



What does intentional growth rooted in being sure you're connected to His Truth and the original core look like?

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

What does intentional growth rooted in being sure you're connected to His Truth and the original core look like?



This, and reflections focused on the [*Parable of the Mustard Seed – Matthew 13:31-32*](#), were the center of the discussion with Wes Kittley, the National Championship-winning Head Track Coach at Texas Tech University, on Tuesday, November 14th at BELIEVES.

In his 25th year as the head track coach at Texas Tech, and 40th year in coaching overall, at age 65, Kittley said he doesn't even think about retiring.

“I was raised as a farm boy 12 miles outside of town in the country,” he said. “I was the middle of five boys, and my dad farmed so this parable brought a lot back to mind.”

Kittley said he always wanted to be a coach to get out of the farm. The specific moment of inspiration that gave him this conviction is the result of his grandfather.

“My granddad was the sheriff of Rule, TX, which had about 1,000 people back then and about 500 people now,” said Kittley. “One day when I was six years old, my granddad took me up to the high school for a track practice. He brought track spikes to give to the kids, and while we were there I jogged with the athletes – though I thought I was running.”

From that moment on, Kittley was hooked and wanted to be a coach.

“I got recruited as a walk-on in the 800-meter run at Abilene Christian, and after graduating, at age 24, I was asked to be the head women's track coach.”

Kittley continued coaching at Abilene Christian until 1999. During his 15-year tenure there, Kittley coached 12 Olympic qualifiers, 3 Pan-American Games athletes, five World University Games athletes, 16 athletes who qualified for the world championships, and one United States national champion. Overall, his program won 29 national track and field championships, the most in Division I and II combined – three short of the all-time record.

In 2000, Kittley then became the head men's and women's track coach at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, TX, where he has continued as head coach to this day and won the Division I men's outdoor national championship in 2019.

Thinking back on the Parable of the Mustard Seed and his upbringing Rule, Kittley said that his dad was never more excited than when he planted cotton.

“He had the greatest faith when planting crops,” he reflected with a smile. “We’d fail the year before, but he’d have the same faith. We were raised poor, but never felt poor. We always made it.”

Continuing to reflect on how his dad persevered year in and year out, Kittley recalled the one time when it struck him that they were poor.

“One Christmas, we had an orange, apple, and jeans as gifts. I saw my mom cry and that’s the only time I realized we were poor.”

When asked what the conversation was like in his family back then, he said, “Coyotes would kill our dogs, and we’d experience what I’ve shared, but my parents talked faith.”

So, what specifically does intentional growth rooted in being sure you’re connected to His Truth bring to mind for Kittley?

“We live an earthly life,” he started by saying. “When I was in high school, a basketball hit me in the head and knocked my retina loose, so I am blind in one eye. I’ve shared about my humble beginnings, and then I moved to coaching. I think I can always see the potential in others from all this. To me, as a coach, I’m still farming, even if it’s the smallest kid, I’m looking for those kids and their potential.”

Instrumental in all of this, in his opinion, is being engaged, being present, and listening to the Holy Spirit.

“We have to listen with people, and plan with people,” he told everyone. “It’s a time to look in the mirror to ensure I’m being the good soil.”

Are there any things in particular that he looks for in people, or words he shares, that he sees make people flourish?

He answered, “The mustard seed was the smallest seed out there. The beginning of the Kingdom was small. Someone took an interest in me, and I became a 3-time national champion. When we have our team meetings every Wednesday, I am looking for the quiet kid.”

Kittley also said that on his team he’s come up with an acronym they all share -- #IHDMUA.

“#IHDMUA stands for ‘He didn’t make you average,’” Kittley explained.

Kittley also gives those on his team a Bible and writes something personally in it.

“It’s imperative to find those mustard seeds, those diamonds in the rough.”

And why the quiet kids?

“Was Jesus who the Pharisees expected?” Kittley asked. “He was not. He was something more. You never want to overlook someone. Of the 30 national champions I have coached, the one who won the 100-meter national championships recently was quiet. I took an interest in him.”

Providing further context and insight, Kittley said that while he loves to win, it’s not at all costs.

“I don’t compromise. Why did Jesus pick the mustard seed?” he posed to everyone.

Then he answered, “It’s going to go wide. In our world, we want everything now. Jesus chose the seed because He knows it would be slow. There’s a beginning, there’s the middle – the waiting, which is what we’re not good at, and then what’s after that.”

When someone pointed out that hearing the parable earlier in the session made him aware that in the end, the tree that grows from the mustard seed provides rest for the birds, Kittley agreed that does stand out.

“The point about the birds is so important because even the birds – the lost souls – will come and rest,” he commented.

Kittley went on to speak of another athlete who was just a part of the 4 x 100-meter men’s relay team that recently ran the fastest time ever in NCAA history – 37.93 seconds.

“The third guy on the team is the leader,” he remarked. “He works the hardest and gets others going. The greatest thing to do with someone is have a one-on-one.”

What does that look like, and what could he share he would ask or talk about in a one-on-one?

When he answered, he thought of one of his current athletes, Maddie McElroy, and shared how he opened the conversation with her by telling her his story.

“Then I told her I thought she could be invaluable to creating the culture on our team. I thought her growth and mentality would shape the team.”

Prior to Maddie, Kittley had other athletes who he had similar conversations with.

“I had two high jumpers, Bradley Adkins and Trey Culver, who had some spiritual side,” he recalled.

Tying back in with his remarks about being present, Kittley said in today’s day and age, he also tells all the young people on his team to be engaged, be present, and put their phones down.

As the discussion time in the BELIEVES session reached its end, Kittley reflected a bit more.

“When I was at Abilene Christian at age 40, I thought I’d die on the ‘holy hill’ (Abilene Christian),” he said with a smile once again. “But I wasn’t doing anything to further the Kingdom. I needed to get out of my comfort zone. So I went to Texas Tech, where He could put a little water and build a house.”