

Dream Center Co-Founder: God Redeems 'Rock Bottom' Moments

When I was 20 years old, I came to Los Angeles to pastor a church. It all happened because a big bank was going to take possession of a little church born out of the Azusa Street Revival, and my dad wasn't about to let that happen.

So while he searched for a real pastor, he asked me to step in. He gave me 10 of his best sermons to memorize and promised I would only serve for three months.

Now, I'm approaching age 50, and I'm still waiting for the real pastor to show up.

Those first months of shepherding a church taught me a lot. They were excruciatingly hard. The church had what I like to call a reverse revival, going from 18 members down to two. I remember standing in that little church one Sunday evening completely alone. No one showed up.

I felt defeated.

That night, I went home and wept. I also cried out to God, asking Him why I was here and what I was supposed to be doing.

And do you know what? God answered.

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He told me to go to LA's Echo Park neighborhood and take a prayer walk.

Eight hours later, I was still walking. And as I walked, I was confronted by the brokenness of the world and the incredible hardships facing so many in the city of Los Angeles. I walked

through Skid Row and saw firsthand the reality of homelessness. I saw families doing all they could to survive, even when hope seemed so far away.

In the midst of all of that, God spoke to me again. He told me to stop being so obsessed with being a success. Success, as the world sees it, wasn't what He wanted for me. Instead, He told me to focus on being a blessing.

He asked me to pay attention to the hurt and brokenness in the world and start doing something about it.

He told me to use what I already have to make a difference.

All I had at that point was an empty church, a desk, three bags of food and a candy jar. I thought, "What on earth could God do with that?"

He said to move my desk out onto the sidewalk. And that's exactly what I did.

While I was at it, I brought my bags of food and my candy jar. Then I started giving food and candy to the people walking by.

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That's when things started happening.

I built relationships with the people in the neighborhood. I got to know their stories, and I kept giving away the food I had. Not long after this, someone donated a house to the church, and I started a rehabilitation program.

Always remember this about obedience to the prompting of the Spirit: When God asks us to do something, He's the one who makes it happen.

All He asks of us is to be faithful. It's a good thing that's

all He requires, because I had no idea what I was doing. But I was certain God had told me to be a blessing with whatever I had instead of waiting for a perfect plan.

Here's something else to remember about the God we serve: He's already got the perfect plan. He's just waiting for us to realize it and stop trying to do it on our own.

For me, it took hitting rock bottom in an empty church to understand God's plans are better than mine. Because at the end of myself, when I was sure I was in way over my head, I got to a place where I could really listen to God. This was a humbling moment when I was asked to give up what I wanted and go after what He had for me.

I am certain this same lesson can help anyone else, no matter their stage of life or the status of their ministry. It's so simple: Listen to God and be faithful in what He gives you to do. Because when you do that, He will work miracles through you.

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To learn more about Barnett and the Los Angeles Dream Center, read the Charisma Magazine online cover story, "Bringing the Light of Hope Against Spreading Darkness," at this link.