

Sight & Sound

BOOKS

Building a Church That Changes Cities

It Takes a Church to Raise a Village

By Marva Mitchell, Treasure House,

141 pages, hardcover, \$

When Bishop Marva Mitchell and her late husband were faced with the tragic shooting death of a teen-age friend, they cried out to God for answers. Her husband asked God where the church was as violence ripped their community apart and children were murdered in its streets. His answer: You are the church.

That cryptic reply led the couple and their church, Revival Center Ministries International in Dayton, Ohio, to intricately weave themselves into the fabric of their city, touching lives through literacy and drug-prevention programs, as well as job training and feeding services. Oddly, most of the ministry's work is funded through federal grants.

In her book *It Takes a Church to Raise a Village*, Mitchell outlines the church's strategy and encourages ministries nationwide to take responsibility for shaping the spiritual, educational, economic and social landscape of their communities. Instead of building elaborate structures, she writes, ministries should empower the "jewels in the pews" to affect change in their city.

Mitchell's book calls the church to be accountable for the well-being of communities. She says this posture is key to reaping the end-time harvest. She encourages ministries to become an Esther church that is pure, wise, prayerful, available and orphaned from external control that keeps it from pursuing God's will. This is the only way, Mitchell writes, to rebuild the ruined places in our cities.

Adrienne S. Gaines

Apocalyptic Thrills

Megiddo

*By Paul Crouch with Cynthia Cirile,
Charisma House, 408 pages, paperback, \$.*

Both a prequel and sequel to *The Omega Code*, Paul Crouch's *Megiddo* is a captivating suspense thriller about two brothers and the battle of Armageddon.

Megiddo chronicles the lives of Stone and David Alexander, the sons of a prominent media mogul. One grows up to become the Antichrist, the other the president of the United States, and the two square off at Megiddo, a vast valley in northern Israel.

Co-written by Hollywood screenwriter Cynthia Cirile, whose husband co-wrote the film's screenplay, *Megiddo* is well crafted, vividly capturing apocalyptic events as seen through the eyes of Crouch and his consultant Hal Lindsey.

Megiddo portrays the Antichrist as an American raised mostly in Europe who rises to power through the United World Union.

He brings a season of world peace and miraculously survives an assassination attempt. But as the time for Armageddon draws near, the world is plagued with earthquakes and famine. Because the United States, along with China and Latin America, refuse to join the Antichrist's One World Order, an epic battle ensues,

with the brothers duking it out at Megiddo.

Despite its blatantly patriotic tone, Megiddo offers an exciting journey through the end times that is worth reading.

Adrienne S. Gaines

MUSIC

Worship That Is Pure and Simple

Worship

Michael W. Smith, Reunion Records.

It seems only fitting that after years of touching contemporary Christian music with his exceptional musicianship and heartfelt lyrics that veteran artist Michael W. Smith should embrace a worship project, which is aptly titled *Worship*.

Reverent throughout, Smith's album opts for simplicity, though it was recorded before an audience of 9,000 and sports a cast of musicians and singers that includes Cindy Morgan, Chris Rice, Darwin Hobbs, Out of Eden and Amy Grant. Smith includes only three cuts from his own pen, but draws from some of the finest praise offerings around, ranging from classics such as "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" to modern ballads such as

“Breathe” and “You’re All I Want.” Each cut is sung with breathtaking passion and purity.

Already making airtime is “Above All,” co-written by Smith and his wife, Debbie. In addition to Worship’s mid-September release, certain retailers are also offering an accompanying disc titled Devotions, which consists of five scripture readings and five of Smith’s classic songs.

Doug Joseph

Multicultural Praise

New Season

*By Israel Houghton and New Breed,
Hosanna Music.*

Worship leader Israel Houghton brings a fresh and exciting sound to praise and worship music with his debut album, New Season. Accompanied by his band, New Breed, Houghton delivers an energetic live musical collection that combines gospel, rock, reggae and salsa to create a multicultural worship experience.

New Season opens up with a soulful praise anthem “Who Is Like the Lord,” which has strong R&B influences and sounds similar to Fred Hammond’s or Gary Oliver’s work. The release continues with a

joyful, urban rendition of Darrell Evans’ “Trading My Sorrows” and the danceable reggae cut, “My Life Belongs to You.” Houghton and New Breed also add some Latin flair with “Suddenly” and “I Lift Up My Hands.”

Though each cut is exceptional, the standout is undoubtedly the title track. A prophetic psalmist, Houghton exhorts the crowd, saying: "It's a new season. It's a new day/ Fresh anointing is coming your way/ It's a season of power and prosperity/ It's a new season coming to me."

A release that reflects much of the diversity within the body of Christ, *New Season* is a rare and excellent offering that places Israel Houghton and New Breed among the pacesetters in praise and worship.

Twanna Powell

Heartfelt Worship

Almost There

By MercyMe, INO Records.

You may not have heard of them, but the Dallas-based band MercyMe has a heart for worship. In seven years as an independent group, the band sold more than 100,000 albums featuring their unique modern rock and pop sound.

Almost There marks their first record deal, and it includes some of the band's best songs. The heart-gripping "I Can Only Imagine" makes listeners wonder how they would respond to standing in the presence of God. Fans will recognize fresh versions of "It's All Right," "In You" and "Cannot Say Enough" as well as the newly recorded "Bless Me (Jabez's Song)."

For the recording, producer Pete Kipley stepped in to stretch the band members in their level of play. In the process, MercyMe was stripped of much of its wonderful, organic, out-of-the box sound but given new life for radio airplay.

Overall, MercyMe is a band that deserves to be heard. And those who enjoy their new album will be wise to discover some of their original, worship-focused independent releases.

Margaret Feinberg

Classic Gospel

Still Tramaine

By Tramaine Hawkins, GospoCentric.

It's been seven years since she last recorded an album, but gospel great Tramaine Hawkins makes a seamless re-entry into the world of gospel music with her latest release *Still Tramaine*. Capturing the hallmark mezzo soprano that set the standard for female gospel artists, *Still Tramaine* has both contemporary and classic elements, yet maintains a traditional feel that is more reminiscent of her earlier work with Edwin and Walter Hawkins than her later contemporary solo efforts.

The opening "Justified by Faith" is a rousing choir anthem, while "Great Change" is a danceable groove with a pulsing bass line. But the rest of the release, save the last two cuts, returns to the traditional, with moving ballads including "I'll See You Again" and "It's Your Power," a duet with Walter Hawkins. The last cut, "By His Strength," takes the sharpest departure, with a hard-hitting dance beat that may remind listeners of Hawkins' "Fall Down," which brought the Grammy award-winner crossover appeal in the mid-1980s.

Though filled with new releases, *Still Tramaine* is strangely familiar. Longtime Hawkins fans won't be disappointed, and a new generation of gospel music lovers will discover the voice

that has earned its place among the world's great gospel musicians.

Adrienne S. Gaines

NEWS

New Film Offers Extreme Ministry

What happens when five friends travel across the country in a makeshift Jeep looking for adventure? They discover what they're really made of and learn some crucial life lessons along the way.

At least, that's what happens in the upcoming feature film *Extreme Days*, which opens in theaters nationwide Sept. 28. Produced by Eric Hannah for Truth Soul Armor in conjunction with Providence Entertainment, the teen-savvy film chronicles the humorous and high-energy journey of four lifelong friends—played by A.J. Buckley, Ryan Browning, Dante Basco and Derek Hamilton—who take a road trip to celebrate their graduation from junior college.

Along the way they pick up a confident damsel in distress, played by Cassidy Rae, and the team embarks on a variety of extreme sports—only to learn that the most extreme sport of all is life. Hannah says he hopes the film proves economically successful to show studios that there is a market for films that aren't "twisted and dark and sexually perverted," he says. Yet he also hopes viewers leave theaters "knowing that God is in our midst."

The film is endorsed by a variety of youth leaders including Josh McDowell, Paul Turner of *True Love Waits*, Teen Mania's

Ron Luce and Matthew Barnett of the Los Angeles Dream Center. The soundtrack, which was released by Gotee Records in February, features such artists as SonicFlood, Skillet, PAX217, Earthsuit, and Toby Mac (Toby McKeegan of dcTalk), who performs the title cut.

Extreme Days is one of several films released this year that target churchgoing audiences and are buffered by Christian soundtracks. In February, EMI Gospel released a soundtrack for the HBO film Boycott, which chronicled the civil rights struggle of the 1960s. And in April, GospoCentric released the soundtrack for Kingdom Come, a PG-rated film starring Whoopi Goldberg. The release included original songs by Kirk Franklin, making it the first motion picture soundtrack written and produced entirely by a gospel artist. □ Adrienne S. Gaines

AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

Enjoying Your Walk With God

Pastor and church planter Daniel Brown, Ph.D., has a simple passion. He wants to see people empowered to fulfill their destinies. That's why he partnered with Charisma House Publishers to write the first book in its new Journey of Faith series, designed to help believers understand the fundamentals of the faith.

In the debut, Enjoying Your Journey With God, Brown offers a "non-legalistic," practical guide to understanding God's love. "If you understand how much God enjoys you, you'll enjoy your

walk with Him more," he says. "I'm convinced the enemy tries to attack us at these basic levels, and it skews everything from there."

Brown says he uses a "graceful, cheerful" tone to tackle such topics as grace, forgiveness, Bible study and worship. And though the series was developed with charismatics in mind, Brown says he explores issues such as the baptism in the Holy Spirit and spiritual warfare in a manner that won't isolate noncharismatics.

Using tons of illustrations, Brown paints the picture of a God who loves His children "like an addict." His forgiveness is like "a great pool of cool water on a very hot day." As a result of better understanding God, Brown hopes believers will feel emboldened to share their faith. "This book will give any normal believer a sense of, 'Wow, I get it now,'" Brown says. "Then they'll be more...[able] to evangelize others."

Adrienne S. Gaines