

How One Woman's Birthday Kindness Sparked a Movement

How one *Charisma* reader's birthday spent blessing others has sparked a global initiative

On the surface, The Birthday Project doesn't look like a typical ministry, nor does its founder describe it as one. But Robyn Bomar says God has used it to reach people who may not have ordinarily given it a chance.

"It's not one of those things that says Jesus all over it, but it absolutely has Jesus all over it," says Bomar, who sparked this growing movement almost three years ago. "I've seen a lot of people's lives touched through it, and I really believe it is absolutely divinely appointed."

The Birthday Project's goal is to create a shift in the way people think about and celebrate their birthdays and other milestones. Rather than making the day all about themselves, participants spend the day serving others. The idea came when Bomar spent her 38th birthday doing 38 random acts of kindness—one for every year of her life. The seemingly miniscule acts ranged from feeding parking meters, to handing out balloons to kids shopping with their parents, to rounding up carts in a store parking lot. She initially didn't want to publicize how she celebrated her birthday, but her husband, Michael, convinced her to post it on her blog—not to brag, but to share it with people. It soon went viral, and comments began flooding in.

Bomar began praying about what to do with the idea. Nearly a year later she heard God speak to her, and she knew what she needed to do and what to call it: The Birthday Project.

"When I think about it, it's not this genius, novel, never-before-been-thought-of idea," Bomar notes. "There is something

anointed that doesn't make sense to me, but it's exactly what it's supposed to be."

Bomar, whose husband and three daughters also give back on their birthdays, encourages people to find unique ways to celebrate. For her 40th birthday this year, she spent the previous 12 months writing letters to 40 people who made a difference in her life.

"There are no real rules," she says. "It's really about celebrating your life by pouring into the lives of others, whatever that means. For me, that means asking God; for everybody else it's going to be different."

That dynamic element is especially evident among those who share their experiences online. Blogger Jennifer Esses wrote about her Birthday Project-inspired 42nd birthday: "I know that God put me here ... for a definite purpose. The reason isn't just about me, but rather to show others who God is and what life with Him is all about. The Birthday Project completely drove that point home; when your birthday becomes about giving to others, it is a small representation on the calendar of your life as a whole. I'm not sure I will ever look at my birthday the same again."

Bomar believes God is using The Birthday Project in mighty ways. After gaining momentum last year when Pinterest emerged as a social media force, the initiative now has more than 12,000 Facebook fans. The Project also has chapters across the country and shares testimonies from around the world on its website, .

"There are so many people who have said to me, 'I've always believed in doing random acts of kindness for fellow man, but when I did this there was just something different,'" says Bomar, who prays not only for the people who take part in The Birthday Project, but also the recipients of their kindness.

"There are people who do kind acts. That's what we're supposed

to do; that's how Jesus lived. But then there's something that's Spirit-driven. It's so unbelievably touching, it blows my mind. I don't even pretend to understand it. It's really, really exciting to be part of it."