

The Southeast

Outlook

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"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

Author, teacher, radio host Stephen Brown will speak on Nov. 1 at Celebration!

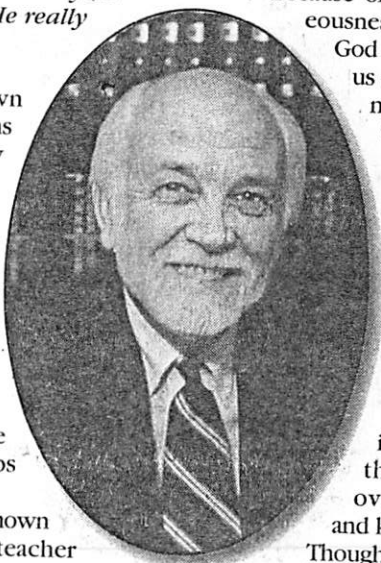
By **Ninie O'Hara**
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*God is not mad at you.
No kidding, He really
isn't.*

Stephen Brown believes Christians need to learn how to dance without looking at their feet.

He says they need to experience the joy of their salvation without worrying so much about whether they're getting all the steps right.

The nationally known author, lecturer, teacher and radio host who will speak at Celebration! Nov. 1 says he believes his chief job between the



cradle and the grave is to spread that joy—"to tell God's people that He is not mad at them."

"Because of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, God will never be mad at us again," said the seminary professor by telephone from his home in Orlando, Fla., last week. "That's the good news of the Gospel—we're forgiven—we're free! Free! But a lot of well-meaning Christians have turned the Gospel into the bad news that God's looking over our shoulders and keeping score."

Though Brown has written more than a dozen books, please see **STEPHEN BROWN** page A6

Stephen Brown speaks at Celebration!

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including *When Your Rope Breaks*; *Born Free, Living Free*; *Jumping Hurdles*, and *Follow the Wind* during a ministry career that has spanned four decades, he said that an early book called *When Being Good Isn't Good Enough* best defines who he is and what his ministry is all about.

It is a book about freedom in Christ and about how miserable some Christians make themselves

in their frantic efforts to be good enough to make God happy.

"If I had to pick one book that lays out what I've come to believe about the Christian life, it would be that one," he said. "I don't think it's written as well as some of the others, but it sums it all up. You can't be good enough to be good enough. So stop trying so hard and let God love you."

Unwilling to take himself or his nationwide ministry too seriously, the former disc jockey admitted with a laugh that he had no idea

how his speaking engagement at Southeast Christian Church came about, since he long ago handed over his calendar and the keys to his schedule to somebody else.

"I just go where they tell me. I get on an airplane and wherever it lands, I get off and talk."

But he has heard about Southeast and looks forward to seeing "the great work God is doing in that church."

The title of his sermon—When Rocks Cry Out—came to him

almost like a revelation, he said with a grin in his voice. It formed instantly in his mind the day his secretary called out "They have to know what you're speaking on right now!"

But the topic is a familiar one to the professor of preaching and pastoral ministry at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando. Brown founded Key Life Network, which yearly sends out more than 350,000 cassette tapes to subscribers, and he teaches Bible on the national radio program Key Life, which is broadcast weekly from 350 outlets.

"I am so tired of the worship wars in American churches today—fighting over traditional worship services vs. contemporary worship. When Jesus was about to make His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the people were so excited. When they were told to be quiet, Jesus said that if they were silenced, the very rocks would cry out."

Part of his topic addresses the God Is Dead movement as well.

"There are a lot of gods in this country today that I'd like to kill, but the real God is the author and creator of the universe and we don't get a vote. He's alive and well. That's something I've always known, even when I didn't want to."

Brown's spiritual journey began in a home where his father was a "womanizer and a drunk," and where his mother read to him from the works of Charles Spurgeon—while teaching him to cuss. But God



Stephen Brown emphasizes the joy of salvation in his ministry, which is headquartered in Orlando, Fla. He and his wife, Anna, enjoy their grandchildren, Christy, 4, and Allison, 2.

was there, and the little boy always felt His presence.

"Even when I was just a little kid and all the other little boys talked about growing up to be firemen or policemen, I knew. I knew I would spend my life serving God. I've never been able to get that monkey off my back, even when I was an agnostic. I think God knew I wouldn't like it, so He put it in my heart early and made the calling so strong I couldn't ignore it—though Lord knows I've tried!"

He went to seminary, did graduate work in theology and pastored a small church. But even then, he "didn't believe any of that stuff about God."

"After all, I was an intellectual! And how does an intellectual get past Genesis?"

The turning point in his spiritual life came when his daughter, Jennifer, was born. She was very ill, with a leg that would not grow and would likely require amputation.

"And here I was an intellectual and didn't believe in a God Who cared! I am not a good person—not now or then—but I do love my family!"

A friend who was a charismatic Anglican pastor called his congregation to pray for the little girl, though Brown held out absolutely no hope that it would do any good.

"They prayed, and then the doctor came in early and called me to say that something 'miraculous' had happened. Jennifer's leg had been healed."

"That day, a radical shift took place in my theology. All of a sudden a God I didn't think cared had intervened in my life."

Brown could not find a way to explain it, or to understand why he had "buried the babies of good people and I wasn't good. Why me?"

The shift in discernment took years and the ministry of Christian brothers who loved him. Finally, Brown came to understand that "being good" had nothing to do with it—that doing all the right things wouldn't make God love him any more than He already did—which was enough to send His Son to die on Brown's behalf.

"I just knelt down and told

God, 'I'm not good, but from now on, I'm yours.'"

Brown's Christian life took odd turns that bring a chuckle to his voice when he recalls them. He did a radio talk show for two and a half years that "went down in flames," dashing a 15-year-dream. The embarrassment and the shame were some of the best things that ever happened to him, he said, though he certainly didn't think so at the time.

Even as he was mad at God for allowing the failure, he realized that "I was in too deep to get out now. You can't unsee the truth. I knew there was a sovereign God Who didn't need my help to run the universe."

"Oh, I told God that if He loved me, He would make what I did successful. I'm sure God got a good laugh out of that! Then I had an attack of sanity and asked the Lord to teach me to rejoice in whatever was His will."

Now Brown lives a life that begins at 4 a.m. when "coffee and Jesus get me up."

"Don't get to thinking I'm some kind of spiritual superman because I'm praying at four o'clock in the morning. I do it because I want to. That time is so important to me. It's the only place I can go and be totally honest and be totally accepted. And sometimes when I pray, God comes. He allows me to sense it emotionally. And sometimes, He doesn't."

He laughed then, thinking of a dear friend who is a farmer and one of Brown's two accountability partners.

His friend was praying, asking God what He wanted him to do that day.

"Lord, I'll do what you want me to do," his friend prayed.

And it was as if the Lord asked in return: "What do you want to do?"

"I'd like to build a barn," the friend replied. And he heard God's response: "Then do it with joy!"

Brown said Christians need to live their lives "with joy!"

"All that stuff we do for God—He's not impressed. He wants our hearts, not our bake sales. He wants to make us free!"