



## **What does faith in well-grounded/nurtured decisions and plans look like – personally, professionally, and in organizational culture? How are they discerned?**

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 Unfruitful Fig Tree – Luke 13:6-9](#), were the center of the discussion with Charlie Siciak, Co-Founder and CEO of Goodwipes; and John Brunnquell, President & CEO of Egg Innovations; on Tuesday, September 12<sup>th</sup> at BELIEVES.

Brunnquell, who leads Egg Innovations, said his company provides premium eggs around the nation, and is grounded simply.

“God first, family second, and work third,” he said, “Faith can be woven into business.”

Siciak then spoke next to let everyone know a bit about him, his business, and some initial thoughts from reflecting on the parable.

“As a business, we are leading, change and innovation in wipes,” he stated. “For me this is grounded in faith, community, leadership, and walking with folks.”

Speaking further about the parable and his reflections, he added, “The first time I read it, I didn’t like it. I tend to be a bit more pragmatic – an achiever. I’ve learned more about grace from God.”

Siciak went on to say that what stood out to him the most when first reading the parable was the part that said “cut it down.”

“But then getting to where Jesus is in his ministry (3 years in), it’s more a ministry of faith,” he commented.

As he stepped into the parable, Siciak said he was in more of righteous space, but then it revealed the character of Jesus in a beautiful way – with Jesus as the gardener, God as the land owner, and us as the tree.

“I love how Jesus intercedes. He says leave it alone, I’ll fertilize and work the soil.”

Brunnquell chimed in to then share that he had talked with his wife about the parable to prep for the discussion.

“There came a very simplistic application to work about performance,” he said. “The piece that hit the most was give it another year – patience. When I was younger, I had a very rapid trigger finger. Now, it’s different.”

Brunnquell, whose company proudly serves as the nation’s number one producer of 100% free-range and pasture-raised eggs, told everyone that he feels as leaders we owe three things to employees – vision, tools, and feedback.

“We can expect success, but before we do something, ‘Have we done our part?’” he asked.

As a family-owned company, that puts the welfare of their chickens, people and planet first in every decision they make and every action they take, he says what you realize in all of this is the cost of turnover.

“I grew up as a farm kid so it wasn’t that I could leverage skill sets from corporate training,” he shared. “I learned the hard way, and saw the repercussions of not taking time.”

As Brunnuell and Siciak engage in “fertilizing” to help their teams grow, what’s that conversation with God like?

Brunnuell spoke first.

“We have about 70 families whose lives are supported by Egg Innovations. There is a prayer process. You want to be thoughtful. You want to be compassionate. Most of our families are dual income, so if someone is let go, they go to one income and it affects them.”

Siciak, whose company uses only the highest quality ingredients in its flushable wipes, which are made with plant-based fibers and engineered to break down, so they can actually be flushed, then spoke.

“Tough conversations should never be a surprise,” he stated. “There should be a feedback loop. We always want to have upward mobility, but also outward mobility – but this is rather openly and in public (i.e. promotion into another company). People feel comfortable as a result. They’ll give 60-90 days when they leave, or they’ll work as contractors some. We haven’t had anyone leave us empty-handed.”

When asked if there was someone in particular on their team who came to mind that they had an anecdote to share that captured what they’d been saying, Brunnuell led into it by first building on what Siciak had said about tough conversations.

“We coach because we care,” he remarked. “That’s our lead into critical conversations. Recently we had a downsizing with someone that led them to becoming the VP of Supply Chain for North America in a vendor. It turned out well because he knows us, which actually gives us an inside track with them. We always want you to leave with more skills than you came in with.”

Siciak’s anecdote focused on a team member who’s been with Goodwipes quite some time.

“We are in a season where we’ve had people with us for a while, but now have more seasoned people coming in,” he mentioned. “When you bring in new folks, they want to bring in new people.”

He went on to say that when they hired a new VP of Marketing in recent years, they had a vision for a legacy marketing person on their team and the new VP being a great team. After working together for a while, a project came up.

“There was a three-month project about a year ago that marketing was involved in, and the end result wasn’t good,” Siciak said. “People were all excited though.”

Shortly after, Siciak told his VP of Marketing that it wasn’t good, and then created space to talk with the marketing person.

“She said, ‘There were some things I wasn’t comfortable with,’ and I told her, ‘You’re in this position because you’re good. We trust your instincts, and you,’” he recalled. “We discussed having tough conversations with the partners around the need to redo some work. She pressed in with the space and coaching. On the other side, she’s flourished. He (the VP) is the right person, and she’s the right person and fit.”

Hearing Siciak's story, Brunnuquell commented, "The scenario that Charlie described – we've had that more on a vendor side. Once expectations are clear, they hit the mark."

Siciak jumped back in and added, "Back to the parable. When we do have these conversations, we do need to be clear."

All of the dialogue had the attendees at the session thinking, including CTK Parishioner Tim Doyle.

"In advance of attending today, I looked up some information on fig trees," Doyle told everyone. "Fig trees don't have a blossom outside – it's a blossom in the fruit. That got me thinking – even in work, if we have to let people go, there's a 'how' involved in this."

Following the sharing of the anecdotes, the conversation focus shifted a bit as Brunnuquell was asked to share a bit from the perspective of being the trailblazer in his industry for decades, and how that relates to the parable.

"I entered my career in the 80s," he stated. "After a while, I started asking questions that people in the industry wouldn't answer. There was a time when only two people were in my corner – my wife and my father-in-law. Thirty years later, we're a category. Even my dad had said, 'Maybe you'll need to do something else.'"

Now, Brunnuquell says they are very open to those in their industry, and let come in and see what they do.

"We welcome people in the category," said Brunnuquell, who commented that he's also at a stage in his career of transitioning knowledge.

Brunnuquell and Siciak were then asked by CTK Parishioner Felipe Buzeta, "How do you do all this (transitioning people out) with friends?"

"It's honesty," Brunnuquell replied. "You have to be honest and straightforward. With the VP guy, we had to take a year off in the relationship, but now we're back to where we had been. I've known him for 40 years. He'd played piano in our wedding."

Siciak remarked, "I get this question all the time. I can do the things I am called to do. It doesn't have to be the same as before."

Related to what he had just said, Siciak shared of a question he had just recently been asked.

"The other day I got this question asked to me, 'If Jesus was looking at your life, do you think He'd say He got what He paid for?' That question knifed me."

What he said he takes away from this is that we can be in multiple groups, and planting seeds in each.