

How can we own all of who we are to become whole and transformed?

The 2023 BELIEVES sessions are focused throughout the year on “Living Our Faith According to Jesus’s Parables.”

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This, and reflections focused on the [*Parable of the Lost Sheep – Luke 15:3-7*](#), were the center of the discussion with Ché Houston, CEO of Ché René Macarons and More; and Stacey Eames, President and Owner of Highland Bakery; on Tuesday, August 8th at BELIEVES.

Houston, a native of Atlanta, wife, and mother of two, is now a full-time business owner.

“It’s as if just three weeks ago,” she shared with everyone as she spoke of how she had recently transitioned from serving veterans in a full-time job during the day while simultaneously running Ché René Macarons and More, to now focusing exclusively on Ché René Macarons and More.

Houston launched Ché René Macarons and More in August 2020, and has been chosen to provide “French Macarons with a Southern Finesse” for the Southeast Emmy Awards, Oaks Elite Derby, Honey Bubble Tea, and Delta, among others.

But Ché René Macarons and More, is more than just delicious bite-size southern flavor delights.

“We hire people transitioning back into society,” Houston told everyone, as she spoke of the three principles that underpin her business.

“Unity, Service, and Integrity are the principles of Ché René Macarons and More,” stated Houston. “They came from my dad’s business, a waterproofing business where he also gave people second chances.”

Eames, who shares Houston’s heart for hiring people in need of second chances, spoke next.

“I started my career with a coffee kiosk at Piedmont Hospital,” she said.

Eames kiosk came to be because she was persistent and enthusiastic, typing up “30 Great Reasons to Have an Espresso Cart,” and then giving it to the hospital’s food service director.

He saw her enthusiasm and gave her a start by letting her set up down in the basement – a crossroads for the hospital.

With all this happening before Starbucks came to Atlanta, Eames has mentioned a lot of people didn’t understand what she was doing. But after talking with everyone who walked by, and giving out samples, her kiosk and team became the fun part of the hospital.

She stated, “The number one thing is to be personable and authentic: Let people know you care about the quality, and you care about them.”

Carrying with her the desire to make a difference in every person's day who encountered her business, Eames later went on to purchase Highland Bakery, where she and her team serve a full menu of carefully crafted, made-from-scratch foods that stretch comfortably from breakfast to lunch and brunch.

When it comes to employing people needing a second chance, Eames said she's been able to do so primarily with women who have been previously incarcerated, people via Georgia Works, and people via the Trinity Program.

"People you give the second chance to sometimes want it, but you have to show them how," Eames commented. "There's so much this parable means to me."

How do Houston and Eames go about helping the people once they're given the second chance?

"First, I let them know a little about me and my journey," replied Houston. "With me being small, I have the ability to be one-on-one with people. I also let them know the principles and expectations. It's not just about the macarons, it's about developing people too."

Houston went on to say that she'll sometimes tell those she's helping that when there's still self-doubt, "believe that I believe in you."

"People appreciate I've taken an interest in them," she then remarked before adding, "And whatever your faith is, just know I'm praying all over the space all day long. We all have different abilities. Wherever you are is where I'll meet you."

Eames could relate to Houston's remarks.

"It's easier when starting out," she said. "When I had 250 employees it was tougher."

Eames then shared that her story is not a secret, though a lot of her employees don't know her story.

"It's on the wall," Eames told those in attendance. "For a while, a lot of the servers were on the party train. Then one-by-one they'd hit bottom and they'd seek me out. A lot of the line staff have been incarcerated or on probation."

In the end, Eames said their journey to recover is them claiming their humanness.

"We probably have an advantage as an employer on the other side who can extend that hand."

Key to handling these situations as an employer is continuing to be vulnerable and show compassion.

"Being vulnerable, and showing compassion go a long way," she said. "If I see out of control behavior, there's two things: as an employer I have to address the behavior, but as a person I make sure they know 'I see you. I hear you.'"

Is there one person who has stood out to Eames and Houston whom they've helped over the years?

"I know this is no coincidence," Houston quickly responded. "There's this one young lady. Then literally last night it hit me, 'You're carrying on a legacy. Are you not going to carry on your dad's legacy? She needs help.' I'm getting convicted to call her today."

Though the young lady is in Marietta, and Houston is down by the airport, she shared that what she keeps hearing inside is, "What lengths did God go to for you? So why not go to those lengths for someone else?"

Then she said with a smile, "I'm a vessel and not just that chic. He uses me."

Eames spoke next, reflecting on one of her first servers in 2004.

"She was all tatted up," recalled Eames. "I actually gave money for her to go on a mission trip to Ghana. She had demons."

Eames said this server now actually calls her, her real dad.

“One day, she called to share she had been one month sober. On the phone she told me, ‘I had to make sure it was real before I called you.’ It was so impactful for her to be able to tell.”

Eames says that now this same woman is such a bright light and has sponsored so many people.

“This is a woman who had lied about her mom being ill, but in reality, she had been drinking already. That was the last day she drank – it’s been 15 years. She teaches me now.”

Hearing this, Houston spoke up to say, “We’re a part of a herd. Listen to the voice of God and stay with the Lord.”

Having shared all they had, how do Eames and Houston believe we can own all of who we are to become whole and transformed?

Eames reiterated, “By becoming vulnerable. Also, having self-awareness, which some of that is also knowing when I am not right, not right with God – and have to make amends. Sometimes I’m my own worst critic.”

Thinking about this, Eames spoke of her relationship with her “Lil Sis.”

“This young lady is someone I’ve known since she was 17, and now she’s 35,” Eames said. “I recount a situation where I lashed out.”

Eames said she could have handled it better.

“Key is authenticity, and letting people know who I am,” she then shared. “Along with this is having a supportive and caring community, and having faith and grace.”

When Eames said she was most lost earlier in her life, she found herself at Little Five Points pub telling her brother while crying, “I feel lost. I feel spiritually dead.”

“When I was lost, the #1 reason I wanted to turn my life around was I wanted more for my life – more from God. God now is more loving than the God I grew up with as a child being Southern Baptist.”

Houston then spoke to close out the session.

“My story empowers me,” she opened by saying. “I am very strategic in who I have around me. When I try to do it on my own, it appears things are working, but it will blow up. I need people around me who will be transparent, not tippy-toe or validate me.”

Today, she says she is able to validate herself and do estimable things.

“Staying committed. Knowing I’m dependable and doing the right thing even when others aren’t watching. Flipping the list of things I can say about myself. I can speak of myself and tell the truth. This makes me so whole.”

Then she closed by adding, “I remember knowing what it means to be spiritually connected and then knowing when it’s not there – scary. I listen to what’s next from God, because I am too afraid not too. That grace piece – so many people have given grace.”

