



THE PASTOR'S VOICE

Insights from Church Leaders

The Pastor's Voice Podcast Season 2: Episode 6

Transcript: Starting A Homeless Ministry - In The Middle of COVID!

Reuel Sample:

Matt Barker. Welcome to the podcast. I'm so glad that you are here.

Matt Barker:

Thanks for having me glad to be here.

Reuel Sample:

Matt is working hard down in Fort Worth, Texas with a homeless ministry that he started at all times, right at the outbreak of COVID. Matt, can you tell me about your ministry and why did you start it.

Matt Barker:

Yes, sir. It is called Bread and Fish Ministries. I worked downtown Fort Worth at a hotel. Um, been there for a long time and I've got to know a few of the homeless people that walk around there. When COVID hit, I realized that, you know, the shutdown was starting the next day and they aren't even going to have, you know, just the one or \$2 that they get, or even a drink of water, even be able to go into a business, use the restroom.

Pretty much all the stuff that they've been kind of relying on for a while is going to go away and they're going to have to adapt somehow. So I went home,, prayed about it and God put on my heart to ask for help.

I went on my neighborhood, Facebook page and some other Facebook pages that I'm a part of. And I reached out and asked for help. I told them about the situation I told them what we might need, you know, and sure enough, people just started donating. Just start dropping off food and the backpacks and things like that. And it grew rapidly. We'd see other needs and we'd pray for everything.

It just started happening. It was amazing.

Reuel Sample:

People probably remember it more than they want to is that when we shut things down, everything got shut down. And these areas where the homeless go to get help or to ask people for. Basically there was nobody there except for the homeless.

And so you saw this need to help them because there was nobody there to help them.

Matt Barker:

Yes, sir. Yes, exactly. Even a lot of the shelters, you know, they, they were no longer allowed to bring them back, bring them in because they had to be at 10 capacity. So it was a scramble, even the shelters were closing down.

They, they weren't necessarily closing, but I mean, they had to kick out 90% of the clients. COVID was a tough time to do it.

Reuel Sample:

So how did you go about navigating everything? in the midst of when people were just really scared to even be around people, much less people that they did know who were living out on the streets.

Matt Baker:

I'll tell you it was tricky at first, especially handing out the food, they had all the regulations and all that. So I like to rollerblade just because I've never learned how to a skateboard very well. And me and my friend, Zach, he, he got a skateboard and I got my roller blades and we filled up trunks full of bags, you know?

Food, you know, individually we'd pack them up for, for one person and put them in a Walmart sack tied off and we'd have about 40 50 of those, put them in a trunk. And, uh, we each have a backpack and put 10 or 12 in the backpack and skate around and just literally just drop them right in front of them. Um, you know, we couldn't linger, you know, we didn't want the police to be involved in, uh, and no one really wanted anyone lingering at the time.

So we dropped them all off. Go back, fill up again. Drop them off and then we're empty and do it again the next day.

Reuel Sample:

How long did you do this for?

Matt Barker:

We did that, that way of doing it until they let them out of the convention center. But they're only allowed to be in there for so long, just pretty much asleep. And they are just kind of on the streets. And so as they're on the streets, downtown two blocks from where I work we would pass out to them.

And then once the kind of regulations moved away, probably about four or five months, then we kind of just moved around and found where they were going. Different areas back to the shelters, tent cities, things like that.

Reuel Sample:

What I find fascinating about this, Matt is that you saw a need, you went home, you prayed about it, and then you went out and did it.

You didn't go through committees. You didn't go through focus groups. You didn't go through the process of setting up a not-for-profit. You just saw the need and you went to do that. That's pretty fast.

Matt Barker:

Yeah, it was, it was definitely all God, because I mean, like I said, I've known a lot of these homeless people for a long time and never, never thought to do anything.

Or even my friend Zach was talked about it before. Like I've always wanted to do something like this to get out there and especially just to get up there, minister on the streets and I've never known how, and then all of a sudden we did this and it was just so easy and same with me. I've never known how, and it was just never knew how.

Reuel Sample:

Until you went out and did it. Did you find that it was easier or tougher than you thought or that your initial thoughts were just blown up?

Matt Barker:

Yeah, I was blown away. It was way easier than I thought it would be. I mean, the way easier we just did it. And uh, you know, whenever you're walking in God's will, he's gonna, he's gonna arm you with everything you need.

So, you know, if we saw the need and someone needed, uh, a Bible. God was going to provide us a Bible, but we just, it was way easier. I thought it was amazing. But you know, people who are listening to this, they'd say no, there's, there is absolutely no way I could, could do that even now, much less during COVID.

I've learned a whole lot. I've learned there's pretty much, most of all my stereotypes when it came to the homeless were disintegrated.

I mean, especially, uh, You know, they're all junkies and, you know, I grew up in a small town. I didn't grow up in a big city. Um, I've been here for a while, but, you know, I had the same misconceptions is, you know, they're all on drugs. You, you give them a dollar, they're just going to go sniff it. Um, but wow, there's so many different stories.

There's a lot of mental illness out a lot of way more than I expected. And, you know, I used to work in that field for a while and. It's really, really sad because you know, there is the help, but these, the ones on the street compared to the ones in the homes, they have somebody to put them in that home.

These guys don't have anybody, so they're just on the street and the government's gotta pay for it. I mean, they don't even want to arrest them.

If they do something wrong, they're just getting free room and board, keep them three days and then kick them back out. But yeah, there's a lot of mental illness.

There is definitely a lot of drug use and, and, but a lot of different stories. I mean, I've met veterans that just couldn't cope anymore. I met a guy that used to be an engineer and he lost his wife and two kids in a car wreck and he fell apart and he just has no will to do anything else. So, and then there's so many people that there's more out there.

There, they grew up their whole lives on the streets when they were little. And so they know, oh, And so yeah, definitely those, those misconceptions have changed. I mean, they're no different than, than us, you know, we're sharing food and you're sharing other supplies, which is what they were primarily needing.

Reuel Sample:

Did you have a chance to share the gospel at all?

Matt Barker:

Oh, yes. Yes. And that was, that was, that was the greatest part. Always has been the greatest part and it's always been the greatest need. It's a lot of stuff we're working for right now, but. That's the main reason why, whenever I go out, I always like to go out with someone else or special.

If we can gather more people because you know, once you go out there and you got all this food and you've got 40 people lined up and you know, you don't have a lot of time to do so much talking, you know, you're gonna have people behind you that are not real happy that there's sitting there for 10 minutes, but it can just get a bag of food.

But if I have someone else there. Someone has a need. Someone needs a prayer. You know, I have the Bible, someone was a type it's so much easier. Now the gospel can flow much easier than when it's just not me. And that's so yeah, generally when it's me and Zach, then it's we get, we get to share a lot more.

There's a lot more Bibles being handed out. There's a lot more prayer and it's, it's, you know, handing out the water is one thing, but you know, that Living Water. Yeah. That's what you really out there to really end up now.

Reuel Sample:

We are sharing a little bit before the podcast about your faith journey. Can you, can you, can you tell us a little bit about your relationship with Jesus Christ as you have grown up and gone through some of the challenges in your life?

Matt Barker:

Yeah, I was, uh, I was raised in church. I'm not just at church but in church. We were up there four or five days a week. Sometimes my father was the worship leader in. He taught the youth and my mom played the piano. And at one point, my brother and my sister both played the drums. But then our church had a split.

Our pastor retired, politics got involved and the church split and broke apart. Uh, I mean, it's broken the, probably about three or four different churches in the town. Uh, but we just stopped going. My parents stopped going and, uh, for a little bit, my mom, we were young teenagers, me and my sister.

We would walk to the closest church and we'd go for a little bit, but then, you know, we're teenagers. Our parents got divorced. My mom moved to Mississippi. My dad stayed in Texas and at one point my mom came back to Texas to take care of my dad. And it was just me and my sister by ourselves. So yeah, we got into a lot of bad things, started drinking heavily and I was away from God for a long time.

And, uh, luckily, thankfully, God, let me hit rock bottom. I got a divorce. Um, and a pastor invited me to church. I was playing volleyball and a church leader invited me to Wednesday night services. Just everything changed after that.

Reuel Sample:

You know, your story is a lot like, uh, Franklin Graham, who also was of course, the son of a very extreme as preacher, Billy Graham and Franklin went away from the faith too. And went through a whole bunch of stuff,

rebellion. But now he, he's a powerful, powerful force in the kingdom of God. And that's, that's your story?

Matt Barker:

Yeah. I mean, it's, it's, it's definitely all God, he, he, he let me know that it's all him, you know? Cause I know the person I, I am and was without him, not him, but I know who I was without him.

And I know I could be without him. And it's it's all God.

Reuel Sample:

We talked about. We talked about your faith. We talked about that you grew up in the church. And we hear every now and then preached in the church. Jesus says to feed the poor and to clothe the homeless and to visit the visit the prisoners. And we hear that sermon every now and then, but what can the church do better when it comes to taking care of the homeless in their own local communities, as well as across the country?

Matt Barker:

Yeah, I'll tell ya. Um, I really think if it's just one out of every 100 Christians would, uh, would do something like this because I don't think there would be much of a hunger or a homeless problem. Um, I think, uh, I think we just, we just got beat the church. I mean, the church isn't. You know, once a week and in filling ourselves up and that's wonderful, but you know, we're being blessed in the blessings.

Aren't supposed to stop with us. They're supposed to go through us and if the church will go out there and kind of be the church and, you know, just hit the streets and minister, um, uh, the donations aren't are, are not a problem. They come, people want to give, I don't have room to store things that people want to donate.

But yeah, that just, just obey and follow God's will and be the church. And don't let the blessing stay with you. And we're all called. We're all called to spread the gospel. That's what we're called to do. And, uh, yeah, one out of every hundred of us would, I think there wouldn't be a problem at all.

Reuel Sample:

And you just answered the next question I was going to ask you is how has

all this changed your worldview and your worldview is that all we have to do is just get to work and do stuff.

Matt Barker:

Yeah, definitely. This is definitely woke me up. You know, I was, I was kinda sitting on sitting in a pew for awhile for a long time as myself.

Reuel Sample:

Has this energized your faith?

Matt Barker:

Oh yes, my goodness. Yes it has. Yeah.

Reuel Sample:

How can people help?

Matt Barker:

Um, well, you know, if you go to Bread and Fish Ministry on my Facebook page.

All the information to whether you want to donate then more or anything like that. Uh, but the best ways, but if it comes to donating. Is my wife makes these Amazon wishlist, you know, whether in, she'll put on whatever the need is for the season. So right now, you know, we're really trying to get backpacks and jackets, things like that.

A lot of times throughout the season, it's food, you know, canned goods and snacks and things like that. So just water, but you can just have. Just ordered off that an Amazon list and have it directly shipped over here that way, you know, you know exactly what your money is doing, you know, uh, if you send in money, you know, it might go for pizza one night for the, some guy might go for sodas, it could go for Bibles, but then, you know, if you're, if you're ordering directly off the Amazon list and really want to know exactly what your money is doing, you can do that.

Reuel Sample:

Are you affiliating yourself with a local church to do all this, or you're doing all this independently?

Matt Barker:

We're doing it independently, but we definitely have help. We had, uh, we've churches in Athens, Texas, and east Texas. About two hours from here. Um, they they've reached out and they in them.

Reuel Sample:

Amazing. So you started this ministry and it is a ministry because you saw people that you saw every day because you worked downtown that they could no longer get help. And now you've evolved to the point where even the local school districts are meeting up with you and saying how, how you here are here are supplies for the people that you're serving.