

Upon Reflection of 2023

Reflecting on the whirlwind of 2023, the encapsulating phrase “It’s both” paints a vivid picture of the myriad experiences that defined this remarkable year. A unique year that for me and probably many others had ups and downs, a year in which you may have questioned all that God had said or even wondered if those prophecies you received would ever come to pass.

Download PDF

```
[responsivevoice_button voice="US English Male"
buttontext="Listen to this Feature" buttoncolor:"blue"]
```

At the forefront of this year’s narrative was the profound journey of the church. Nationally, what we saw at the Asbury revival unfolded as an extraordinary manifestation of a divine intervention. A genuine move of God that drew thousands to a Christian university in a region that would not normally attract such a crowd without the usual famous speakers and preachers. It illuminated a critical truth: a hunger for God precedes His movement, transcending the influence of music or well-planned events. Hunger for God seemed not to be something any one person could produce or manufacture. It arrived as Christians became desperate to see God move inwardly and outwardly.

The fervent hunger for God among Gen Z was palpable. This spiritual zeal coincided with global turmoil, notably in Israel and the ongoing violence in Ukraine, prompting introspection on the significance of these events leaving the question: are end time signs increasing? Simultaneously, our nation weathered political crises, economic shifts and a crescendo of societal needs. We bid farewell to Loren Cunningham, a monumental figure who catalyzed 500,000 missionaries. *The Send* reverberated with the passion of

thousands of Gen Zers, resulting in numerous life-altering salvations. Witnessing “Gen Z For Jesus” gatherings in Los Angeles, united under the banner of “Jesus,” was an awe-inspiring testament to the power of faith and community. From salvations to baptisms, we saw many meet Jesus near the very place Aimee Semple McPherson held her gatherings and flipped Los Angeles for the cause of Christ.

Personal paradigms shifted as I once believed that blessings meant an absence of troubles and that revival unfolded flawlessly with countless testimonies of God moving. Now, I grasp that revival often sprouts amid societal upheaval, and global discord can ignite a fervor for personal spiritual growth. Tragedy and revival share the same lane, as they head the same direction and God seems to use these moments in history to catalyze the church forward.

Lou Engle, my spiritual mentor, famously said, “Underneath the rumble of riots rumbles revival.” This year, I bore witness to God’s unwavering presence in turbulent times, an anchor of faithfulness during the storm. In an era in which faith seems to wane, where societal norms distort truth, God’s movement persists. History will tell in time about those who witnessed only what God did not do and those who discerned His hand amid the darkest hour. This is the juncture where we cling to God’s promises, when our natural sight falters in the face of adversity. It’s a time where we affirm that His promises are unwavering, a resolute truth that God cannot and will not lie.

On a more personal note, I witnessed an amazing season for someone dear to me, broken free from the shackles of sex trafficking and rediscovering their faith in God. The tumultuous journey of breaking addiction and reconciling identity in God despite struggles was one of the greatest miracles I was blessed to witness.

Too often, I have seen the moment when many abandon their divine calling just seconds before the breakthrough. A mere

ounce of courage or encouragement might have rewritten their narrative.

In navigating my own path, I've embraced God's calling despite the persistent urge to surrender to my discouragement. As the world darkens, our light shines brighter. If we are the world's light as the Bible says, then darkness becomes the place we were made for. As we embrace the upcoming year, may we embrace the duality encapsulated in the phrase, "It's both."

It's the year of hardships and divine encounters, victories and midnight struggles, the fulfillment of God's promises alongside the closure of doors.

This past year affirmed that crises don't dismantle us; comfort does. When comfort reigns, the Comforter remains at bay. Yet, in discomfort, His presence becomes our resting place. May you find yourself leaning more onto His ability to do all He said than even your ability to fulfill all you have promised God. May this year unveil moments where we encounter God in valleys and mountaintops.

Perhaps sometimes in both at once.

Brian Barcelona is the founder of *One Voice Student Missions* and *The Jesus Clubs*. Since 2009 Brian has been a leader of youth evangelism calling high school students to surrender their lives to Jesus. Barcelona lives with his family and community in Texas.