

A Chronicle of Redemption

Chapter 9: Love God, Love People

Ben DeLoach

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CHAPTER 9: LOVE GOD, LOVE PEOPLE Deuteronomy 6

Last week was the first time that we, together as a faith family, heard greater detail about how we as a faith family are going to go into the East Lake and Gate City areas of Birmingham as part of The Radical Experiment. Pastor David challenged you, he challenged me, he challenged all of us as he was teaching out of Numbers 13 and 14, as he was asking us to pray this week about what God is saying, and if He is leading us...leading you and I as individuals, leading parts of us as a faith family to go into the East Lake area...to move, to relocate ourselves there. So, I have hoped that you have been praying that way this week.

As a result of this challenge we had last week, this week I think that it's of great value to us, we're going to hear from Ben DeLoach. Ben DeLoach is going to come out. He's going to share a lot of his story. A lot of what God has been doing in him, and he's going to be able to tell us more about what this picture looks like for him and his family. Then, after Ben shares, briefly we're going to have a time with a panel of people up here, and you're going to get to hear from them, and this group is going to share what it means to dive deeper into relationships, dive deeper into serving in the East Lake and Gate City communities of Birmingham. So, Ben's going to come out and share.

Let me introduce you to Ben DeLoach. He's our Associate Minister for Local Disciple-Making at The Church at Brook Hills. Ben's going to share; I'm looking forward to hearing from him. Then, we will have this panel of folks to share to dive deeper about how we give the gospel away in the midst of urgent spiritual and physical need right here in front of us in Birmingham, Alabama. So, Ben, looking forward to hearing from you this morning.

Ben DeLoach: Thanks, brother. As Chris said, David gave a challenge last week, and it was quite a challenge for us to consider as a faith family...what it looks like to invest our lives in an area of our town, of our city, where there is a great poverty and a great lostness. So, I hope that you've had a chance to pray through that. This is something that my wife and I have been praying through for about six months now. About four months ago, we made the decision to move into East Lake and Gate City. I realize that there are members of our faith family already living in areas of Birmingham like Bessemer and Ensley and Fairfield and some others where they are surrounded by people in their community who are impoverished and lost. This is, in some ways, new to our faith family and in some ways not.

I want to reiterate something that David said last week that, if you are already serving in an area in this community, whether it's ministering to the homeless out in Lynn Park and downtown, or if you are serving the Hispanic community out in Leeds. I know several small groups are doing that out on Lorna Road. There are groups serving in a variety of contexts around this city. I want you to continue to do that, and I want you to pray and be led by God's Spirit to be where God wants you to be. However, as the local Radical Experiment, as The Church at Brook Hills, and as a faith family, we're going to be investing significant resources into the East Lake and Gate City communities. So, pray through that and see if

God will have you to be there to disciple men and women and children and also about moving to the area.

We realize that we will always somewhat be outsiders as we go to these areas that are very different than ours, and so moving into the communities, that we can make sure that the gospel is being proclaimed and that the needs of the poor are being met and this is our conviction.

Today I'm going to share a little of mine and Kylee's story. It's a long story. I don't have a whole lot of time today, but before we go into that, I want us to look at Deuteronomy 6. This is a text that has been read a couple of times this morning and has been sung this morning. This is kind of the centerpiece of the Jewish law and is a very important text for us. We're familiar with this text because Jesus Himself quotes it several times in His ministry. Specifically, this text is in response to the question, "What is the greatest command?" Jesus responds here with verse 5 of Deuteronomy 6. We're going to read Deuteronomy 6...just the first few verses here, four through six. I want to show you some connections here. Deuteronomy 6:4, he says, "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.*"

Deuteronomy is the final sermon of Moses, the final instructions given to the people before they go into the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. So, this is very important. This chapter, specifically, is important because this is where Moses really begins to dive into how important it is for the people to love God and to obey Him and to fear Him as they move into this land.

I want us to look at verse 12 as well and verse 6 and show you a connection between verses 5 and 6 and verse 12. Moses, basically, said, "After you go into the Promised Land, you begin to receive these blessings." Verse 12, "*Then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*" "*Take care you lest you forget.*" Now, the connection here is if they are loving God with all their heart, with everything that they are, they will not forget Him. So, when Moses says, "Take care, or guard against this," this is what will guard them from forgetting God is loving God.

Look down at verse 18, we see something else. He says, "*You shall do what is right and good on the sight of the LORD...*" this is verse 18 "*...that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers.*" Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses is making this connection. "If you do what is right and good on the sight of the Lord, then it will go well with you, and then you will take possession of God's promise." The fullness of God's promise is going to be fulfilled as they're obedient. Don't miss this connection that God's people will be obedient when they love Him, when their hearts are completely focused...all their heart, all their soul, all their might, then they will be obedient, and then they will receive His promise.

God's Word on their hearts would lead them to His promise.

God's Word on their hearts would lead them to His promise. God's Word on their hearts would lead them to His promise. This is something that Moses desperately wanted the people to see. He wanted them to know God, so that they could love God. At the beginning of the *Shema*, verses 4 and 5, Moses makes this clear, concise, simple statement of who God is, and he says with such urgency, "*Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is*

one." This simple statement. "*The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*" It has been debated throughout the centuries what this phrase actually means. It could, potentially, mean a lot of different things, but two things I want us to look at when we know God, what this means.

When God is known by His people ...

When God is known by His people, they will experience life in the land that God has promised, life to the fullest. Moses makes it very simple for them. What it means to know God is that God's people should know Him as their God. God's people should know Him as their God. Then, God's people should know Him as the only God. God's people should know Him as the only God.

You see, God had chosen these people to be His...His special possession among the earth. There was a sense of ownership of these people, and all they really needed to do to enjoy God's blessing was to recognize that they were God's people, and He was their God. However, also not that He was just theirs, but He was the only God. Moses knew that they had forgotten God in the past, and so he knew that they were going to be going into the land flowing with milk and honey, yes, but also full of pagan idolatry and false worship. So, Moses is very careful here to point out that God is your only God. He is exclusive; He is unique. As he describes God, this awesome God in verse 4, the God of Israel, he, then, tells them how to respond in verse 5. "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.*" Just as God is unique and awesome, your love for Him should be unique and total. You shouldn't love anything like you love Him. Moses makes it simply very clear, because he knew that when God is known by His people, that He will be loved and obeyed by His people.

... He will be loved and obeyed by His people.

When God is known by His people, He will be loved and obeyed by His people. This is where...as good as this sounds, this is where we are reminded, as we read through Deuteronomy and then into Joshua and then into Judges, by the time we get to Judges 2, God's people, the new generation of Israelites, has already forgotten Him. Not the people who are going into the Promised Land but their children. By Judges 2, it doesn't say, "They quit loving God; they quit obeying God." It says, "They forgot God," completely forgot Him. Moses was afraid this would happen, and he speaks very harshly here with such urgency, "*Hear, O Israel...*" and we're reminded that, if we don't love God, if we don't seek God with all that we are, we might forget Him, and they did forget Him.

We see the gospel so clearly in this picture because we realize that we cannot know God, and we cannot obey Him, and we cannot love Him apart from God coming to us and changing our hearts. This is the language that Deuteronomy 30 speaks of when Moses talks of this very issue. He uses this kind of uncomfortable language of circumcision, and he talks about how God will circumcise their hearts and open their hearts that they may be able to love and obey God. This is where we see the gospel very clearly. It's the same for us. The Word of God on our hearts, Christ in our hearts, gives us the ability to know God...gives us the ability to love and obey Him.

God's Word on our hearts has led us to His plan.

It's at this point that I want to talk about our story, because it is God's Word in our hearts, it is Christ in our hearts, that has led us to see God's plan for our lives. God's Word on our hearts has led us to His plan. I don't want people to think that this decision to move into East Lake is based on popularity or based on what David said so or anything like that. This

is because Christ has worked on our hearts over the last year, specifically, over the last four months and has shown us some truths from the Word, and these truths have brought great conviction. We've seen our sin in some areas, and we've repented of that sin. So, that's what I want to walk you through over the next few minutes are three truths that God's Word has shown us and has revealed sin in our lives. I want to share the sin with you as well.

God's blessings are for His purpose in our world.

So, the first truth: God's blessings are for His purpose in our world. God's blessings are for His purpose in our world. This is from Psalm 67:1-2, and when David first came to Brook Hills, he preached a sermon titled, "The Ultimate Disconnect." That title describes our sin. We had disconnected the truth of Psalm 67:1 from the truth of Psalm 67:2. Psalm 67:1 says, very clearly, "*May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us...*" The psalmist is just praying this prayer, "God be gracious; bless us." This is exactly the prayer that I prayed my entire life. "God bless me; give me these things that I want, that I desire." Same thing that the psalmist has prayed, "God be gracious to me and bless me and make your face shine upon me." However, we can't disconnect to the reason why as found in verse 2, "*...that your name may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.*" See the disconnect? When we asked God for blessings, it's not for our purposes; it's for His purposes.

So often...and I'm sure many of you can relate...I've asked God for things, and when He gives them to me, then great. I praise God. Then, when I don't get them, then I wonder, "What's going on; this isn't fair." However, then again, that's because I'm seeking to use God's blessing for my purpose and not for His. We've been convicted by this, and we realize that we've received God's blessing with arrogance. We've received God's blessing with great arrogance. We would never say that. We would never say that we're living our lives as though we deserve to be blessed by God, but often we live that way.

Secondly, Kylee and I have neglected the giving of blessing to others. We've hoarded our blessing in many ways, and we passed out blessing to others when it was convenient. This includes physical poverty, but also, the greatest blessing we've received which is our salvation...the knowledge of the gospel, and that God has regenerated our hearts and has given us forgiveness from sin...we have not shared that blessing like we should either. We've hoarded that and kept it to ourselves. It's not what we were created for, and God created us for more than that, and in Isaiah 49:6, we see this same truth from Psalm 67:1-2. However, in Isaiah, he's talking about the servant...God's servant...which is a picture of Christ in the Old Testament. He says, "I'm not sending you just to raise up the tribes of Jacob in the house of Israel, but I'm making you a light to the nations" and this is speaking, specifically, of Christ. However, remember Christ has given us that same responsibility. He has passed that on to us, and we are in Christ, and so we are intended to be lights to the nations, the church, God's people, Christ's people, and we've neglected that.

With our blessings from God, we will share the Word.

So, our response to this revelation of God's Word in our lives is that, with our blessings from God, we will share the Word. With our blessings from God, we will share the Word. This is our desire for East Lake: to share our blessings, physical and spiritual, with those in poverty to meet their needs as neighbors; to walk with them and encourage them and make sure they hear the greatest news in the world.

God's commands often conflict with our comforts.

Truth number two: God's commands often conflict with our comforts. God's commands often conflict with our comforts. This was actually a truth that hit me between the eyes as I reread the book of Jonah. The story of Jonah is probably the most popular Bible story around. If you remember, Jonah is told by God to go to Nineveh, and he doesn't do it. As a child, I always thought he was scared of the big Ninevites, the Assyrians, this great empire, this powerful nation. However, in Jonah 4, we find out that Jonah wasn't scared. He knew that God would forgive the people, and he did not want them to be forgiven. He knew that if he preached this message and the people repented that God would forgive them, but he didn't like those people, and he didn't want them to be forgiven, so he ran.

Now, you wonder, "Why would Jonah, prophet of God, act this way?" If you look back at the history a little bit and back in 2 Kings, it talks about how Jonah was the prophet under Jeroboam II. Jeroboam II was an evil king. He led Israel into idolatry and continued in their idolatry, but yet, in Jeroboam II's reign, during his reign, Israel expanded its borders and became a prosperous nation. You'd never guess who prophesied that would happen: Jonah. He prophesied that Jeroboam's reign, in spite of Israel's sin and wickedness, that they would be prosperous. So, it would seem that bad news for the Ninevites would be good news for Israel. That if God said, "Take this message of judgment to them and, if they're destroyed, that will be good for Israel, then you could expand more; you wouldn't have as much competition." However, Jonah knew because he saw God forgive Israel and God bless Israel in spite of their sin; he knew that if he took this judgment...this message of judgment to Syria, that they might in fact repent, and God would, in fact, forgive them.

So, you see Jonah saying he gets angry enough to die because of this issue, and we realize that Jonah desired gain from God more than the glory of God. I saw myself in that. I saw that I...Kylee and I...have desired gain from God more than the glory of God. When the gain is high, it is easy to obey, but when it costs us something, that's when we really begin to see, "Are we really concerned about God's glory or are we concerned about our gain?" Kylee and I had to come to a form of repentance in this because God has commanded us to love others. Love God; love people. It's pretty simple what we are to do as followers of Christ. However, to love people, it costs something always, and more times than not, we were not willing to give up our comforts. You can't love without sacrifice, so instead, we embraced our comforts at the expense of our compassion. We embraced comforts at the expense of compassion.

This is something else that we see in Jonah. After the people repent, it's kind of funny; it's a funny scene. Jonah runs outside the city, goes east of the city and looks back at the city almost in anticipation. "Maybe they'll fall back into sin really quick, and God will destroy them anyway." It almost seems like Jonah's thinking. He goes just to wait and see what will happen. While he's there, he's pretty uncomfortable. So, God sends this plant...causes this plant to grow up and cover Jonah, and it comforts him, and Jonah loves that plant. Says he is "*exceedingly glad,*" that's what the text says. So, God then sends a worm, which is also kind of funny, to eat the plant and it dies. So, it comes up in a day and dies in a day, and then Jonah, again, is angry enough to die. God goes to him and says, "Jonah, why are you so angry? You didn't do anything. You were uncomfortable in the desert. I caused this plant to grow up. You were comfortable, and I took it away. Why are you so angry? You didn't do anything for this plant." It becomes obvious that Jonah becomes angry, not because his plant had died, but because his comfort was removed. God goes to Jonah and says...and this is what the whole book of Jonah is about...He says, "This city, Nineveh, 120,000 people there. I've had a lot to do with this city. These are people created in my image. These are people created to glorify me. Shouldn't I have compassion on them?"

It was at this point, again, that I saw myself in Jonah; that I had embraced my comfort at the expense of compassion for people...men and women made in God's image. We were in Disney World over Christmas. A member of our faith family...a family in this church blessed us with that opportunity, and it was...if you know anything about Disney around Christmas, it is the most crowded that it will be. So, the first day that we were there at the park, they actually closed the park at about 10:00 PM. Tons of people and, literally, people from every tribe and tongue were there. It was incredible to see. At night during Christmas time, they do the big lighting...the Christmas tree lighting, and they light Cinderella's castle with all these Christmas lights, and it's really pretty. So, we gathered there...all these people. I don't know how many people it was...10,000, 15,000 people gathered there in this court, this square in the center of Disney World, and the Fairy Godmother comes out on the balcony, and they do this big show, and she does her "bippity-boppity-boo" thing, and all the lights come up on the castle, and it's beautiful. I mean, it is absolutely beautiful.

Kylee and I...we couldn't get down to the courtyard, so we were up on a ridge, and we were able to see the castle, but we were also able to see all these people. As I was standing there holding my kids and with my wife looking at one of the most beautiful things that man can create, I saw the contrast between the creation of man and the creation of God. I looked out at this sea of people, literally, every tribe, tongue...it was incredible to see the diversity of the people there...and realized that when God looks at this same scene, He doesn't think that castle is beautiful. His creation, the crown of his creation is beautiful, and I realized, in that moment, that I don't see people that way. I had not seen people that way. I had served in the inner-city quite a bit with Empower Ministries and with Brother Bryan and just getting to know people in the community and served at Lovelady some, and I realized I did not see these individuals the same as God saw them.

There are 229,000 people who live in the city of Birmingham; 51,000 of them live in poverty, and just like God talked about the city of Nineveh and said, "They don't know their right hand from their left..." I've met men and women that seem like they don't know their right hand from their left, and yet, we've been entrusted with the answer. We've been entrusted with the gospel, and we're concerned about our comfort? We were created for more than that. We've been blessed with the Word of God, with the understanding of salvation and with the resources to impact 51,000 men and women in poverty, and we're concerned about our comfort.

With our compassion for people, we will show and teach the Word.

God's Word should be multiplied through every part of our lives.

So, God has put compassion in our hearts, and with our compassion for people, we will show and teach the Word. Truth number three: God's Word should be multiplied through every part of our lives. God's Word should be multiplied through every part of our lives. This is back to Deuteronomy 6 again. This is the truth we see there and in the Great Commission in Matthew 28. We already saw how Moses described how important it was to love God with all their heart but look down in verse 7. He says, "*You shall teach them diligently to your children...*" "Teach these commands diligently to your children." Then, look at the language here. This is not compartmentalizing language. This is not segmented out. This is all-inclusive language. You shall "*talk of them when you sit in your house...*" that is His commands "*...when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the door posts of your house and on your gates.*" Every part of your life should be filled with passing on God's Word to your children and to others. This talks

about being written on the door posts, like Jim mentioned, and on your gates. That's in the public square; that's not in the home. Everywhere. Constantly keep God's Word as the focus, because it is God's Word that will lead us to understand who God is.

We also see the same thing in Matthew 28, and this is a passage...The Great Commission...that we're very familiar with at Brook Hills. He says, "*Go into all the world and make disciples.*" David has taught us over and over again that that phrase "go and make disciples" is not just, "We'll schedule it in and go do it," but all-inclusive. All the time. As you go, as you go about your life, make disciples. The same type of all-inclusive language Moses uses here, Jesus uses in the New Testament, but then He tells us how to do it, "*baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit...*" and what? "*...teaching them all that I have commanded you.*" The same exact thing that Moses said. Teach these things diligently to your children. Jesus says, "Teach them all that I have commanded you," because it is in God's Word that we begin to know God.

When I saw this truth, that disciple-making cannot be compartmentalized, I realized that Kylee and I...that we have built a kingdom of isolation. We have built a kingdom of isolation. We were so intent, so hung up on buying a house and looking for safety and schools and people like us and close to the entertainment. Once we got that house, we filled it up with stuff we liked, and we wanted, and we really never had to leave. We could stay in that four walled, three bedroom, two bath castle all the time and go out for a little random task here and there and serve people when we could and be living in our little kingdom. We isolated our self to the point where we really, after four years, haven't gotten to know our neighbors that well. As a result, we have separated our lives from service. We've separated our lives from service.

As we've seen, the law of God and the love of God should be integrated into every aspect of our lives; that includes where we live. When we love God with all that we are, every decision that we make will be dictated by His will, by His command. Serving Christ, loving the church, loving the poor, seeking the lost, it can't be something that we schedule into our kingdoms. It's got to be all inclusive. Scripture doesn't give us any other option.

With our surrender to Christ, we will serve the world.

So, in response to these two sins in our life with our surrender to Christ, we will serve the world. With our surrender to Christ, we will serve the world. There's a lot more to share, and there's a lot more truths that I could share with you, and stories that I could tell about what God has done over the last six months, but there's one final thing that I want to share with you, and this was a question that was posed to me by a missionary. This was a missionary to the hardest to reach area in the world...the most unreached area in the world. This is where this missionary and his team live and where they work, and he stood before Kylee and I...we had had dinner with him, and he said, "Answer this question for me: what are some good reasons why you are not with me? What are some good reasons why you're not living with me?" He meant living in that context. We gave him some reasons that we thought were pretty good. He said, "Sure, those are some good reasons for now, but what could not be overcome? Which one of those reasons that you just gave us could not be overcome if you really tried?" He was exactly right. So, we began wrestling really with this question, "Why do we live where we live? What is our reasoning for that?" We moved to this house in Chelsea. We didn't think about how our living there would impact the community. We really didn't. We were building our kingdom.

So, I want to ask this same question to you as a faith family, as my faith family, and here it is...and I've worded it a little different. "If we love God with all that we are..." which is what the Word tells us to do, "and if we call Christ Lord...if we believe the Word is true then what good reasons are there for not planting our lives among the lost and the poor?" What good reasons are there for not planting our lives among the lost and the poor? I'm not just referring to the lost and the poor in Birmingham, but all around the world, anywhere, like this missionary asked. What are good reasons...biblical, Christ honoring reasons for not planting our lives among the lost and the poor? While you prayerfully considering this question, I'm going to invite the members of the panel to come out, and we're going to dialogue about some of the things that are going on in East Lake and Gate City.

Chris Nichols: I did want us as a faith family to hear from some people that are arm's deep already, so to speak, in serving and sharing the gospel in this area. So, we've got a group gathered this morning who I'm really excited to talk to you in front of. So, we're going to start down here on my far left with Keith Stanley. Keith is our team leader for our local disciple-making at The Church at Brook Hills. So, Keith, we'll just begin with you, and I was wondering if you would share maybe two or three reasons...there's a lot of places in Birmingham that we could pour resources, and there's a lot of places that we could mobilize small groups so why East Lake? Why Gate City?

Keith Stanley: That's a great question. There are a lot of places where our small groups are invested in themselves and making a difference around the city, but East Lake and Gate City is one of those areas where very few churches are investing at this point. We know there are real issues of poverty there. A third of the people are living under \$20,000 a year; 40 percent unemployment rate; there's huge issues for orphans and widows in the area. 62 percent of the kids in the area are being raised by a grandparent. Half the seniors in the area are disabled. There's huge needs for people to come along and minister to those seniors and support those children...tutoring, mentoring, pouring our lives into them.

It's also a place where our people have already been called. Over 100 people have been investing their lives already in the East Lake area at the Lovelady Center and in partnerships with local churches there. It's an area of great opportunity. As we've traveled around East Lake/Gate City, interviewed local pastors, community organizations, school officials, others who are in position of leadership, we found a great openness for our people to come along aside the residents and minister in the name of Christ there. It's just an open door we feel like.

Chris Nichols: So, what are possible opportunities...and I know nothing is set in concrete and that's why we're part of this panel this morning...but what are some opportunities for small groups to mobilize in that area?

Keith Stanley: Well, we're working on a lot of different opportunities. Obviously, the main thing we want to do is create relational disciple-making relationships. We want to build friendships with the people in those communities, and we're going to be mobilizing small groups to help do that through a number of ways. We'll be working with partners like the Lovelady Center and schools and senior adult centers and local churches. We'll also be having some special outreach initiatives. Things like backyard Bible clubs, home Bible studies, health clinics, just a number of ways to help build relationships, sports leagues and even some workshops that we'll sponsor for people in the community.

Ultimately, we hope to be able to mobilize small groups as well to address some of the education, economic and development needs of the community at large.

Chris Nichols: You mentioned that one person you spoke to mentioned that you were only the second church, I believe, to even be interested in possibly talking with this area, in his particular area. Is that right?

Keith Stanley: Yes. One of the organizations we've met with in Gate City, which has had a long history of crime in that area, was surprised that we wanted to come help, and said we were only the second church in five years willing to come down and help. That's exciting to see the responsiveness of the people on the ground looking for help.

Chris Nichols: Tell us really briefly about the orientations coming up at the end of this month. What's the purpose of those?

Keith Stanley: Sure, two weeks from tonight, we'll have our first orientation for anyone interested in wanting to serve in the Gate City/East Lake area. There'll be a following one on Wednesday night, March 31. The purpose of that is two-fold: we want you to know about the opportunities more specifically...how your group can get involved, but we also want you to understand a little more about cross-cultural ministry and being culturally sensitive as we go into different areas of the city, particularly, urban areas. Sammy Campbell will be doing some training with all of our people going into the area, so that we do that with love and compassion and dignity as we move into inner-city areas.

Chris Nichols: Keith had mentioned that Brook Hills is already arm's deep in a lot of different ways in this area and one of those areas is the Lovelady Center, and Vernetta Young is with us this morning. Vernetta is on staff there at the Lovelady Center, and we joked about how long her title should be if we captured everything that she did. Vernetta, you are serving in a great capacity there. Your journey began before then, and you were actually served by and ministered to by the Lovelady Center. So, can you just give a brief picture of how you came to be?

Vernetta Young: Yes, just a long...maybe someone would say a productive life which I thought was productive. Married and children, and then some kind of way after divorce and domestic violence, moved to the Mobile area. There I had a tragic passing of a child, and it was just very tragic, and then became addicted to prescription medication, and from that addiction to prescription medication just took it to the next level: illegal drugs. Heroin, crack cocaine and the addiction just took everything away from me...the other two children, house, home and everything. Found myself just on the streets just doing whatever you can to get that next high, bouts with the law and everything.

From there, an angel came into my life and referred me to the Lovelady Center, and after I got there, I was still in a mode of depression, suicidal attempts. Then, from there went to the drug rehab program there.

After the drug rehab program, graduated and then moved into the transitional housing part of the program. There I was introduced to Jesus and accepted Him into my life. A Father I had never had, never had a relationship with, and then I realized that He was a friend as well. He could be your best friend. From there, my life started. Restoration with children; they came, and everyone was baptized there and just my life took off in a whole other direction. Became employed outside the Lovelady Center, still living there and going through the program, and God just started opening doors for me. It's just overwhelming in the possibilities and all that I learned and this new lifestyle that was introduced to me at the life center.

Chris Nichols: Now, your story is not really that uncommon for ladies that are there. If you could give the folks that are listening this morning...explain a little bit about what are the top few reasons that people end up in the Lovelady Center?

Vernetta Young: The Lovelady Center was originally opened up for women coming out of incarceration when they didn't want to go back to that same old lifestyle. It was an alternative for them to come back and get a new lifestyle, renew your mind and just do a whole other way, so they wouldn't get caught up in Alabama's recidivism rate. However, now we open our doors to those women. We are an alternative for prison, so some women there, instead of going to prison, they do their time at the Lovelady Center. We have a domestic violence program. We have a drug treatment program, and now, in these economic times, we're seeing that women are just coming there because them and their children are homeless. So, we open the doors to them as well.

Chris Nichols: Praise God for what He has done in Vernetta Young's life. I appreciate you being willing to share that this morning. Next, on my left, I've got Beverly Fleming, and Beverly is part of the Brook Hill's faith family. She's a small group leader, and Beverly...actually, you were leading small group women on Wednesday morning here on this campus, right? Now, tell me, if you would, or tell the folks in this room: how did you lead people from investing right here...or how did you go from investing here to investing in East Lake?

Beverly Fleming: I had been teaching a number of years on Wednesday morning, and I guess it's a little over a year ago, God had said, "You need to go to the next level." I wasn't sure what that was, so I kept praying about it and praying about it, and then, when one day, lo and behold, this young lady comes to our Sunday school class, and she's talking about Lovelady. It really got our attention. She invited our class to go to a tour of the facility, and we did, and I sat in on some classes, and then I was hooked.

Chris Nichols: Now, Vernetta earlier...the first time we gathered this morning...mentioned about mentoring...mentioned about disciple-making, because I think, if I'm correct, there was a lady from the suburbs...maybe Mt. Laurel area...that had poured into your life encouragement and those kind of things...prayer-partnering. Beverly, you've been involved in that as well. Tell us a little bit about that and how other women are going along with you in that picture.

Beverly Fleming: Well, I have mentored one lady who has graduated the program, and I am currently mentoring another lady. I'm constantly recruiting for Lovelady, so I might get you in the hall sometime, and we'll chat about it. However, I am constantly recruiting for people to be mentors. These women at Lovelady need mentors. They need to know the love of Christ up close and personal. Sometimes they come from families that are certainly dysfunctional, that don't have any love in them, and these women are so starved for love. One woman just came up to me one time, and said, "I just need a hug." That's pretty convicting.

Chris Nichols: I appreciate you sharing this morning. Thank you for doing this. On my right, I have Sammy Campbell, and Sammy is working alongside us. Sammy grew up in downtown Memphis, Tennessee, and he has, literally, done urban ministry in a variety of places around the United States. So, we are privileged for having Sammy to help us. When we go into this area as The Church of Brookhills and people of God, it is more. We are Christians, we are people of God, and we go into this area, we want to not inhibit the spread of the gospel, but we want to facilitate the spread of the gospel. So, Sammy is helping us. He's going to be part of this training that's coming up in how to understand what we're

doing. Sammy, we're going in there sort of as outsiders. So, if you could give some general advice, an overview a little bit about what we need to remember about doing ministry in East Lake/Gate City.

Sammy Campbell: I previously was a missionary to Washington DC, and I recall the time when I first went to Washington DC. The area for which I served was the murder capital of the US. It was Ward 9 in Washington DC. There was a lot of trepidation I went with, knowing I was going to be working in the murder capital of the US. Ward 9 was the primary area. So, as I embarked upon asking these churches who I was working with to come join me, everybody was excited to learn that I was there to help them do this work and so forth. However, as I engaged them to come join me and volunteer their time, the best response that I could get from them was, "We will pray for you, brother."

We think that God can be everywhere in our lives but not in the hard areas. As we recall distinctly in Matthew 28, Great Commission, He said, "And lo I will be with you till the ends of the earth." We need to know that these areas that we're going into, these problems that we're dealing with in urban areas is spiritual based. There is no other group that's equipped to deal with spiritual issues than the church. The government can't do it, even faith-based organizations can't do it alone, the church must be involved in that. We can summon a power that none other can. So, I would say the greatest need that we need to be aware of is that we're not going into these communities alone. It is our responsibility as Christians to be in there, and God is with us.

Chris Nichols: If you would, tell us a couple of coaching points as we begin to embark on this and there are going to be people across this family that are going into this area. Just a couple of quick coaching points to remember that we can think about.

Sammy Campbell: Relationships are key. The Civil Rights Movement caused us to start these trends of people moving in and out of the community, and the city dwellers are less trusting of the church because of that. So, we must be involved to create opportunities for us to reestablish these relationships.

One thing that I would like to bring to your attention is, first of all, that you can't go into those communities with your preconceived ideas and thoughts about their plights. You've got to be on the firm foundation of trying to learn what they know. In fact, I say you must be the listener. The other things are two questions: one, you must answer this question that is, "Why are you here?" Talking about working in the community, and "How long will you stay?" It's going to be significantly important that you have those answered because, invariably, they're going to be asked in some form or fashion. A lot of times they will not be asked just verbally. In body language and in attitude, you'll find out they really don't think you're investing in their lives.

Chris Nichols: Thank you Sammy. We're looking forward to working along side him. Sammy brings a great wealth of understanding those communities. So, we're thankful that he is going to help us in this way.

Next I want to do something a little different. We've heard from Ben. Ben you've had your chance, but I want to hear from Kylee because Kylee is a vital part of this mission to involve their lives in the East Lake/Gate City community. Kylee, if you would...you're not simply just following along behind Ben, but God is speaking to you on an individual level about this, and I wanted you to share more about that if you would.

Kylee Deloach: Sure. I am following Ben, but he has been the spiritual leader in our house. He is definitely the one who came up to me and said, "Let's consider East Lake." It was not something I was all "gung ho" about at first. It was in the first conversation that we really had about it...it was me giving him opposition and giving all the excuses and all the reasons. It was, "We have kids, and we have this great life, and we have this great school system," and it became all of our comforts. In that moment, it was when I was convicted of my pride and was just really humbled by what...the sin that was in my life or in our lives. So, that's kind of been the path leading up to this is just humility and realizing that, if we really love God, then we're going to go love the people too.

Chris Nichols: I appreciate you being transparent in that, Kylee. Now, you do have children, and you are going from a setting where the schools are really good, and it's probably very familiar, and you're going into a setting where the schools may not be so good. So, talk to us about where God is leading you educationally? That picture.

Kylee Deloach: Well we will be home schooling. For me to say that is actually a lot bigger than, "We're moving to East Lake." That was not something that I ever wanted to do or ever thought we would be doing, but as God has changed our hearts in moving to a place that is not as comfortable, he has also changed our hearts as far as what we will do for schooling. So, home schooling is the route we are going to go in, and I'm actually excited to say that I'm actually looking forward to it.

Chris Nichols: That's great. So, this is the time when...Kylee gets to go first by the way...where you can share how can we as a faith family pray for you guys? What are the things that you would ask for the most? Kylee if you would lead, and then Ben go ahead after that.

Kylee Deloach: Well, I would say wisdom would be my top prayer request right now. There's going to be a lot of change...a lot of things that are different. How do we work home schooling; how do we work ministry; how do we work being a family just in this different setting and not as comfortable. We don't want it to be us doing this; we want it to be something God is doing through us. So, just some wisdom in that as far as we go, not to be our ways, but to be God's ways.

Chris Nichols: All right, Ben.

Ben Deloach: I totally agree with Kylee on that, but I guess the temptation in moving to any area, I guess, would be to identify people just like us. I really...I don't want to go that route again unless that's where God has us, but that God would begin to convict men and women in the community, raise men and women up in the community that we could invest in, and that God would entrust to us to invest in. For us to be sensitive to that and have our eyes open for those individuals regardless if they're like us or not.

The second thing...and this goes back to leading our family is that I don't...trying to minister to all these needs of people in poverty to ever come between us and hurt our family at all. So, we want to be able to balance that where we are serving people in poverty, but we are not overwhelming one another or our family. That's something that we'll have to guard against, and something I've had to guard against at Brook Hills as well as a full-time minister. I've been good at that at some times and not so good at others. So for this...for our family to be lived out in front of people in the community, for people to see that we are focused on Christ and focused on the gospel. It's going to be very important for us to guard our family as we serve people in the community. So, those two things.

Chris Nichols: I am thankful for Ben and Kylee and the way that they have been transparent with us, and what I want us to do now is we're going to pray for them in just a moment but Dr. Platt had challenged us last week to pray about whether God would place us in East Lake, and Ben and Kylee have been experiencing a leading by God to place their lives in that context. I want us to pray for them. You guys as a faith family, if God is speaking to you at all in this direction, then we're going to have a chance, as Keith mentioned, at the end of this month to be part of some orientation that will help us better understand ministry in that community, and certainly, I would encourage you as He is leading you in any way in this process, that you need to make yourself apart of one of those orientation times coming at the end of this month.

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