little mission church across town for "those people."

The head of the church board was a man of community influence and finances. He contacted the organization and demanded that Joe be removed. This wasn't legal according to church by-laws. Joe knew it, and tried to fight back, but the supervisor started to turn the denominational screws that chew up young men for the sake of image and power.

Mitchell wasn't the type to roll over and take this. He called the South West District Supervisor and said, "You're not dealing with just one young preacher but over one hundred churches and when you touch one of us you touch us all. Get this clown off my man's back!" It solved that problem, but left some tension.

From that point Mitchell refused to take any more churches that had any people in them. It was too hard on these young men to be forced to battle with people they wanted to love. It was much simpler to win sinners than to try to arm wrestle dead saints into some type of alive Christianity.

Looking back it is easy to see that there was little chance that the two groups could ever co-exist peacefully. The men were like wild broncos, they had never been broken to be "rode". Taming them would be like roping a tornado or riding lightning. They loved anyone with the same vision, but they were unafraid of anything else.

The men loved excitement and were born for battle. This didn't make them easy to get along with. They laughed at threats because they realized

there was nothing that could be done against them. Paperwork was hard to get from them and they had a tendency to mock the empty titles, dead formalities and rinky dink games that was life to the rising bureaucrat. They knew that what they needed was God, not man.

### **"Go Ye"**

A turning point came in 1978 when Mitchell was given a chance to speak at the International Convention. This was the fulfillment of the vision he'd had of himself as a young convert preaching in a great building before men of influence. He still remembered the message that God gave him to speak. As he preached that service on, "Go Ye Into All the World and Preach the gospel", there was a tangible moving of the spirit. At first the atmosphere had been saturated with indifference, but electricity began to fill the auditorium as the place was moved. Mitchell was asked to speak for thirty minutes and then let three of his young men share for ten minutes each. It had been a ploy to limit his impact, but it worked in reverse.

Ernie Lister, a young Navajo pastor, brought the house down as he said that when God sent him to Gallup, He'd given him the promise that "He would give him the heathen for his inheritance" and "Lo and behold, white people started getting saved"

Jack Harris spoke of Mexico, and Harold Warner shared with a punch and an authority that exposed as false the accusations made against these young men's abilities.

Unplanned, the following speaker added credibility to what Mitchell had said. He was out of a church that didn't care for what was happening in Arizona and had no reason to put any blessing on the fellowship. In spite of this, he told the gathered convention that the only growth in the organization had been in the Arizona fellowship, and showed graphs and statistics to back this up.

It was a critical opportunity for the churches gathered there! Interest was at a height, but the leadership counteracted what God was trying to do. Mitchell met with those in control and told them that if they would come out in support of the ministry it could revolutionize the whole organization. Instead of encouraging their pastors to investigate, they intentionally isolated Mitchell and cast doubt on his methods. They wanted to capture the churches and pastors from Arizona for their growth charts and tithes but they had no intention of going on the line in support of them.

Leadership is the critical factor in the church, for good or for ill. When these men took their stand, it closed a door of revival in the organization, and made inevitable an ultimate separation.

There was no immediate conflict, but there was no further acceptance. In spite of the fact of Mitchell's churches size and the explosive growth of the fellowship, he was never given another opportunity to address a large number of pastors.

Strong opposition built first against the churches being planted in New Mexico. A supervisor there began to assault the young men, and the organization refused to acknowledge their credentials or right to minister in spite of promises given earlier to Mitchell. Whenever conflict arose, the bureaucracy tried to play the middleman and keep everyone happy. It makes great politics, but it can be playing loose with the truth. It was decided to not plant new churches in New Mexico as Foursquare churches and the churches which were already there went independent.

These pressures, plus a drift by some leaders in the fellowship away from church planting and world evangelism and towards just building big churches through church growth concepts, forced Brother Mitchell to return to Prescott from Australia. As captain of the ship, he was committed to take the churches through the rising storm, or go down with them.

Attacks against key men began to surface in the works overseas. This began to undercut the work, sacrifice, and investment that had been made there. Accusations were made and then denied and then made again. Letters flew back and forth to no avail.

Slowly, the fellowship churches were forced to stand alone. As they lost confidence in the leadership of the organization, they felt, in good conscience, that they couldn't take any money or buildings. There was still a feeling that things would work out, and most just tried to ignore the turmoil and keep going for God.

It became almost humorous to watch appointed denominational leaders that had never had a hundred people in their churches trying to force pastors running hundreds to make all their decisions through them. Also interesting to observe was the rising fear of "the powers that be" as they realized that it was only a matter of time until this group out of Prescott would be bigger than any other group in the organization. Several subtle moves were made out of fear that the pastors of the fellowship would just show up at some point and vote themselves into power. It was hard to deal with the rising hysteria and paranoia.

Trying to get the denominational leadership to take a stand was

harder than catching a greased pig with one arm. Reassurances would be given only to be found meaningless later. Deadlines for action would be set, that were never met. Frustration began to rise among the men.

Ron Jones had a church that was bigger than any of the churches in his district, yet he hadn't even been asked to take an offering at a convention. It became comical to hear the greasy adulations of praise, knowing that they were completely insincere.

### **Breaking Point**

The straw that broke the camel's back came at the International Convention in Santa Fe. As Pastor Mitchell was driving there, God spoke to him that this was going to be the moment of confrontation. He knew, by the Spirit, that some kind of attack was planned and that no one was going to stand with him.

It turned out that secret meetings had been held prior to the convention. The bureaucracy was unwilling to stand on either side and allowed attacks to be made and only responded by setting up a committee of inquiry. As Mitchell listened to obvious distortions and charges that had already been proven false, he was deeply hurt. The fact that there was no one who had the nerve to stand and fight for him or his men was proof that there was no point in maintaining this unnatural union.

The young men had been ready to pull out several times before, but Mitchell had hoped to straighten out the differences. He didn't want to start a new denomination, but the churches were being forced to find their own way. He returned to Prescott and let the word out that he wasn't leaving, but he wouldn't force anyone to stay in that didn't want to. Within days Foursquare headquarters was awash with notices of withdrawal. Even at that point, it was hoped that this action would take the pressure off so that the larger churches with property would be able to remain. It was impossible.

The expectation was that the two groups could go their own ways. Several churches were in buildings that had been vacant and unused by the organization. These were immediately vacated and given back. Some buildings had been vastly improved and expanded, but the pastors felt they should return them. Joe Weidinger had received \$40,000 from an inheritance left by a lady that had attended the church. He returned it to the organization along with the building and property. No one wanted a big fight that would divert the churches from revival.

The organization, though, smelled the scent of property. They made it clear they felt everything that the churches had was theirs. They had made no investment. The local churches had paid for their property and equipment, but the corporate lawyers threatened suit.

The fellowship had a strong case. Lawyers were eager to fight, but Mitchell felt it would be a diversion. Pleas to act in a Christian manner were rebuffed on legal technicalities. It was a powerful lesson in the dangers of the system. God was allowing Mitchell to see what could happen if the fellowship didn't build on a different foundation.

Several churches lost property that people had sacrificed to buy. The only other alternative was to pay for the property a second time. The Prescott church had no other alternative. In the small town of Prescott there was nowhere else for them to go. They were faced with paying half a million dollars for the same building they had paid for once already, plus substantial interest.

In the January, 1985, conference, Ron Jones preached on a Wednesday night and then challenged the people to pay off the debt. That night enough was pledged to meet the need, and at the end a prophesy came. The young prophet saw a picture of Abraham offering his son Isaac. The whole affair was a test of priorities, and as the money was pledged to pay off the building, he lifted his voice and declared from God, "You have passed the test and from this night there will be an acceleration of revival." It proved to be a true word.

What seemed bad turned out to be good. With the churches freed from the organization's clutches, it was determined that the Biblical pattern wasn't a hierarchy that dominated, but was power based in the local church with men working together because of vision; not by-laws or fear of loss of property.

A loose corporate structure was established to meet government standards, but the churches were released to their own destiny. The future won't be a replay of the same problems they faced. As churches grow larger, they are encouraged to organize independently. No one wanted some giant home office with an unwieldy bureaucracy. When a pastor had more people and responsibility than he could handle he only needed to spin off part of it, and allow it to grow and reproduce as God led. The pruning would allow for more fruit.

Through the various conferences around the country this decentralization is a natural process. Each fellowship reaches out to a lost world. Prescott doesn't need to control the men or the finances. Ron Jones

sent a man out of Colorado into Belfast, Northern Ireland. There, Don and Lorreta Portnova began to see a fresh move of God in that troubled city. Harold Warner took Kim Pensinger and sponsored him to language school in Costa Rica. Ruben Reyna started three churches in England. As these churches were released, they could do more than any one man trying to meet all the needs of the world.

Yet with the growing expansion and release, there is still a cooperation and linking together that causes the talents of each church to be a help to the other churches.

It was feared that some of the overseas opportunities would be hurt by the withdrawal from Foursquare. The opposite proved to be true. In the Philippines, attendance at pastor's conferences had been around 100, but as soon as the church in Manila went independent Larry Neville was swamped with requests by Philippino pastors to be able to come. It turned out that many had been repelled by the organization. As long as the fellowship had been tied to a standard structure, there had been subtle pressures on churches to join up. Now there was nothing to join and others felt liberty to participate.

## Chapter Twenty

### The Church

The concept of the church began to loom larger and larger. Not the organization but the local body of believers struggling to birth the Kingdom where they lived. This wasn't a natural evolution of thought for Mitchell. The denomination he was saved in emphasized the organization, but the Spirit kept bringing Mitchell back to the people, gathering.

He studied the word "church". For most people it had become a vague concept that touched off nostalgic memories, but meant nothing in their everyday life. It was supposed to be important and everyone wanted to be married or buried in it, but few wanted to faithfully attend one. For some it was a beautiful building with steeples and crosses. For others it was a label for a bad childhood experience. Most identified it with the denomination they belonged to, or to some will-o'-the-wisp entity, written down in heaven but spread, unknowable, across planet Earth. Mitchell saw that to the Apostles it meant a congregation. The word came from the Greek word "Ekklesia", meaning, "those that are called out" or "those that gather together." It's impossible to make this a denomination or a contentless encounter with Deity on a golf course or in the woods. In the vast majority of its uses the word is used to identify a specific group in a specific city and location.

As time passed, God showed Pastor Mitchell the power of the Kingdom that existed in the local church. While pastoring and observing the Prescott church, he saw the potential of just one body released and challenged to do its best for God. As other churches were planted and released, he saw the multiplying of this principle, and the power of a real church. The church released was like a nuclear explosion. The energy developed from the splitting of an atom radiates out and causes others to split that then split others. This was the same chain reaction that God wanted for His church.

If the church was "people gathering", this destroyed the supposed churches of the airwaves or television screens. It killed the idea of "floating kidneys" in the body of Christ. It meant that people were more important than intellect, structure, programs or entertainment.

Not just people alone, but people leaving their homes to come together under God's direction made up the real church.

As people had lost track of the importance of the local church their

commitments had become more surface. Church became a once a week social gathering. In most churches there was a lethargy and a willful giving up of responsibility. Para-church organizations arose with the purpose of reviving the church, but in many cases they merely accelerated the draining of its resources and best talents. If the church was the heart of Christianity then anything added to it could only be justified if it served it. It wasn't that these were wrong or unneeded programs, but the question was, "where was the church?" The church could only be healed at the basic level of its existence, in congregation.

David had experienced the displeasure of God at his attempt to streamline the movement of the ark. Ox carts were nice, but God didn't want the ark of the covenant to be up on one. The presence of God was always intended to be carried on the shoulders of men. There were many great ideas for streamlining the reaching of the world, but they couldn't take the place of the church. Christ is the Head, and the people are the body.

The world of the twentieth century was attacking commitment and loyalty. It wanted the cross made easy and patience in an instant. Christians were floating from place to place enjoying their Sunday spiritual smorgasbord, but power could only come from commitment.

Jesus had designed the church to be an interference with normal life. He demanded a public stand of loyalty. He made it clear that He was worth having eyes gouged out or hands cut off, and had no qualms about calling disciples right from their jobs and interfering with their family businesses.

The danger in the twentieth century was to compartmentalize and specialize life until God was given only a small slot of time on Sunday morning. The church became a little club or a spiritual watering hole that was only one of many events on people's busy calendars. This loss of urgency was the death of militant Christianity, and could only be restored at the local level.

What seems to some like an insignificant argument over definition has great ramifications. Jesus loved his *church* and died for it. He gave it power to be His body and do His will. He made the *church* the depository of truth. He commissioned the *church* to go into the world and make disciples. If that was an organization, then the local body was only a small part of something larger and more important than itself that it fed, but if the *church* was a local congregation then every-thing changed. Each local body gained both awesome dignity and responsibility. It meant discipline and training should exist at the level of the congregation.

In Revelations, John has a vision. He sees seven candlesticks and stars in the right hand of the living Lord. These are revealed to him to be local congregations, and their shepherds, each with its own future and judgment, each loved and precious in the sight of God. Here is the way that God sees the church not all of the congregations of the Empire thrown into one big homogeneous classification, but each individually judged and given its own unique promise and warning.

This is a picture of God's plan: a people called out to assemble together and meet with God; not the property or the structure, but a body representing a living God in its community. Revelation also places a divine emphasis on men. These angels or leaders were the dominant force for ill or good in each church. If this was true, then the men God gave Mitchell were worth any investment, and any act of redemption.

In most groups, men were sacrificed to build an organization, but for Mitchell the value of organization was only justified if it built men. Out of this came a tremendous heart for redemption, and the men God gave Mitchell would need redeeming.

When Jack Harris saw miracles take place, it released a desperate struggle with pride in his heart. Concern and time brought him through. Jones battled with the pull of the organizational church, and several times saw his fears and bad attitudes taken out on Prescott. It would have been a simple thing to just let them fall. Mitchell wanted to redeem, though, and he brought these men through the problems into powerful ministry.

Most churches without thinking about it are motivated by reputation. They feel that they are called to defend an image. Jesus never worked this way. He intentionally chose a rotten image. He was building people, and the foundation was redemption, not reputation.

If reputation is the goal then numbers and property become a subtle but all pervading force. Professionals are put in place. Plastic smiles are planted on tinsel Christians who are scared to admit that they have the normal problems of people that live normal lives. A desperate attempt is made to hide their humanity. If the goal is redemption, though, a whole new set of priorities come into play. The church begins to look for those who desperately need to find help and forgiveness. Since redemption is stronger than image, people are allowed to come who might damage a church's reputation. Just as communists and capitalists have trouble seeing the other side's point of view (because of their definition of the goals and reason for life), so do churches rise and fall on their concept of the church.

Something in the fallen nature of man has difficulty seeing God's purpose for life. Man tends toward the fulfilling of his pleasure and not God's, to the establishing of his own little kingdoms, and not the eternal one.

### **Nimrod or Abraham**

The Bible shows two pictures of life and structure. In Babel, Nimrod plans to hold together and control. He starts a building program with mud and slime, and sets out on his purpose to "build a name"

Contrasted to this is Abraham. He's not out to build a name but a family. His leadership is that of a father not birthed out of a desire to dominate, but to bring his sons to a place of independence. A father's greatest pride is to see his sons standing on their own.

The church world easily slips into the idea of the church as a structure whose purpose is to build a name. The flesh always leads to an emphasis on the seen over the unseen. In this environment a wrong choice of priorities begins to gradually set in. These priorities lay unnoticed, subtly buried below the surface of the church, and yet they affect every decision.

In the time of testing and trial, everything is sacrificed to hold to what the organization feels is its basic spark of life. For denominations, this means the property and control of a structure.

Mitchell knew that the thing God was doing was the restoration of the local church. Others were talking unity, but he wanted liberty. Denominations only had the right to function as they served the local church.

Buildings lost their magical quality in this environment because the organizations that loved property over people weren't calling the shots. The church of the first century had no buildings. When it said the Apostles built churches, it was with people and not with property. Every Christian was mobilized. Every believer was a priest, and capable of rebuilding the body of Christ even if he was the only believer left alive.

For Mitchell the danger of control outweighed the benefits. Through out history, when churches have been too tightly centralized, it only took one or two "bad apples" to turn a whole group away from the truth. Worse yet, unwieldy structures arose that killed the momentum of revival.

It's common to talk about the need to maintain standards and control, but this is an impossible goal. The Apostle Paul couldn't control the

church. These divinely spawned organisms had too many variables to be controlled by a structure. They depend on men, culture, responsiveness and obedience.

In the Bible we see a wild assortment of churches, from Jerusalem's mongrel blend of old and new to Corinth's undisciplined carnality. Crete was loaded with converts that even their pastor saw little hope in. Thessalonica was captivated by the Second Coming, while Galatia was obsessed with the law. No one but God could control the life God was releasing, so the New Testament leaders functioned to help, not control.

Paul exercised strong control of several churches in the early stages of their growth. This was the natural result of his starting them and their immaturity. Far from taking the heavy handed approach, he often seems overly loose. He refers to the men saved there as his sons and fertilizes their spiritual growth with his tears, apologizing in his letters for his leniency and lack of demand for sacrifice to several churches. Most of the men Paul left to pastor were saved for only short periods of time before they were bearing major responsibilities. He considered God responsible to take care of the majority of discipline and correction in the Kingdom. This wasn't a job he was appointed to, but one that God had entrusted him with. After developing these churches and their leaders, they were encouraged to find their own future. Some supported him, some didn't. Nothing showed their autonomy more than the fact that some could even turn away from Paul and he couldn't do anything about it except to withdraw his fellowship.

The New Testament pattern lacks the rigid lines of established authority that mark much of the church world today. Peter had authority, but Paul felt free to tell him off at one point and even brag about it in letters he wrote. This is definitely something different from a papacy. Paul, in his training, never felt pressure to come to Jerusalem and join the denominational preacher factory. The leadership in the Bible rested primarily in the local churches. These men had strong control and direction in their churches, but it had little exercise beyond serving those around them and overseeing those directly related to them. Jerusalem sent Apostles to help in Samaria with the establishing of the gifts, but not to dominate. Their power was in their unity of vision and cooperation, not their structure. When a council formed to debate the acceptance of the gentiles, they sent out the New Testament denominational by-laws: don't drink blood, help the poor, and stop fornicating. These were not the overbearing codes of rules and minute orders of decoration and action that most groups mandate. The main method of leverage in the early

church was the simple threat to withdraw fellowship.

This was what Mitchell was feeling drawn towards. Churches needed to work together if they were to win the world, but those ties mustn't violate the dignity of the local church and what God was doing with it.

Ruben Reyna and Mike Neville were stronger for not being forced into the structure. They worked as closely with Mitchell as they would if tied by corporate by-laws.

### **Indigenous**

It was critical that each church be forced to bear the weight of its own future. The fellowship's future lay in the principle of the indigenous church. Only at the level of the local congregation could a church move its community. This wasn't true just in the U.S.; the churches started in other countries were challenged to pay their own bills, to raise up their own leaders, and trusted to do that. If Mitchell had to control everything, nothing would get done.

Who would think to drive people to church standing crammed into the back of open pick-up trucks? In Mexico it was a natural thing. Neville sent a man to Hawaii and he couldn't find a building. The man just had church under a tree for a year. On the Indian reservation crowds would swamp any meeting where there was an opportunity to drink strawberry pop and eat mutton stew with fry bread. In releasing the church you allowed it to meet people's needs, and left it flexible to respond to its own world.

This didn't mean that everyone just did their own thing. Men functioned poorly when isolated. Churches needed to work together. It was vital that conferences were held periodically to renew vision and purpose. The secret was allowing this to be done freely. People never like what's forced on them, but will make sacrifice for what is their own decision and choice.

Mitchell helped the churches, but not too much. If they were to mature it was crucial that they begin to pay their own way and make their own choices. Pastors treated like children never became more than that.

On one of the trips to Asia, Pastors Mitchell and Harris stopped and visited the Juarong Bird Farm in Singapore. A net was stretched over hundreds of acres of canyon. A beautiful bird sanctuary was created that a person could wander through. It was beautiful. Little streams ran over waterfalls and under bridges. Predators couldn't get in and food was

spread around to make up for what the environment couldn't supply. The birds were free . . . to a degree. The only limit was the net, and the only problem was they could never be what God made them to be. They could go so far, and no farther.

What was more astounding to Mitchell was that as he looked up at the top of the net there were several dozen other birds trying to get in. They felt the good vibes and wanted to crash the party.

As he watched this, the Spirit of God spoke to him and said, "This is just what a denomination is. It allows protection and freedom to a degree, but it is a freedom that goes only so far. The pastor escapes much of the danger of freedom but also loses the potential to reach his full release in God"

Men love organization and structure. They want to bottle revival to preserve it for the future but the Spirit calls for as little control as possible to release the dynamics of God. Authority, when it follows function, is a natural and healthy factor in the church; but when established by some hierarchy from above it more often stifles than releases.

### **Local Church**

Mitchell saw pastoring as the greatest call on earth. It took all of his time to fulfill that role and anything that hindered that, he dropped. He wouldn't develop an organization. He had enough to do just molding Prescott to the Biblical mold.

Most of Christianity viewed the congregation as an audience. The fellowship saw it as an army. The vital factor in a minister's attitude was in seeing the church as a force and not just as a flock. While most men saw the church as a holding pen, Mitchell saw it as a boot camp.

He wasn't herding people in to keep them in order. Services were to prepare people to go out and encounter the world. They, the people, were the ministry, and he was determined to tear down the walls between clergy and laity. Jesus had chosen to come out of laity. His school was the carpenter shop. Mitchell turned every job into a seminary and every service into a classroom. He built dignity and possibility into that local congregation.

He preached a gospel that demanded a lot, but it was because a lot was required. The world needed to be reached and their job was to reach it. Others could say someone else would do it, but not Prescott. The people felt they were important so they acted like it. Finances came in as

they sacrificed to win a lost world. Lives began to be disciplined as they felt the responsibility of reaching the world.

In the New Testament, the church was at the center of their lives. Daily they were meeting in prayer, the sharing of the Word, and fellowship.

In the early days of the ministry it seemed that God had raised up and blessed the Prescott church because of its evangelistic zeal. Later, as churches were planted and men released, it was felt that the thing that marked the churches was their ideas on discipleship and the developing of workers. Both of these were important parts of the vision God placed in their hearts.

Yet, as time went on, Mitchell began to see that the blessing of God was rooted in a deeper force. It was in his desire to help the local church and release it that God opened the doors Prescott was stepping into. Here was the heart of God.

### **Restorer of the Breach**

The fellowship was becoming just what Pastor Mitchell hoped it would be; a spiritual fire burning out of control. In fact in El Paso Texas during a revival service the police and fire department arrived when the neighbors called reporting flames leaping from the building. Like in the book of Acts the spiritual reality of revival had broken out into the physical world. This was New Testament revival come to the twentieth century. Mitchell wasn't trying to stay in control, he was stoking the flames. Everyone had a method of forcing God to do what they wanted. Mitchell knew that the problem was God getting us to do what He wanted. He spoke at a conference in Australia and said, " I learned how to keep God in control in Bible college, and for ten years I kept God in a box and nothing really happened. Then, one day I wasn't looking, and God got out of control and He hasn't been under control since."

The men themselves are not controllable. They've been touched by the Fire and left part prophet and part watchman. They're the "dirty dozen" of God's Kingdom. Pulled out of the cesspools of sin, they have nowhere to turn back to. When they get too far out of line, Mitchell's worst threat is just to let it be known that they can go out on their own. They know that they can never survive alone.

Mitchell controls them like David did his mighty men. He loved them and made it clear he was the baddest of the bad. Who wanted to fight a

man who had killed a giant? More than that, who wanted out of something as exciting and real as the fellowship was becoming. These men that had been destined for obscurity were now a part of destiny. Their lives were being used to bless others. They saw miracles come and found the nations of the world open to here of something real. Filled with joy and challenge the adventure of real Christianity filled them.

There is an order to the fellowship, but there is also a divine chaos. The New Testament Church hadn't known exactly where they were going. The first years were like a wild roller coaster ride. Persecution turned out to be God's method of spreading the truth. Threats released greater power of the Holy Spirit. Prisons produced Bibles. Churches began out of riots. Outcasts became converts.

In the same way, most of the nations and opportunities that have opened for the fellowship have come out of others' failures. Crises with the organization had brought freedom. Difficulties had only caused the whole to be strengthened.

Mitchell knew that he was responsible to maintain order. Thieves did come to steal, and wolves stalked the sheep that were fat and happy; yet the greatest force in the world was to release a man who had heard from heaven.

Over and over God had driven this point home to Mitchell. Gary Kelly had, in the earliest days, asked permission to start a church in Bull Head City, Arizona, at his own expense. It was a success, but nearly forgotten until Bill Lambson started pestering Mitchell about being called. Bill was an unlikely candidate. He was too old to preach in the music scene, and there wasn't the obvious anointing on his life that marked those that would have a dynamic ministry. Yet, there was a persistence that wasn't easy to shake. Bill begged for a chance. He said that God had called him to Needles, Arizona. Mitchell told him he couldn't put the money into him that was needed for a man on full support. Bill said, "I'll go with nothing" Here was a desire and a call Mitchell couldn't refuse. Bill worked to support his family, and the Prescott church helped with rent and outreach. It wasn't a roaring success, but it was a success. A whole new door of release opened. There were dozens of men who weren't developed enough to warrant full support (and might never be), but these men could, over time, forge out beautiful works in barren communities if given the opportunity and some backing.

**Jack Harris**

Mitchell gave advice and disciplined, but possibly his greatest impact was to allow men the right to find what God had for them. Jack was a picture of this Biblical release. His past wasn't cut from the fabric that would cause most pastors to trust him. Mitchell saw his weaknesses, but trusted God's call on his life. Moody by temperament, he fit the picture of the Old Testament Prophet brooding over the will of God. He was driven by a restlessness that wasn't always good for him or his family, but blazed many trails for the churches. Mitchell didn't try to dominate and control, but to help and guide him. He allowed him to do his thing as long as it wasn't destructive, and attempted to work with his desires. Out of this began to rise a strong leader.

He started the church in Nogales, Mexico, because of the deception of another church group. He spent two years building a work in the States and overseeing the men in Mexico. They experimented with people, ideas, and methods there in Nogales looking for a productive Biblical pattern. Jack left Nogales for Prescott, frustrated and mad at how little seemed to have been done. He fought off feelings of failure, little dreaming that the men he had reached would one day influence the opening of not just Mexico, but other nations.

In Prescott he found re-direction and felt called to pioneer again. Globe, Arizona, is as mean a town as exists in the United States. What Galilee was to Israel, Globe was to Arizona. Jack stayed 8 months until the itch got so bad he couldn't stand it and begged to be allowed to leave. Hank Houghton stepped in to take control and saw the church leap into one of the fellowship's most powerful works.

Jack pledged to go out and start churches that could be turned over to others. It's doubtful that headship today would allow a man to move as many times as they did then. It wasn't good for the families, but it seemed to work at the time. By trial and error it was found that you just couldn't give men a church that someone else had built. The only method of discovery was experimentation since there were no established patterns to refer to.

God spoke "New Mexico" to Harris's heart. He told Pastor Mitchell he was going and Mitchell said it was fine. He went to Farmington with no idea what it was like. He thought it would be some little hick adobe city, but he found a boom town on the edge of Colorado. He lasted three whole months there. Those three months saw a core of 40 people come together. It was here that Jack asked Mitchell to send him to India. The world beckoned to him and scared him at the same time. He knew the battles that he'd fought in Mexico and yet he realized that they were easy compared

to what might await him in the Third World.

Pastor Mitchell knew this was impractical at the time and said, "If you want foreign exposure you ought to go back to Mexico." This was almost as exciting to Jack as it would be for Paul to ask for another beating in Phillipi. He went, though, and brought some needed direction.

Jack's crusade and conference ministry had been developing all the time. Then, in 1978, he stepped into the church at Flagstaff, Arizona. It was as close as he could come to settling down (if you call leaving the country for crusades every few months settling down); he spent the next 6 years there (except for a six month hiatus in Guam trying to find direction for impacting the Third World). During that time the church in Flagstaff doubled and pioneered 18 churches, besides supplying replacement pastors for works that had been started by others.

Jack knew that God wanted him to leave Flagstaff, but he didn't know where to go. He spent 8 months in Lancaster, Pennsylvania directing the men on the East Coast. Then, he returned to Prescott to work with Mitchell and hold crusades. Six months later God called Mitchell back to Australia and Jack took the direction of the Prescott church. Here was the explosive release of a productive man to find his purpose in God. In a few short years his life had impacted many different peoples and nations. In an organization, Jack might still have been sitting, frustrated, in Nogales, but when he was supported and allowed to listen to God, his impact was incalculable.

Jack was only one of many men who were jumping around the country and the world spreading revival in their path. Ron Jones had leaped from city to city early in his ministry. After walking on the edge of rebellion a couple of times, it was only Mitchell's confidence in him that had brought him back to work as loyally as old shoes that were made to fit.

He pioneered churches in Flagstaff, Lake Havasu City, and Sierra Vista, Arizona. His destiny, though, was linked to Colorado Springs, Colorado. Taking a wild-eyed, dancing crew of about 35 misdirected Charismatics, he soon turned them into a revival machine, that within a few short years was pushing 600 and planting churches around the world.

Mitchell had found a key. It wasn't in programs and organizations, it was in finding productive men and investing in them and trusting them to God. The twelve disciples had heard the "Rhema" of God telling them to go. It didn't make it easy. They showed confusion under Satan's attacks and needed key times of divine intervention. They even refused to go for

a while, the revival was so great in Jerusalem. But when God intervened with stones and jail cells they caught the message and went. The key was they had heard from Heaven. This is what Mitchell had learned to look for.

It wasn't that everything they did was right. In reality, most of the men would just as soon bury half of their pasts in the deepest sea. Unfortunately, though, mistakes seem to be required in order to grow and learn. John Wooden was the greatest coach in college basketball. He never let his men forget his motto, "The team that wins is the team that makes the most mistakes." He wasn't encouraging stupidity but he knew if you did anything, errors would come. Doing something, however, also won games. Here was Mitchell's philosophy.

Sometimes it was a complicated process to get someone saved, and to turn a disaster into a victory. The Wickenburg church was holding a movie revival in the local theater. The pastor hoped that the people in the city would come out to this neutral ground. The church had put its best foot forward. As everyone was leaving the movie, an ex-con that had showed up insulted a local woman. One of the church's newly redeemed saints took it upon himself to teach this heathen a lesson and jumped him. An old lady was knocked down when she got too close to the action, yelling, "Kill him!" The cops showed up just as a little boy, too excited from the action, threw up on the front steps. Another woman wasn't looking and slipped in the mess and fell. The ambulance came and took her to the hospital. The next day, the con showed up in church and got saved. A movie producer for the Keystone Cops would have had trouble dreaming up a wilder plot. Yet there was fruit.

## **Revival**

Through release God started turning out men of exceptional quality. Cruz Guerrero, the ex-horse thief, has become a powerful leader in Mexico. In a crusade with Jack Harris the whole city was shaken and the church he pastored leaped to over 700. It took tremendous faith to even find a building to hold all of these people, let alone pay the rent, but Cruz was up to the challenge. He leads the revival in his country preaching crusades, revivals, and conferences.

The Prescott church itself is as alive as ever. As Pastor Mitchell left for Australia, the church was having a revival with Harry Hills that was extended into a second week, with 640 out on a Sunday night, and visible miracles happening nightly. As Mitchell stood in his last service in Prescott he prophesied of a fresh new wave of revival coming. Crusades

in the States, that were once thought to be impossible, ran from 1,000 to over 3,000. Six churches were running over 500. Eleven churches had over 300. Revival was breaking out in church after church with the corresponding release of men and resources.

As of May 1985 there were 15 full-fledged conferences taking place around the world, as well as several 2 or 3 day mini-conferences. Several conferences were starting to break 1,000 in attendance, with several conferences larger than the Prescott conference itself. Each of these drew in men by the hundreds who felt a call to preach and ached to reach new cities.

Australia was rapidly becoming a power house of its own. Works had been sponsored from there into other nations. Teams of Australian pastors were going into the Third World. Larry and Tiz Huch, in two years, saw the church in Adelaide go from 8 people to over 200. The church was like a United Nations, with Russian translators next to Spanish translators.

The Philippine work was moving forward rapidly. Joe Campbell preached a meeting where armed guards had to take him to and from the services. He stood before a crowd of 10,000 people and felt nothing, but when he prayed, they felt God. One man's eye had been totally whitened over with cataracts, but as Joe prayed color came into the eyes and he saw. A man carried into the meeting in a chair stood up and walked. A woman threw down her crutches. Two men with deaf ears told of how they were able to hear.

In 1985 there were ten crusade teams scheduled for Asia. Each of the men heading these teams was an experienced leader with an established miracle ministry. These teams would, that year in the Philippines alone, touch over 6,000 workers, and 1,000 pastors in conferences, with another 70,000 people being preached to in crusades. The impact of these conferences and crusades is far reaching. A Philippino church running a few hundred before the crusade pulled the meeting back into the church and had 2,200 out. Pastors in the Philippines continuously tell Larry Neville of churches throbbing with new life; and of how they are now planting churches, holding morning prayer meetings, and growing with the thrust of evangelism.

The European works might have started out shakily, but now they're as solid as any works in the fellowship. Leadership is rising and churches are growing. The world has literally become a harvest field.

India is an open door of great opportunity. Pastors Harris and Mitchell got their feet in the door with meetings in Madras and Harry Hills

was sent to open it the rest of the way. The first night of the crusade 1,000 showed up. The second night brought out 4,000 and the third night saw over 8,000. Four people, blind from birth, were verified healed. A girl had come with a fungus covering her whole body. As Harry prayed, the place was electrified by the screams of the girl's mother. The fungus that had covered her daughter's body had simply fallen off.

The Indian minister who set up the meeting was so impressed that he promised to set up a crusade every month anywhere in India if teams would come to hold them.

As 1985 started great things were happening, but it was only the beginning. God is faithful to fulfill his promises. In Revelations, Jesus told the last day church, "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."

All that has happened already is only a foundation for the future. The promise from Isaiah 58:12 remains to be fulfilled: "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places; thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in."

In Job, God speaks of the wonder of the war horse. "He paws in the valley and glories in his strength; he goes to meet the battle without fear. He laughs at terror and is not dismayed; he turns not back from the sword .... Quivering and excited he eats up the ground, no longer willing to stand still, having heard the sound of the trumpet.

When the trumpet sounds he neighs joyously, scenting the battle from afar ... " Here is a picture of God's men. David, a boy moved by adventure, attacks Goliath, an impossible foe. Jonathan and his armor bearer claw their way up a hill to fight, outnumbered, against God's foes. Paul was consumed with a desire to go into places where no one else had gone. The early church rejoiced in the face of difficulty. All of these represent something beyond man's determination. It is the hand of God. In the last days God is raising up a church excited by the vision of a needy world and of combat with the forces of darkness.

What Pastor Mitchell and the fellowship are involved in isn't a new technique. When techniques take over the church is only a footstep from the grave. In the last days, God is raising up a church excited by the vision of a needy world and of combat with the forces of darkness. Around the world small centers of evangelism are kindling a flame destined to engulf the world from a rediscovery of the power of the local church. From hearts hungry for God's moving, the cry goes up, "God, show us your open

doors!"