



Shepherding the Spirit

What does it mean to shepherd the Spirit, and how does it happen?

This was just the tip of the iceberg during the panel discussion on “Shepherding the Spirit” that took place on Jan. 12th at BELIEVES featuring Dan Hayes, Executive Director of Atlanta Community Ministries (ACM); Sterling Brown, Director of Character Development for Kennesaw State Athletics; Jim Lientz, the former COO of the State of Georgia; and Vaughn Williams, the Athletics Director for Kennesaw State University.



Hayes, the Founder of ACM, has spent more than four decades mobilizing people to accomplish ministry — first with Campus Crusade for Christ for over 27 years and now with ACM.

“I grew up in New Orleans, and it wasn’t until late in life that I came to faith at Northwestern,” Hayes shared. “Prior to that it was all about ‘wine, women, and song.’”

When the Lord got a hold of Hayes at Northwestern, he said for him ‘believing in Christ was either worth it all, or worth nothing.’

“I told Christ, ‘If you’ll show me, I will go,’” said Hayes. “So as far as shepherding the Spirit goes, I actually feel more shepherded by the Spirit – which is first and foremost about being available.”

Lientz, the former COO of Georgia from 2003-2010, who previously had a lengthy career in the banking industry, agreed with Hayes.

“The main thing is being available and willing. In business, being willing is somehow hard to do,” said Lientz. “I am reminded right now of Dietrich Bonhoefer’s quote – needing nothing, God allows us to serve Him.”

Lientz also added it is important to not think and get out ahead of ourselves, because that is when we can hurt ourselves.

Brown also agreed with Hayes, but from a different angle.

“First it’s being shepherded – the Lord is my Shepherd – and that happens through prayer,” Brown said. “Having watched God be faithful helps to learn He is a faithful Shepherd.”

Brown, who is responsible for creating programs that will help KSU student-athletes develop the fundamentals of character that will serve and guide them throughout and following their playing careers, also helped to create the student organization, KSU 925, a faith-based campus group comprised of student-athletes that seeks to “change the world through sports.”

He noted that a leader is in some ways a shepherd who has an understanding of the power of belief.

“Our athletic director, Vaughn Williams, says, ‘everyone believes something, and operates from it.’ So a big part of growing in our faith is challenging others and ourselves to think about why we believe what we believe.”



Hayes said at ACM, they certainly believe in Christian values and seek to live by them authentically, but it is hard to say they live by Christian values all the time so they chose to pick two to focus on the most – prayer and love.

“If someone wants to start a ministry through ACM out of obligation, we won’t support it,” stated Hayes. “We find that ‘need and duty’ last about 6 months. Our ACM team leaders do things out of love and that tends to last an average of 9 years.”

As an example, Hayes shared that Lientz’s wife, Peggy, was actually one of ACM’s first ministry leaders. Though she is no longer an ACM ministry leader 20 years later, she still volunteers with ACM today.

Chadwick Smith, a BELIEVES attendee, asked Hayes how he and his team at ACM distinguished duty and obligation, from love.

“First of all, people tend to love things they already love,” Hayes mentioned. “We just accepted our 31st ministry – a motorcycle ministry. When the events in Charleston happened last year, these few folks who loved motorcycles formed an informal ministry to collect money and take it to those affected. They ended up collecting \$15,000. This is how the motorcycle ministry began. Frederick Buechner said, ‘The way one finds one’s true vocation is where one’s deep gladness intersects the world’s deep need.’ I believe this.”

Mike Kirchner, a Large Market Rep with Guardian Life, asked further, “How do you weed that out?”

Hayes responded, “In virtually every case, the person says, ‘You know, I’m not sure I want to do this.’ A conversation does lots of things. ACM raises money for ministries, but what we ask leaders is ‘how much time can you give to this each month?’”

Lientz jumped in saying, “Let me do a little self-promotion for Dan here. ACM is like a ‘spiritual venture capital incubator’ – that’s what I think of when I think of ACM.”

The conversation then shifted from what shepherding the Spirit is to how each of the leaders seeks to do this in their organizations or work environments.

“The first thing you have to do is earn the right to do that through competency,” Lientz commented. “What I usually tell people is whatever your calling is go do that, and don’t lose sight that the Lord is your leader.”

Lientz felt like being in business probably gave him license to sit down and talk with people about their spiritual life, and encouraged everyone to think about the weight they have in business.

“I want to read you an email I got yesterday from one of my clients,” Lientz said. “The executive wrote, ‘I’m the lucky one for having the privilege to work with you. Having someone like you that I respect to bounce things off in business, personally, and spiritually, has been invaluable.’ The point of sharing this is that this executive and I have been working together for 18 months, and I don’t recall having spiritual conversations with him – but he thinks we did.”

When he was in government, Lientz said he and Pepper Bullock, his current business partner at Safe Harbor Consulting, also decided to start a bible study for the Georgia Legislature.

“They need it,” Lientz remarked. “This Legislative Small Group time took place every Wednesday morning while they were in session, but we facilitated, we didn’t lead it.”



Kirchner, the Large Market Rep for Guardian Life, then asked another question.

“What is something that surprised you about people’s spirituality even if not intended?”

Lientz answered, “It is a big part of people’s lives so it inevitably comes up. People will say stuff like ‘my wife and I went to church the other day.’ Sometimes at Bank of America I would ask people, ‘Why’d you go to church?’ The answer often received was ‘because others do.’”

And what was Lientz’s response?

“I’d say, ‘I go for Jesus.’ Two weeks later they would come back in my office and say ‘what’s Jesus have to do with church?’”

Natalie Grasso, Board Relations and Development Manager at the Woodruff Arts Center, then commented, “What you’re sharing makes me think of something I heard on the radio the other day – to be a true evangelist, you have to live in a way where people want to know the God you serve.”

Piggybacking a little off of Grasso’s remark, Lientz said he wanted to get to one of the questions he and his fellow panelists were asked to think about to prepare for the BELIEVES session – who are the models you see that shepherd the Spirit well?

“In my wife’s bible study, they are just finishing up with Daniel, and I think he’s the perfect model. He is competent, smart, strong, but more importantly Daniel didn’t say, ‘we can’t eat the king’s food because it is not the right food.’ He didn’t come against anything – he was for something.”

Vaughn Williams, KSU’s Athletics Director since 2011, who emphasizes to his staff the value of being servant leaders, said he believes we are all called to do something.

Daniel was called to do something in the bible. For Williams, he looks at his student athletes as his ministry that he is called to, and considers it a privilege to shepherd or impact 410 lives every day.

“This is a means to come to KSU by His choice to help our student athletes realize their potential, and what God has given,” Williams said. “When I tell our student-athletes they are called to do something, I tell them – find your vocation. It’s not just a job or career, it’s about what you are called to do.”

At KSU, Williams believes he and his team seek to have the Department of Athletics be a “village founded in values of faith” so it can serve as a place for that.

One example of this that Williams pointed to was the creation of Brown’s role as Director of Character Development.

“Sterling’s role came to be through praying with the men’s golf coach,” said Williams. “We care not only about athletics and academics – we care about our students as people. Today, 1 in 4 of our student-athletes gets together each week to talk about faith.”

He added, “At a state institution you have to be careful, but not fearful. There’s a difference. This is a time in young people’s lives where they’re challenged. We’ve all been there. We need to go where people are. Jesus went in the pub.”



Brown, whose relationship with Williams dates back to when the two played football against each other in college, added, “Three things have stood out for me in how the Spirit is shepherded, and the first is love. If you look at each one of our positions (referring to he and his fellow panelists), some things may not translate in what we’re saying, but love is always relevant. That said, ‘What does that look like?’”

For Brown, an experience he had meeting Billy Graham in 1997, exemplified it.

“In 1997, I met Billy Graham in an elevator in Jacksonville. I couldn’t build up the nerve to say something at first, so my friend and I agreed that the next time we saw him, we’d have the nerve to speak up,” Brown recalled.

Not long after, Brown and his friend saw Graham coming out of the hotel, and had the nerve to approach the car he was getting into to ask if it was Billy Graham.

“As we did this, the window of the car’s backseat came down,” he said. “We saw the white hair and this hand motioned to us – it was Billy Graham. We just said, ‘Thank you for your service to the Lord.’”

And what did Billy Graham say?

“His first question was ‘Do you know the Lord Jesus?’ He then asked us questions to know about us: Wow, Billy Graham wants to know about us!! He showed love through asking questions.”

Brown went on to add that in addition to showing love, Billy Graham also demonstrated what Brown believes are the other two things that stand out to him about shepherding the Spirit – being willing to spend time, and asking people questions.

With Brown’s remark, the facilitator of the panel discussion, Andrew Schoppe, the leader of BELIEVES, commented, “Wow, it feels like this conversation is just starting, and I am looking up seeing we only have five minutes left. This session is giving me chills up my spine with the amount of His truth that you all are sharing.”

Schoppe then tossed out two questions for the panelists to choose from to provide their final thoughts.

“What is the one thing you would advise those here to do differently than you have done to Shepherd the Spirit, knowing what you know now?” he asked. “Or, what is the one thing you learned from listening to your peers here on the panel that you will take with you to further shepherd the Spirit?”

Hayes responded first.

“The one thing I would do differently is less comparison of my own spiritual life and success with others. I would want to be more relaxed with where God’s leading, versus seeing how I measure up.”

Lientz said, “Be bolder quicker. I probably was too timid early on.”



And Williams?

“Not being fearful,” he stated. “I think we feel like we have to be in a position of influence to be an influencer, but that is not true. I waited until I had relevant ‘say-so’ to infuse what I really believed.”

Finally, Brown said, “I am kind of more in Dan’s camp. We’re not called to be successful, but to be faithful.”

Even though time was up, it was possible for one more question following the last remarks.

Elaine Szeto, CTK parishioner and Sales Manager at Hyatt Atlanta Perimeter at Villa Christina, asked the panelists, “What do you do on a daily basis in your spiritual and faith life?”

“Spend daily time in prayer. Right now, I am in Psalms – or as one guy in college said ‘the plasms’ which I didn’t correct, because I was just glad he was praying,” answered Hayes prompting a round of laughter.

He added, “I also keep a prayer list on my phone and pray or note answered prayers. The one thing I am led to often is Luke 5:16 about how Christ would often withdraw to pray.

When Hayes spoke of Luke 5:16, Lientz stated he too thinks of this.

“If withdrawing to pray has worked for 2000 years, maybe I should keep on trying it.”

Lientz further emphasized, “You must find time to be alone with God, and hear what He has for you. I pray for my grandchildren on the treadmill every time I get on it. Originally it was five minutes for each, but now that I have 10 grandchildren it is about 3.5 minutes each.”

The audience laughed again.

Brown’s response paralleled those of Lientz and Hayes.

“For me, it’s time in the Bible. Jesus said, ‘Know my voice.’ How do I know His voice if I don’t seek to discern it?”

Brown also mentioned that he sets aside a day or weekend to be with the Lord each year.

“The disciples asked Jesus ‘teach us to pray’ – not something else.”

Lastly, Williams, who is going to a men’s prayer retreat in the north Georgia mountains later this month, said he tries to put himself in the community and surround himself with others – including four pastors from different faiths who he meets with regularly to seek different views from different places.

But Williams also said, “I hired Sterling so he could pray for me,” which had the audience laughing once again.

