

From Barrenness to Blessing

Almost 40 years ago a young missionary from Tennessee named Naomi Dowdy ventured to the Marshall Islands to begin her ministry. She battled loneliness, sickness and culture shock while learning to love rice, Chinese noodles and all things Asian. She eventually planted a church in Singapore that grew to 5,000 members in 30 years.

After turning the leadership of Trinity Christian Center over to the man she trained, Naomi began traveling all over the world, teaching pastors how to grow churches. Today, while many women her age are taking dream vacations or playing bingo with friends, Naomi is more passionate than ever about claiming nations for Jesus. How I wish there were more Naomi Dowdys in the world.

I have had the privilege of sitting under Naomi's teaching ministry and sharing the pulpit with her for the last two years, and she has become a true spiritual mother in my life. That's why I am so thrilled to introduce you to her in this issue of SpiritLed Woman. I hope that when you read her article on page 16 you will receive a boost in your faith.

By watching Naomi I have learned that women have so much more potential than most church leaders recognize. Some religious traditionalists would be happy if all women sat in the back of the sanctuary. Actually, God has placed a desire in women to engage in spiritual battle and to join men as equal partners in building His kingdom.

Perhaps we have forgotten that when God called Abram to be the father of our faith, he also called a barren woman named Sarai. Both Abram and Sarai struggled to believe they could be the parents of "many nations," as God had promised (Gen. 17:4,16).

Even though the promise was reaffirmed seven times, Abram and his wife wrestled with doubts. Both fell into the trap of rationalizing their promise away. And both came to the conclusion that they were too old to ever see the fulfillment of what God had guaranteed.

But in the end, after God changed both Abram's and Sarai's names, they believed. They became heroes of faith. Even though Sarah had laughed to herself when she heard about God's promised miracle, ultimately she received the ability to conceive—at the age of 90! That little baby Isaac is the best proof that God produces His biggest miracles in the midst of human brokenness.

What about you? It's likely that God gave you some special promises many years ago. You may have put some of them on a shelf, or perhaps you even laughed them away—thinking to yourself, "That could never happen to me." Or perhaps you gave God a list of excuses:

"I'm too old. I've missed my chance. I'm not qualified. I've made too many mistakes."

The devil loves to play those messages over and over in your ears. You must fight back by pushing the eject button.

I'm glad my friend Naomi Dowdy didn't listen to the voices of doubt. Instead, like Sarah, she held fast to the impossible dream. Today, even though she never married, Naomi has countless spiritual sons and daughters ministering all over the globe. And her life is now inspiring a new generation of women who are called to be nation-changers.

It's not too late to become a woman of faith. Tune out the shame and condemnation. Quit rationalizing. Don't laugh at the impossibilities. Stop looking at the darkness of your circumstances and instead gaze on the bright promises of His Word. He is eager to turn your barrenness into joyful shouting.