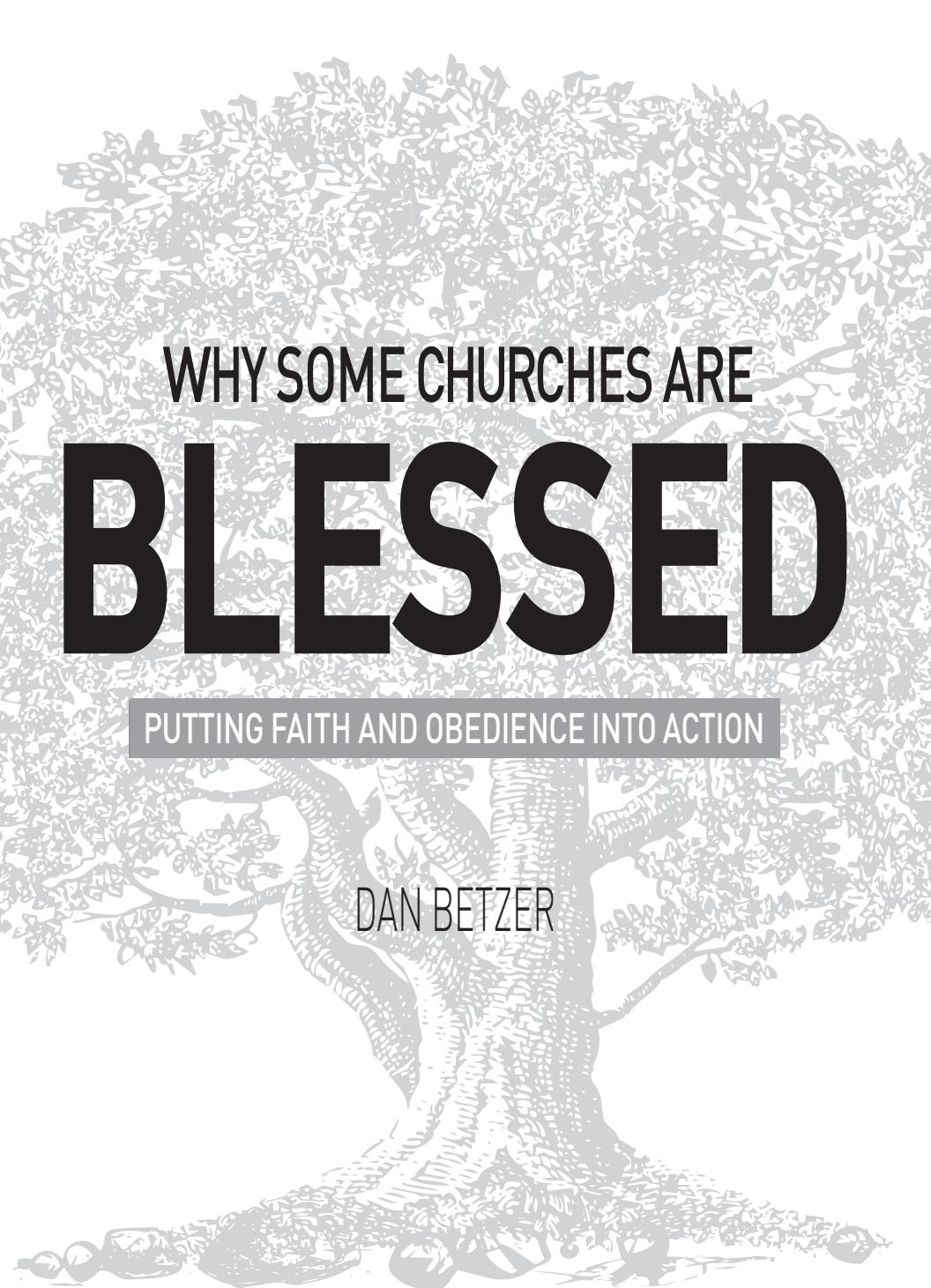


WHY SOME CHURCHES ARE BLESSSED

PUTTING FAITH AND OBEDIENCE INTO ACTION

DAN BETZER

FOREWORD BY SCOTT TEMPLE, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF ETHNIC
RELATIONS FOR THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD



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CHAPTER  ONE

ONE ASTOUNDING NIGHT IN NOVEMBER

THE CROWD BEGAN ASSEMBLING IN OUR FLORIDA SANCTUARY A FULL HOUR BEFORE THE ANNOUNCED STARTING TIME. The parking lot was filled and attendants were assisting late-comers to park on the grass or on nearby streets. The sun had just set over the Gulf of Mexico and street lights were popping on across the church property.

Over 200 members of the church music and drama department were putting the finishing touches on their opening theme. Various members of the cast had been in makeup for several hours to the point where, when I saw them, I had no idea who they were. They would be representing many nations and cultures that night.

In my study, those who would be speaking had joined me in prayer: former Missouri governor, senator, and United States attorney general, John Ashcroft; David Green, founder and CEO of Hobby Lobby; ninety-two-year-old Dois Rosser, founder of International Cooperating Ministries (and perhaps the world's foremost church builder); Reinhard Bonnke, world-renowned evangelist; Assemblies of God Archbishop Barnabas Mtokambali of Tanzania, Africa; local Christian businessman, Dr. John Patrick; and myself.

My good friend, Bob D'Andrea, founder of the Christian Television Network, had committed all of his stations as well as live coverage coast-to-coast on both DirectTV and Dish Satellite networks

for the entire evening to televise the service—at his own expense. A few minutes before starting time, his helicopter landed in our church parking lot, only intensifying the drama.

We had billed the evening as “The Great Commission World Summit.” The goal was to raise millions of dollars in one night to build churches around the world through the extraordinary ministry of ICM, the aforementioned International Cooperating Ministry. The founder, Dois Rosser, over the past several decades had constructed well over 4,000 church buildings around the world. A successful businessman, when he was in his sixties, God gave him a plan for this ministry, backed by leveraged giving and coupled with a commitment from each of those congregations to plant five churches within the next three years. As a result, Rosser now had a worldwide network of gospel-preaching churches numbering nearly 30,000. He and his staff have distributed hundreds of thousands of Bible studies as well as solar-powered gizmos (the size of a cell phone) that contain a complete Bible and a four-year Bible school course.

We were pumped! I don’t know when I had ever felt such excitement coursing through a congregation. There was a buzz all over our town. Nothing of this magnitude had ever been attempted before, at least in our neck of the woods. Weeks of prayer and intercession preceded the night, as we are well aware that God only blesses what comes from Him.

I've always believed that any endeavor we undertake for Jesus is a command performance. Only our very best is ever good enough for Him.

In the months prior to that service, I lay awake many nights wondering, *Will anyone come? Can we fill the 2,000 seat sanctuary? Can we reach our goal of millions of dollars raised for building churches overseas? Will anyone truly care?* Have we bitten

off more than we can chew? But I knew God had led us to undertake this mission. In God’s work, faith is a necessity (more about that later in this book). We weren’t doing this for our sakes. We were doing this

for God in direct obedience to His Great Commission, which is not a suggestion but a command!

As a pastor, I've always believed that any endeavor we undertake for Jesus is a command performance. Only our very best is ever good enough for Him. After all, God gave us the best He had when He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). How could we make our missions convention a mediocre activity? So we spared no effort in our preparation, although we had limited funds to underwrite the night.

Can you believe that each of those speakers flew in at his own expense and didn't ask for an honorarium? John Ashcroft evoked laughter from the crowd when he opened his remarks by saying, "When Pastor Betzer called me and asked me if I believed in free speech, I didn't know he was going to ask me to make one!" What a lineup of speakers!

At five minutes before 7 p.m. the speakers and I filed into the sanctuary. The orchestra was already playing (missions music, I hasten to add!). At 7 o'clock the screens lit up with scenes from around the world. The one-hundred-voice choir began to sing and another hundred people filed through the sanctuary dressed in various international costumes (as were each of the choir members). Everyone looked awesome! The theme for the night was "All the Nations." For over ten minutes the choir sang with deep anointing as the live panorama of the actors and dancers portrayed the impact of the lyrics:

*To You belong all the nations;
To You belong all the peoples.
To You belong all the kingdoms.
To You belong all the tribes,
Created for Your glory.
We come to testify!*

*Every culture, every race, find expression within this place.
Every culture, every race find expression to give Him praise.*

Now people marched in who represented the nations of the world from north to south, east to west, crisscrossing the building and stage as the choir continued:

*To You belong all the islands,
The nations that surround
within this rim of fire.
We're tearing strongholds down.
Every people, every tongue, crying out to the Holy One.
Every people, every tongue crying out, "Lord, Your kingdom come!"*

By this time the sanctuary was a kaleidoscope of color, national dances, and glorious sound; the crowd responded with “amen” and applause. Across the sanctuary you could sense a rising tide of expectancy for what God was going to do among us.

*Every motion, every song, every rhythm to You alone;
Every motion, every song, every rhythm before Your throne.¹*

Our staff had created a twenty-foot long, fiery red dragon, representing some of the eastern nations. The crowd oohed and aahed as the creature writhed its way through the sanctuary (operated with a few people beneath the reptile’s skin). Overhead, professionals swung back and forth over the congregation on specially-hung silk draperies, up and down with dazzling maneuvers, keeping the crowd’s attention firmly fixed on what was happening before them.

By the time the opening production number ended, the crowd was on its feet. Many people in attendance at our church for the first time quickly understood that we mean business when it comes to missions! To us, missions is not some second-rate, last-minute adventure in mediocrity. If it’s important to God, it must be important to the local church.

Then our speakers opened their hearts, each one imploring the congregation to get their eyes on a lost and hopeless world. Pointedly

they emphasized that Christ's anointed body, the church, can do something about that lost condition through the power of the Holy Spirit; after all, that's why He was poured out on the day of Pentecost. After an hour and forty-five minutes, I went to the pulpit to receive the offering, every penny of it to build churches. We closed with a congregational mission anthem, prayed, and began to make our way home. We had done everything we knew to do . . . now we would await the results.

Eighteen Months Later

From that one evening, here are the results:

- Sixty-two churches have been constructed (or are currently under construction) in eighteen countries: Burkina Faso, Dominican Republic, Egypt, India, Russia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Liberia, Myanmar, Mozambique, Nicaragua, and Peru
- The congregations that benefitted from The Great Commission World Summit have already begun the great evangelistic task of planting 310 more churches
- Twenty thousand new believers have been reached for Christ

That's the results for the kingdom of God from just one night! One night! It's astounding what Holy Spirit-filled believers can do, realizing again and again in the most practical ways ever dreamed that we have received power after the Holy Ghost has come upon us! Yes! We have received power, supernatural capacity to fulfill what God has commanded us. You won't find expressions such as "We can't do that" or "We can't afford that" in the book of Acts. As the world-changing missionary-apostle Paul reminded us: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

That was just one night. There's so much more to this story. Our church in Florida is made up of ordinary people, just as most congregations are. You won't see Bentley or Rolls-Royce vehicles in

our church parking lot. You will see Toyotas and Chevys and Jeeps. But in the past twenty-five years or so, as of this writing, these committed saints have given over thirty-seven million dollars to global evangelism at home and abroad. They have planted over eight churches in Florida, mostly in our area.

Perhaps someone is protesting, “Well . . . a church that large can do things like that; but our congregation is small. What can we do to make a difference?”

Great question! Let me explain to you that my passionate love for the task of missions began when I was starting home-mission churches in Ohio back in the ’60s. Everything I learned about giving to missions I learned in those churches, where we had few people and virtually no money. We started one of those churches in the basement of our rented home where my pulpit was a Maytag washer-dryer.

But God intervened! In the most dramatic and highly unexpected ways, the Lord brought people into my life who revolutionized my thinking. The Holy Spirit, the fabulous teacher whom Jesus said would come to us, brought into my life circumstances that gave me insight into ministry and missions I had never heard of—and probably would never have dreamed of. These people and circumstances radically raised the bar on my faith expectations.

I want to tell you the story of how it all began—and why it continues. As Paul Harvey used to say, “Now you will know the rest of the story!”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAN BETZER IS THE SENIOR PASTOR OF FIRST ASSEMBLY OF GOD IN FORT MYERS, FLORIDA, WHERE HE HAS PASTORED FOR THE PAST TWENTY-NINE YEARS. During those years, he has seen the congregation grow from a few hundred to its current 10,000 members and adherents with an average weekend attendance of 6,700 including the satellite campuses.

Ordained fifty-two years ago, Dan is a lifelong veteran of broadcasting and is known as a writer, television and radio host, and district and national executive with the General Council of the Assemblies of God. At the age of three, Betzer began radio work on WNAX in Sioux City, Iowa, doing children's and religious programs each weekend, singing and acting. By the time he was in college, he was a daily anchor on both radio and television news. Profoundly sensing God's direction, he entered the ministry and began planting churches in Ohio.

Betzer served as the assistant district superintendent of the Peninsular Florida District of the Assemblies of God for sixteen years and carried the portfolio of World Missions. He is now an honorary presbyter in that district.

For the past twenty years he has served as an executive presbyter of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, which is the twenty-member general board of directors of the denomination. He has been a part of the general presbytery for twenty-two years.

For nearly seventeen years (1979–1995), Betzer was the speaker on the Assemblies of God syndicated radio broadcast *Revivaltime*, which was heard on over 600 stations each week in over 80 countries. He also wrote and hosted the two-minute weekday radio program *Byline*,

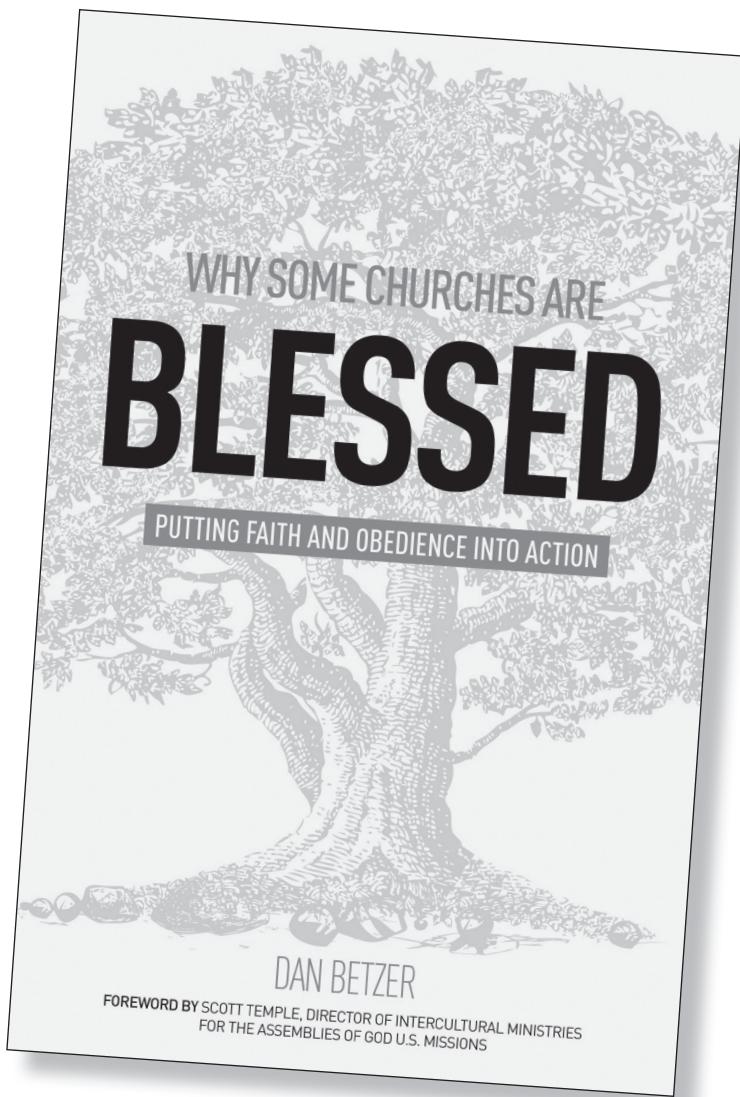
Why Some Churches Are Blessed

heard on several hundred stations, and also wrote and hosted the one-minute television version, seen on scores of stations worldwide each weekday (TBN, CTN, Family-Net, Cornerstone Network, and Daystar). He currently hosts nine television programs and one radio program each week in southwest Florida.

As a soloist, Dan has produced seventeen albums and has sung with artists such as Ralph Carmichael and his orchestra, Dino, Larry Gatlin, the Blackwood Brothers, Lulu Roman, The Couriers, and many others. Betzer has authored twenty-one published books, including a best-selling novel.

Betzer has been married to his wife, Darlene, for fifty-nine years. They have three daughters, one son, eight grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. For relaxation, Dan enjoys traveling (he has ministered in sixty-two nations), playing golf, fishing, and reading.

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DAN BETZER WANTS TO PUT YOUR CHURCH ON THE PATH TO BLESSING BEYOND MEASURE

It's curious how some churches just seem to flourish, both numerically and financially, while others struggle and scrape by. Is there a secret to this? Dan Betzer thinks there is. That's why he's so eager to share the principle of blessings he learned early in his pastoral career: A church that gives generously is generously blessed.

Giving for the kingdom of God isn't about believing for what is logical but for what is supernatural. In other words, give and it will be given to you. As Betzer's church has obeyed and embraced a divine worldview of evangelism, God has met the congregation's needs in startling and supernatural ways. Through generously supporting missions—giving over \$30 million in recent years—they have experienced phenomenal growth.

IS YOUR CHURCH READY TO BE BLESSED?

Dan Betzer is the author of more than twenty books and serves as senior pastor at First Assembly of God in Fort Myers, Florida. He has shared his remarkable blend of humor and Bible teaching with audiences of adults and youth via 600 TV and radio stations in the US and worldwide. A national executive with the Assemblies of God, Betzer and his wife, Darlene, reside in Fort Myers, Florida.



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