

A VISIT WITH JOHN FLOWERS

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I asked John to identify people in a 1923 picture of the Jackson church with visitors from Detroit. He saw Richard Herrington and began telling me about the Westside church when he came. Richard and John Granville Holt were elders and neither were capable Bible students or teachers.

G. E. Stewart was there as minister and was wanted to teach young preachers at SWCC. When the school began it had a white President and Bible teachers which taught the preaching students a white preaching style. Blacks wanted a teacher who could teach black preaching style and so persuaded Stewart to come.

That was 1952 and JRF was ready to leave Joseph Campau because of all the legal trouble developing there. G. E. Stewart said he would leave if JRF would come to the Westside. Stewart had been in consultation with the big four who wanted him in Terrell and knew of JRF's work on the radio program which Joseph Campau was conducting at that time. He was well-known in the church and a capable Bible student. JRF let it be known he was not interested in being a preacher. He knew churches did not pay enough and he had a large family to raise. Besides, he had a good job with Ford Motor Company and was active in the church on the side. Because G. E. Stewart had baptized John O. Williams and preachers felt they owned whomever they baptized, John O. was asked to come and take the church. He came but kept an eye on JRF the entire 14 months he was here.

John O wanted to promote the friendship with Orum Trone, but several had left Joseph Campau to come to the Westside and were dissatisfied with Trone. One Sunday John O invited a friend to come preach at the Westside. He came in a new car and wore a diamond stick pin in his tie. In the pulpit he praised Trone very highly. When he finished, John O took up a collection for the guest preacher but there was very little given. John O became enraged and fussed at the people for treating the man so poorly and cheaply. He quoted Paul saying that it was proper to give "not out of necessity," noting that Barnes and Matthew Henry agreed with this understanding. After service, JRF said they needed to talk about his use of Paul phrase and doubted Barnes and Matthew Henry gave that interpretation. John O. got mad at JRF saying that his Bible understanding was respected throughout the brotherhood and that JRF was a novice elder and had no right to question him.

At the evening service, John O. apologized to the congregation for getting mad and saying things in anger in public. He still defended his knowledge of scripture. JRF went to the pulpit and corrected his knowledge of Paul's statement, noting it was contrary to Barnes and Matthew Henry. With that challenge, it was not long before John O. resigned and went to Toledo to preach

JRF knew that John O was staying in G. E. Stewart's house, and one day he had had an opportunity to go in. He looked for his library and saw only one book, Brownlow's Why I Am A

Member of the Church of Christ. JRF felt confident he did not possess much of any library of religious books.

Trone put in his bulletin that the Westside treated John O. unfairly and kicked him out on the street. Trone appealed for funds for John O. The other preachers in town believed that report and sided against JRF. Those preachers were: John Kolb, Alonzo Rose and A. C. Holt. These men bragged about putting Westside out of business in 6 months. G. E. Stewart was brought back to the Westside for a gospel meeting. He waited until the Detroit preachers were present, his wife informing him who was in the audience. He denied the charge that the Westside treated John O. unfairly. He said the church faithfully paid rent to him for the use of his house for the preacher.

JRF began to preach for Westside. Alonzo Rose had someone filling in for him while he was away for a gospel meeting and he had a chance to come hear JRF preach. He went back and reported that if they thought Westside was shutting down they were sadly mistaken - meaning he was impressed with JRF's ability to preach.

Lectureship time came at SWCC and JRF and Granville Holt went. They spent the night with G. E. Stewart in Ft Worth and drove over to the lectures. As they pulled on to the campus, John Kolb pulled in beside them in a new Chrysler. He asked Sister Stewart to roll down the window, since she was driving. Kolb said a few preachers from Detroit wanted to meet with him. Stewart said they were having a board meeting and he would not be through until late that evening. He assured him it did not matter and they were anxious to meet as soon as possible.

Just prior to this, G. E. Stewart and R. N. Hogan had chanced to meet during their travels and had discussed the Detroit situation. Both agreed that JRF was a good Bible student and both knew the Westside did not kick John O. Williams out on the street without compensation. The meeting was finally held late that evening. The Detroit preachers seemed intent on getting G. E. Stewart to say something that would trip him up. They asked all kinds of questions of him. They had brought Ellis Bonner along with a tape recorder and this was held close to his mouth without "Blind" Stewart being aware of it. Stewart commented on the way home that night that he couldn't understand what they were doing. He even felt Alonzo Rose's breath against his face. When they arrived home, there was a knock on the door and it was Ellis Bonner bringing G. E. Stewart the tape of the session. Although he had joined the others for the taping, he had a change of heart.

Early the next morning, G. E. Stewart spoke with Brother Isbell, president of SWCC and told him of the night's experience and how he had a restless sleep because he could not figure out what was going on. When all gathered for the main assembly, Isbell told of the event and how low-down it was to take advantage of a blind man and recording him when he was unaware of it. That put a stop to the Detroit preachers trying to bury the Westside. JRF seemed to earn their respect from that time on.