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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 Growing Seed – Mark 4:26-29*](#), were the center of the discussion with Mary Grace King, Founder and Executive Director of Frontline Housing on Tuesday, December 12th at BELIEVES.

King grew up as an only child in Marietta, and then went on to the University of Georgia in Athens where she ultimately earned a Masters in Social Work. From there she began working at the United Way.

“Housing kind of found me,” she said. “I worked for Housing Plus, which was just starting at the time, so I got to watch it launch – including things like filing 990s and more. As a result, I thought, ‘I can do this.’”

Now leading Frontline Housing, King says the hardest part is leading a team.

“I started Frontline Housing four years ago, and it’s been a crazy experience. I’ve learned a lot.”

So, what does the Parable of the Growing Seed mean to King?

“Based on just the title, I thought it would be more about the seed growing, but diving in more it was more about the farmer,” she responded. “It was more about trust. The farmer took care of the land. Plowing then planting. He’d already done a lot to naturally let the seed grow.”

For her personally, she took away from this a focus on values. Professionally, she said it brought home the importance of laying a foundation with hard work, and if you do, then it’ll work out.

Those in attendance were then asked what their thoughts were on the parable, and one guest spoke up.

“In my mind, it’ll immediately go to raising kids. We have influence, but it’s also the surrounding influence.”

Hearing this, King commented, “There were times I’d go to work with parents, who were in social work, and so I’d take that in.”

This prompted the guest who had spoken to share one more thought.

“One of my mom’s best pieces of advice when we started having kids was to stop trying to attribute kids to you and seeing them through the lens of who you are. She said, ‘Let them be who they are.’”

When King then shifted her thoughts more to the professional side of what the parable meant, she spoke more about Frontline Housing.

“United Way housing and economic stability gives most of our funding,” she said, emphasizing they don’t only focus on housing. “We try to expose people to financial well-being.”

To do this, she stated the first three sessions they have with people are in-person, so they at least also get to meet other people in similar situations.

“People do want to learn. We have great volunteers who come in and lead.”

Someone then asked, “What about their spiritual well-being?”

She responded, “I think what’s interesting is for my license, I have to get continuing education units (CEUs). I signed up for one that’s somewhat spiritual. As a social worker, we can at times avoid those conversations because people could have had experiences that weren’t good. So as a team we don’t go there but I’m realizing we should.”

After answering the question she was asked, she returned to speak more about the sessions they have with those they serve.

“With our workshops, it’s intentional they’re doing it in person initially,” King said. “It made my day one time when one person was going to get a Lyft but someone else gave her a ride. Who knows what relationship comes from that.”

While most of the work King and her team focus on is centered on families, they do also serve individuals too.

“We have five people on our family program, but we do have one on individuals.”

As she had mentioned earlier, she and her team have set up their program to do more than just get people housed – especially help people to focus on their financial savings.

“Protip gives a lot of our funding, and he loves savings match programs,” she said. “Our Cash on Hand program is proven to be successful and impactful. A lot of families take advantage of 401K matches at work.”

Besides financial challenges families face, what other challenges coexist that she sees as things that get in the way?

She answered, “I feel like it’s wages. Atlanta isn’t a great transportation city, so the #1 use of savings is car repair and expenses. Our lack of transit is huge. I wish we had a subway for our entire city.”

She added, “Childcare is big too, but they’re very creative – like turning to older kids to babysit younger kids. Health is in there too. When we do budgets, health care is usually last, but then it catches up to them. They’re working very manual jobs.”

She then spoke personally about her passion for those she serves.



"I care so much about our families working. A lot of our families work at places like State Farm Arena, Mercedes Benz Stadium, Amazon, and the airport," King told everyone enthusiastically. "Our families get excited when they can get a shift for events or contractor work. They also often refer work-from-home and remote jobs to one another."

As the families try to work through the struggles with transportation, find jobs that pay enough, and manage their health and childcare, she said in the metro Atlanta area, a lot of the families often wind up finding housing in Clayton County rather than in Atlanta itself, because they can find \$1300/month rent there versus rent that's closer to \$1800-2000/month elsewhere.

With all that King and her team do with the families while they're in the Frontline Housing program, King has set up steps for staying in touch with the families once they graduate.

"While we do back down our resource support after graduation, we do have a scheduled check-in about three months later with our families," she stated.

What have been some of the overall results King and her team have seen in recent years?

"We only started doing housing and savings about a year ago. We had 100 families, got in touch with 80, and 85% were stable. I get hard on myself on the 15%, but they 85% is really something," King remarked when reflecting.

And is there one favorite or memorable story that comes to mind from helping families?

She answered, "It is interesting because now as the leader, I'm not as involved, but I'm at the workshops. Families come in at the end when they have done the savings program. One family came in and the mom wanted to share how she's worked on her credit. People are really excited to show what they learned. It is really exciting every time someone graduates."