

Finding Destiny In The Wasteland

AFTER YEARS OF PREPARATION, GOD BIRTHED A CHURCH WHERE THOSE DEEMED UNREACHABLE COULD BE DELIVERED AND CHANGED.

In 1988 I received a prophetic word that changed my life. I was told, "You will pastor in a neighborhood that has become a waste place. The church building will need a facelift, but God will supernaturally provide for the renovation."

The prophetess who had come to me went on to tell me that people would travel from around the nation to receive deliverance from spiritual bondage at the church. And she explained how God would physically and spiritually restore the neighborhood nearby.

My ears could not believe what I was hearing. My natural mind could not see myself, a former drug abuser, ministering on this level to anyone.

It seems like yesterday when two leaders from the Church of God gave me the keys to a building located on the corner of Steele and Blue Streets in Jacksonville, Florida. The conditions in this drug-infested area had worsened in recent years, prompting the group to move to a better part of town. Since that time, no pastor had been able to thrive in the neighborhood.

The church that had been prophesied to me became a reality on the first Sunday in January 1996. It was just as the prophecy had stated.

The facility seated 900 people comfortably, and the area was a haven for drug trafficking. This didn't faze me in the least. The inhabitants of this tough neighborhood were my future

ministers and preachers.

Even before I had known this building would be my church, God directed me to ride around in my car and pray over the city. I was claiming Jacksonville for Jesus.

He told me to circle the Durkeville area seven times. On the seventh lap, I was to shout the victory.

As I did this, I caught the attention of many of the drug dealers. I'm sure they thought I was covertly helping the police.

I remember during my final trip around the block that day, I shouted at the top of my voice. All the people in the neighborhood looked at me as though I were crazy, but I felt the walls were coming down!

QUITTING NOT AN OPTION

With all the obstacles that came against us at Steele and Blue, it often appeared as though the people were unreachable, but giving up was never an option. We didn't want to be among the preachers who had tried and failed to revive this local church, even though the neighborhood was a challenge.

Some of the most hard-core, criminally minded people in the city lived near my church. I'd hung out on these streets when I was strung out on drugs. Because I remembered what it was like to have a criminal mind, it was easy for me to reach out to the residents.

In a sense, I was in a neighborhood of lepers. Truly, I felt like a leper myself. But God reminded me of the four lepers who sat at the gates of Samaria when a great famine fell on the land (see 2 Kin. 7:3-11).

Just as in Samaria, trouble wasn't limited to one area in Jacksonville. Our entire city seemed to be in a hopeless situation.

We needed help. But a place where people could run for salvation, safety and true deliverance didn't exist at that time.

Today, at Spoken Word Ministries, we have church members who have undergone sex changes and who have participated in the occult and many other sinful practices. God has so beautifully transformed these people that you can't detect who came out of what.

There are still many others out there whom society deems unregenerate, but God sent His Son for them, too. Sometimes you have to be willing to become a reproach in the eyes of men in order to reach the souls God has assigned to your care.

During the time of the Old Testament, lepers were considered unclean and beyond help. In 2 Kings 7 the four leprous men figured they could either continue to sit and do nothing, or they could go into the enemy's camp and take back the goods that had been stolen from them.

The Bible says that when the lepers decided to do something for themselves, God sent a delusion that caused the enemy to flee in fear (see 2 Kin. 7:6). When the lepers got up, it was twilight, the same hour when God scattered their enemies (see 7:5,7).

At this time in my ministry, I had no one to turn to who could help my vision come to pass. I was in an abusive marriage that ended in divorce, and my name became a reproach.

No one in the church community wanted to deal with me, and those who supported me were considered lepers just as I was. Then I made the decision to go where the provision was—in the enemy's camp!

In the Scriptures, a great thing happened when the lepers returned to Samaria: They delivered the goods to the city, and the people were no longer afraid of their disease. The Bible

never said the lepers were healed. It was as if their disease no longer mattered.

People in the community didn't refuse the nourishment the lepers provided because they were starving. We are spiritually starving in America, and God is birthing what can be described as "leper ministries," in a sense. These are ministries that may be small or not highly regarded but are willing to share the gospel with the multitudes.

In my city, we were experiencing a famine of solid, ground-level deliverance ministry. Somehow, the enemy had crept in and slandered the ministry of spiritual warfare and deliverance. God moved for us miraculously, but the closer we got to our breakthrough, the darker it seemed to get.

DESTINY ISN'T FREE

At Spoken Word, we were willing to pay the price even though the enemy came at us from every direction in an attempt to shut us down. When facing each challenge, I often thought about the prophetic words spoken over my life.

The demonic attacks we experienced during our early days in ministry were bad, but the church withstood the storms. For two years we could count the number of visitors we had on one hand. At the time, we had four families in our church, which totaled 18 people.

After my divorce, I was married to a former drug dealer who had given his life to Christ—Ardell (Danny) Daniels. In the midst of our difficulties, we saw a sliver of light. We began experiencing breakthrough after breakthrough. God began to confirm our ministry.

We went into the enemy's camp to take back what had been stolen from us, and the spoils were plenty! God began to save and deliver those considered untouchable.

We saw signs, wonders and miracles on a daily basis. But just

as God sent prophetic words to me about my destiny, Satan sent me lies and threats.

One day a man called me from a cult he called Eifi and said that he had been sending death curses to my partner, Pastor Bea, and me. The caller said his powers were not working against us.

Before he hung up the telephone he told me he wanted to leave the craft, if he could find a sure way out. He also said very strongly to me, "Whatever you are doing, keep on doing it!"

As I think back on the phone call, it almost seems unreal. The only thing that testifies of its reality is Pastor Bea's subsequent death from cancer.

It was Pastor Bea who gave us the name "Demon Busters." When she preached the gospel, the gates of hell trembled.

Her death was one of the hardest things I had ever dealt with because I believe she died as a result of having stopped doing what kept her alive. She ceased doing deliverance on the level on which we had been doing it and became a casualty of war.

I learned that though we are called to fight the good fight of faith, faith without works is dead. God has given us power over all the powers of the enemy, but if we don't use it wisely, we pay a high price.

Pastor Bea was also the prophetess who had told me years ago that God was calling me to the waste places to pastor a church. Her godly lifestyle and instruction laid out the blueprint for my life and a ministry that is now reaching the nations. I look forward to fellowshiping with her in heaven one day.

Until then, no matter what arises, I have to keep doing what I have been called to do. It may cost me relationships, family and friends, but I must press toward the mark.

I am called to cast out devils and manifest the glory of God in the earth realm. I will not settle for anything less!

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