

The Man With The Plan

George Bloomer fought a tough battle with drugs as a young man. Today he's cleaning up lives and inspiring people to succeed in life.

Destiny can be relentless. Just ask North Carolina pastor Bishop George Bloomer. He has watched it creep inside a maximum security prison, overshadow an addiction to cocaine and move him beyond the pain of molestation.

Growing up in Brooklyn, New York, in Red Hook projects, Bloomer had dreams of being CEO of his own company. At the age of 9, he even ran an imaginary business from his bedroom—complete with a desk; a torn, black-leather chair that had no legs; and a worn-out attaché case he found on a junk pile. Outside his bedroom door he hung a sign: “George G. Bloomer, President.”

“God always shows you your destiny, your end, at your beginning,” Bloomer says in retrospect.

Even when the family moved into a smaller apartment, his mother crammed his makeshift office furniture into his bedroom. But in the years that followed, Bloomer seemed unlikely to succeed—dropping out of high school in ninth grade with a second-grade reading ability and eventually developing a \$300-a-day cocaine habit.

Yet out of his mess, God crafted a message that has helped thousands find

salvation and deliverance. Today he pastors 2,000-member Bethe'l Family Worship Center Church in Durham and oversees more than 80 churches in his Come Let Us Reason Together

ministerial fellowship. He acknowledges, “It’s been bigger than I ever thought.”

Indeed Bloomer, 39, has come a long way from Red Hook’s apartments A, B and C—from living on welfare with his mother and eight siblings to leading what he says is a \$5 million-a-year venture.

An author and recording artist, Bloomer anticipates that within five years revenue will quadruple. But he says he won’t forget the long and winding road that links him to his roots. After all, those tests along the way forged his testimony.

“A testimony is an undeniable experience you’ve had with God in the past,” he told attendees at New Man magazine’s men’s event in Orlando, Florida, in August. “If you’ll tell the truth, God will use your messed up, tore up life to craft another person’s life.”

Bloomer is living proof.

Plugged In to the Right Source

For nearly 20 years, believers across the nation have been giving Bloomer and his message a rousing amen. At its core, his ministry focuses on spiritual warfare and deliverance, though Bloomer rounds it out with teaching on personal and spiritual growth, and developing business acumen.

“He’s always wanted to impact [God’s] kingdom and create wealth,” observes longtime friend Kingsley Fletcher, pastor of Life Community Church in Research Triangle Park, North

Carolina. "He's always talked about the community. And when he's talked about it, he's talked about creating jobs and being able to survive."

According to Durham native Darren Meadows, Bloomer's message is regarded as refreshing for an otherwise spiritually dry region dominated by "religious" institutions and its mainstream denominations. Bloomer uses a nontraditional ministry style and is described as demonstrative, animated and humorous.

At the New Man event, for example, Bloomer illustrates his point using a common wire strip. As he playfully searches for the right connection for the plug, Bloomer tells the men that if a man is not tapped into the real source—God—then he has no power. He is merely hooked up to himself. And if he is in ministry, others can be drawn into the same delusion.

"While you're laughing, you're learning something," says Meadows, a longtime member of Bethe'l. "It's like Bill Cosby and Fat Albert: 'You might be laughing, but you might learn something.'"

Using a brand of New York City candor—what some would describe as raw, in-your-face preaching—Bloomer frequently shares his experiences growing up amid a vicious cycle of poverty, abuse and illiteracy. He learned to read just 14 years ago, and no one in his family graduated from high school. His point is not lost on listeners: If God can deliver him, He can change anybody.

"The young people say, 'I can feel you,'" says Cliff Lovick, a Greensboro, North Carolina, minister who has invited Bloomer

to speak at his church on several occasions.

“I think one of the effects of ministry is they have to feel you. They have to make contact. That is an aspect with Bishop Bloomer’s ministry. There are a lot of people hurting, and they need somebody they can feel and can make contact spiritually and emotionally.”

For Bloomer, relevance is a matter of remembering his past and being transparent enough to share it with others. In his book *The Little Boy in Me* (Creation House Press), Bloomer challenges men to become emotionally mature while sharing his testimony of molestation, which he says led him to hide a little boy’s emotions in the body of a grown man. Often in ministry settings, he talks about his involvement in gangs, promiscuity and drug dealing—a lifestyle that eventually landed him in the notorious Rikers Island prison.

“The prison became my processing chamber,” Bloomer says. “It was the place where the Lord would finally get the yes out of me that I’d refused Him for years.”

Bloomer answered the call to ministry at age 17 and was ordained through the Bethel Full Gospel Tabernacle, a deliverance movement church. His first visit to Durham was in 1982 when he was 19 years old and preaching in a small revival at Mount Olive Baptist Church. Though in ministry, Bloomer still struggled with his past cocaine addiction.

“I had experienced a season of deliverance,” he says, “but in my second year of traveling ministry the craving for cocaine came back. For nearly two years I was strung out on cocaine and preaching at the same time.”

A year later he returned to Durham for good with the intent of starting anew, ridding himself once and for all of the cocaine habit. He attributes his deliverance to prayer and submitting himself to God's Word.

"I wanted to get out of New York City, out of that scene, and get myself healed, delivered, set free and taken care of. North Carolina afforded me that opportunity," says Bloomer, who learned to read proficiently and earned his GED after moving to Durham.

Bloomer had met the former Jeannie Little a year earlier during that first visit to Durham. "Bloomer," which she affectionately calls him, asked her family's permission to date her. They married in June 1983 and have two daughters, Jessica and Jennifer.

Though he says he wrestled with hatred toward his father for physically abusing his mother, initially Bloomer was an authoritarian leader in his own home, using Scripture to support his oppression. One day he got angry with Jeannie and attempted to hit her, but she moved in time to avoid the blow.

As he retreated to the couch, she went into the kitchen, retrieved a heavy cast-iron frying pan and whacked him on the head with it, knocking him out cold. "That was one thing my mother did: She didn't allow my father to hit her," says Jeannie, 37. "That was something we didn't take, and although I was shy and naive, it was something I wasn't going to take."

Jeannie believes that incident made Bloomer a better husband and father, and the two now share their insights on marriage in their latest book, *Crazy House, Sane House* (Whitaker

House), which released earlier this year. "Marriage is not a dictatorship," Jeannie writes. "Instead, a sane house is built with understanding and respect for the other partner within the house."

Building a House for God

Today Bloomer has come full circle, planting a church in a neighborhood much like the one in which he grew up. The property where Bethe'l is housed was once East Elementary School, a 12-acre tract of land just east of downtown Durham. Less than a decade ago, the surrounding neighborhood was drug-infested and crime-ridden, and more than half of all Durham's murders occurred there.

The school had been abandoned for several years and vandalized numerous times. Had it not been for the fact that a segment of the main building was considered a historical landmark, being more than 100 years old, it would have been condemned by the city. "I drove by it one day [in 1995], and God told me that He had preserved this school for me. I thought God was joking," says Bloomer, who was still a traveling minister at the time. "I was saying to myself, 'You thought a lot of me, didn't You?'"

For several months after receiving that word, Bloomer said he would curiously drive through the neighborhood, making sure to stop by the school. "I never prayed. But I would walk along the [parking] lot, observe things, pick up pieces of paper," he says.

In May 1996, Bloomer took a more prodigious step onto the property that was then up for auction. "I found an opening

through a window," he says. "When I entered, it was dark and dingy. There was defecation. There were animals running through the building—and some people."

As he wandered farther inside, Bloomer paused and leaned against a wall. Then he says the craziest thing happened to him: "I heard children running through the hallway. Public School 27 [in Brooklyn] came back to me. I used to run through those hallways. I knew every nook and cranny of that building. It all came back to me."

A month later, Bloomer planted Bethe'l through a 30-day tent revival. Within two weeks, he had nearly 500 in attendance. Out of that meeting Bloomer says 70 people joined his new church, but only 20 showed up for that first service, which was held in a business complex in downtown Durham.

While conducting services in the business complex, Bloomer says he also began negotiations for the school property. Initially it was to be auctioned for \$875,000. The asking price dropped to \$270,000 and later to \$90,000, which the Bloomers paid after putting their house up for collateral. "It was a total walk of faith," Bloomer says.

It took Bethe'l, which means "house of God," nearly two years and about \$555,000 to refurbish the school's former auditorium and gymnasium to hold services. An \$800,000 project is currently under way to construct a new sanctuary adjacent to the current one.

Meadows said the ministry's presence has been linked to a significant drop in crime in the area. "The transformation has amazed me," he says. "There was a lot of gang activity. There

was a lot of prostitution and drugs right in that area. Now you hardly ever see it.”

Bishop Eddie Long, pastor of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia, agrees that the transformation is impressive. “The move of God today is one of universality and unity, and not necessarily one geographically,” Long says. “In other words, God has a plan to reach people and bring the entire body together as one body through whomever He desires.

“There is something God placed in Bishop Bloomer that the people in Durham, North Carolina, need. God’s hand is on him for the work he’s doing.”

As for the school building, more work is being accomplished. Throughout the spring, saws and drills whistled. New Sheetrock, fresh Spackle, wallpaper and paint were applied. Old classroom and office furnaces were being replaced with a centralized heating system. Chalkboards will be replaced with dry erase boards. Wooden floors were to be covered with carpeting.

When finished, it will become the home of Bloomer’s business enterprise, The Image Center, which will consist of a banquet facility, travel agency, recording studio, recreation room and workout facility, barber shop, beauty salon and bookstore.

“I think everything that God is doing now happened on 453 Columbia Street, in Apt. C, in that little room my mother saved for me,” Bloomer says.

On the door to Bloomer’s office a gold plated plaque is engraved with “George G. Bloomer, President.” Inside, the high

ceiling and old furnace evoke memories of New York. To the left is a portrait of Bloomer's family above a couch. There are several pieces of artwork depicting lions and eagles throughout the converted classroom.

"I'm surrounded by eagles and lions. I love them," Bloomer says. "Eagles for me represent the transcendence of God, being swift and mounting up on His anointing."

"Eagles see things as God sees it: He views our situation like God does from above. The lion represents His strength and majesty and His authority. I'm submitted to God and protected by Him at the same time."

Farther to the right are a sizeable desk and a large, plush leather chair. A leather briefcase is usually positioned to his left. Destiny didn't let go, and Bloomer remains true to his dream.

"I'm a part of what's going on here," Bloomer says. "I'm satisfied in the area that I'm thank God for that."

Cocaine in the Church?

Christians struggle with drug use more than anyone wants to admit, but Malachi House is helping people find deliverance.

There is a spiritual junkyard full of fallen ministers who returned to former drug and alcohol addictions. Bishop George Bloomer has been there; he's seen the shame. But he also knows

the way out.

Early in his ministry, Bloomer preached in churches while supporting a \$300-a-day cocaine habit. Now pastor of Bethe'l Family Worship Center Church in Durham, North Carolina, Bloomer still remembers the burdensome hypocrisy, and he believes there is a ministry opportunity awaiting those willing to counsel these pastors and help them rehabilitate. Bloomer himself has been delivered of his addiction since 1983.

"You must do this very carefully and prayerfully and not see each individual as a hypocrite," he says. "The inward nature and desire comes up through bad teaching and no discipline. I've come to know that all these desires are not demonic. They're carnal."

Just as Christ paid the price for mankind's sin, Bloomer believes the church must pay the ransom to redeem the fallen ministers who want to be restored. But, as Bishop Eddie Long of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia, observes, the church often forgets the grace it was given.

"All of us have sinned," Long says. "It is important that we not indulge or encourage sinful activity. But at the same time, we must remember that God is in the restoration business for the repentant."

Long said many people do not realize the stress of being a pastor. But one reason pastors fall back into their past addictions is a lack of accountability. Many feel trapped in their sin, fearing that they'll be exposed and lose their ministries if they confide in certain colleagues.

"While this is not an excuse, it is an understanding that only another pastor understands," Long says. "Sometimes a pastor can help another pastor through trying times. We cannot be islands to ourselves. We have to have a circle of friends with whom we can be transparent and vulnerable and who love us enough to hold us accountable."

The work Bloomer does for his fallen comrades is actually an extension of his noted deliverance ministry. Bloomer says the church needs a . unit where these fellow soldiers can receive healing, encouragement and restoration.

"The body of Christ only has hospice," he says, "where people get sick, and there is no recovery."

Bloomer refers many to the Malachi House, a Christ-centered treatment center in Greensboro, North Carolina. Bloomer learned of this facility through a ministry contact of his, elder Cliff Lovick, who is the executive director.

"[In] the church, we make it so difficult [for fallen ministers] to come back and be real with themselves. That needs to change," Lovick says. "We need to be in an environment that provides care and support for individuals that have fallen. God is a God of mercy. The church needs to be a place that people can find hope and healing in spite of being a pastor or minister."

Lovick said part of the key to recovery is walking in repentance. A person also needs to understand what habits cause one to sin and be able to identify them before falling into a downward spiral. According to Lovick, the Malachi House claims a success rate of 42 percent. Although the number does

not seem impressive, Lovick says it's a higher rate than secular programs.

He says secular programs are more educational and program-oriented. A missing element in secular treatment, says Lovick, a former addict himself, is discipleship. "They struggle without a Christ-centered approach," he says. "Discipleship allows people to spend time with people and get to know Christ through them.

"We're expecting that people get healed and delivered. But for some it is a process. And that process is discipleship."

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For more information about the Malachi House, call (336) 275-2500, or write P.O. Box 20803, Greensboro, NC 27420.