

James Stanley Lester

- 11:13:29:23 [Eric Darling]: And rolling. Thank you.
- 11:13:35:04 [Mickey Youmans]: Alright, let me get my headphones on. Okay. Ready to go
- 11:13:46:13 [Tom Kohler]: Stanley. Good morning and thanks for coming to be with us.
- 11:13:49:04 [Stanley Lester]: It is great to see you, Tom.
- 11:13:50:23 [Tom Kohler]: Very kind. I'm going to start us off by just asking if you would, if you would give us your full name and also if you would spell it.
- 11:13:59:21 [Stanley Lester]: My name's James Stanley Lester. J-A-M-E-S S-T-A-N-L-E-Y L-E-S-T-E-R.
- 11:14:07:13 [Tom Kohler]: And what pronouns do you prefer?
- 11:14:11:08 [Stanley Lester]: Him? I guess.
- 11:14:12:16 [Tom Kohler]: That's a good one. Alright, and then do you mind where, well, where were you born, when were you born? And if you weren't born in Savannah, a little bit about, you know, your hometown and then how you got here?
- 11:14:23:03 [Stanley Lester]: I was born in Alex City, Alexander City, Alabama, in 1946. And we'd lived there until through the sixth grade. My father died when my brother was six and I was five. And then we moved to Auburn, Alabama about 40 miles. So my mother knew that we would need to live at home to be able to get a college education. In hindsight, I, you know, the Lord had to be walking with her for us to do all that. You know,
- 11:14:55:15 it's, it is traumatic moving for a child at that age. I did not realize how traumatic it was going to be until we did it. And, but we lived through it and in looking back on it, I'm glad we did it because I would probably, I would've never been a veterinarian if we'd stayed in the local. It just, it just wasn't a... Availability of, of being able to go to school. And
- 11:15:23:17 [Stanley Lester]: It's, growing up in a university town is entirely different than living in a, say industrial town. And it was a, a good experience and I, I'm, I'm glad I had the opportunity to do that. After I finished veterinary school at Alban in 1970, I worked in Birmingham, went in the Army for a couple years, worked in Florida for a couple years and came back and started to practice in Anniston, Alabama and
- 11:15:54:21 lived up there for 11 years. It's amazing when you're in a small town in a one-man practice, you're on call all the time and it, I was getting to be my late thirties and I could see myself burning out and that is a term that is used in a lot of professions -

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burned out. And I, I knew I needed to get to a situation where I could have, when my time off was it'd be quality

11:16:26:01 time off. And I had a, a person, Dr. Max Cooper that is now deceased, had started a practice in Savannah back in the early seventies and he needed an experienced veterinarian. So we got together and I came down here in 1985. And so I have spent half my life here in Savannah. I know that that is probably be returned, returned a half-arsed Savannahian, but I'll take it.

11:16:54:21 (laughs)

11:16:56:12 [Tom Kohler]: That's great. And then tell me a, if you don't mind, could you tell me a little bit about are if you're active acumen of faith-based group of some church, a congregation?

11:17:07:13 [Stanley Lester]: Yes. My wife and I belong to Wilmington Island Methodist Church.

11:17:11:02 [Tom Kohler]: How long have you been members there?

11:17:12:12 [Stanley Lester]: About two years now. Going on two years. We had, we had done some church searching and soul searching and that's where we have ended up.

11:17:21:19 [Tom Kohler]: Very nice. And then has religion played a role in your personal life in terms of how you relate to the larger community?

11:17:32:06 [Stanley Lester]: Yes, very much so. As you go along and you come in contact with God and he makes his presence known to you, you come to realize that he is what he says he is. And that if you follow him, the blessings that follow go beyond human understanding. And it is an amazing walk with him. If you can trust him with your whole heart and lean not into

11:18:10:08 your own understanding, acknowledge him in all your ways and he will direct your path. It's incredible. It's incredible.

11:18:20:19 [Tom Kohler]: How does that express, express itself at Wilmington Island United Methodist Church?

11:18:27:08 [Stanley Lester]: There, it's a, it's a faith base. We have a wonderful minister that is a, not only a good preacher, he's a good person. You can ask him to help in situations that you're placed in. And he goes out of his way to help people... Get things done in a time of, of need. I can give you a specific instance if you would like to hear in just in the last week, friend and client's

11:19:00:13 husband had been sick for many years with Alzheimer's. He died about two weeks ago and they, her family, she and her family had not been shepherded real good by the their church. And that's, and I said, she called me, I said, would you do the

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service? And I said, I told her, I said, I I feel privileged that you and and honored that you would ask me, but I, I don't

11:19:31:05 really need to do that, but I can call somebody that will. And he took over and had the funeral service at the church. And it was, it was, it was a beautiful situation and it was what needed to be done for that family because it, they had gone through a ordeal of a, I think that's one of the worst things that happens to human is the loss of mind and functions that

11:19:58:11 not only a burden on the person but the family too.

11:20:02:19 [Tom Kohler]: Well that's a great example of faith in action. Your minister making himself completely available to what sounds like a quote stranger.

11:20:13:13 [Stanley Lester]: The her father had gone to that church and so she already knew him and that was the first service I'd ever attended that church when I went to her father's funeral about three years ago. And so I knew there was a acquaintance there, if not a relationship, but it was amazing. It was amazing and I was so appreciative and I, you know, when I attended the service, it, it really meant that much more to me because I knew what had gone in to getting this done. And and you see the members of

11:20:45:09 the, that congregation that are involved in a worship slash funeral service that they, they make themselves all available. I mean it's incredible to, to see their devotion to their lord in their church.

11:21:05:03 [Tom Kohler]: Are there, are there specific ministries that get run out of outta your congregation?

11:21:11:15 [Stanley Lester]: Yes. Like we're on the missions committee and so we support different missionaries that are in the field. I just got off the phone this morning in talking to a veterinarian. She and her husband are missionaries in Tanzania. I met her in 2013 on a mission trip to Costa Rica. And she, and, and this is a veterinarian down there that I'd

11:21:43:14 known from veterinary school that had had his life radically changed by the Lord and had gone with CVM Christian Veterinary Mission to Costa Rica to start up his ministry down there. And it was flourishing. And these mission trips consist of veterinarians, veterinary technicians, lay people. I took, the first time I went down there, I took my assistant 'cause I'd already

11:22:15:05 been on one and I, it was gonna be a while before I could get to another one. So I wanted to go down there and I met this couple down there and they were starting to explore whether they wanted to go into the mission field. And they have been in Tanzania now seven years and we have been a financial supporter of hers. And she's coming down here to speak to our congregation in about

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- 11:22:41:00 [Stanley Lester]: What's October the ninth? What, whatever date that is. I think it's on a Wednesday.
- 11:22:48:03 [Tom Kohler]: Well that's a great example.
- 11:22:50:07 [Stanley Lester]: I mean it's incredible to be able to help people.
- 11:22:56:06 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah. You'd mentioned a prison ministry?
- 11:22:59:02 [Stanley Lester]: Yes, I in Kairos Prison Ministry. I was a, at first, a reluctant participant. I was invited in to a participate in a weekend in March of 2011. And I thought about it and thought about it and I said, I'm gonna wait. But I started in the fall of 2011 and I probably have been in prison for 25
- 11:23:30:00 weekends now. We, we usually we'd service two, go to two prisons. I started at Rogers State Prison in Reidsville, Georgia. And then we go to Coastal State Prison here in Savannah. And I'd been going more to Rogers and I would do occasional weekend at Coastal because they, you always need somebody, people have to drop out to last minute 'cause you need a certain number of people to do this. And it's, it's the, our weekends are based on
- 11:24:03:05 Cursillo Walk to Emmaus. I don't know whether you're familiar with those type, I never have been on one, but that's what they're based on. But those are weekends where people already know Christ and they want to go deeper in their relationship. Our purpose is to the introduction of Christ, to the prison population. And when you bring the Holy Spirit into a situation, you
- 11:24:34:05 see signs, wonders, and miracles. And we see some radical change in human behavior that where people have been locked up for particular, they've been locked up. And prison is not a environment... I love going there. And I would go there as long as I physically can, but I would not wanna work there... Difficult, and I certainly wouldn't want to be incarcerated.
- 11:24:59:06 [Tom Kohler]: Could, could you tell us what it actually is like to do one of these weekends? I mean literally you pull up in the parking lot and you just carry us through from there.
- 11:25:09:07 [Stanley Lester]: Well when we come in, you, you gotta go through what they call a sally port. So you gotta take everything outta your pockets, take your shoes off, go through the metal detector and then be, you know, put everything on. And I feel sorry for the guards. 'cause when we have a weekend we'll have, you know, 30, 40 people going through and it puts a lot of stress on them because there is never enough manpower on the prison staff. And we go in and this what we call a four day weekend. We have an introduction the first day is Introduction to Kairos. We introduce

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- 11:25:43:05 everybody in the... Week can have a chance to stand up and give our names and professions, churches, families. And so do the people that are incarcerated there. We call their, we call them the participants. They give their names, their hometowns, their families, where they're from and what their function is at the prison. You know, 'cause a lot of 'em will have jobs there and which is good because it occupies their time otherwise there
- 11:26:12:00 is a lot of boredom, tedium and apathy in prison. And then we have Introduction to Christ, we have the introduction to other people and then we have Introduction to Salvation and it's,
- 11:26:33:03 [Stanley Lester]: It's simple. We don't, it's not a Bible study. There are a series of 11 talks. First one is choices, then you, the next one is you're not alone. And one of the most dramatic things that we see is each member will have a prayer list and we have sheets that are marked off in 30 minute segments. We'll ask people to sign that and pray for the Kairos weekend during that,
- 11:27:09:05 maybe not at two 30 in the morning, but sometime during the day. And most of these names are obtained through your church relationships. We do have people that put out his list on social media and it's incredible how many people will sign up to do that. And we take those and we cut 'em up into a strip and do like you used to do a Christmas thing where you make it into a
- 11:27:33:03 little circle and staple it and then you staple that in there. So you've got a prayer chain then. And when it's all put together, everybody has their own prayer chain. You bring it in paper or plastic bags and the agape room is, that's one of part of the ministry. They put that chain together and they, the people that are working in that, the, the other participants, the inside participants that have already gone through the weekend, they bring that
- 11:28:03:20 out and would be like coming into a church and walking around the church and staple it to the wall. And sometimes it will circle the room is that large. And we see so many people come in there, you know, these guys have been isolated with each other and they're, it's just difficult. I can't describe how difficult it would be to be incarcerated that when they realize there are that many people that are praying for them for the
- 11:28:33:19 weekend, we see awe, awe! In their faces and it, it start, they start to change. And you can see these people, they come in there.
- 11:28:44:06 [Stanley Lester]: I've seen them such fear has gripped them. They can't even hardly move and just come in, just trembling. And by the time Sunday afternoon comes around when they get up what we call open mic and they're able to profess what they've experienced through the weekend and the softening of their hearts and the opening of their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ. It's incredible, incredible, incredible. And I have some specific stories to tell you about requests for help that most of the time

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- 11:29:17:12 the, they will have, we'll have opportunities for them to talk. We have one minister at each table and they can pick out of, we usually have six or seven tables and they ha they could just listen to the people. They can pick out who they'd like to have a conference with. And we do see some people come to Christ and salvation on the weekend. But that's not the main gist of the Kairos Weekend is the introduction. You want somebody to come
- 11:29:48:00 to know Christ and start learning about him before you have to meet him. And, but we do have people that do come to Christ and accept him as a Lord and Savior During that time.
- 11:30:03:22 [Tom Kohler]: You mentioned some stories.
- 11:30:05:18 [Stanley Lester]: Yes.
- 11:30:07:12 [Tom Kohler]: Do you mind telling a couple?
- 11:30:08:21 [Stanley Lester]: Oh, I'd love to. In November of 2017, I was working a table. That's when we, there were six participants and three team members. Table leader, assistant table leader and clergy. And on Sunday morning, you know, we were rocking along and you know, things were wonderful. You know, by the time Sunday morning comes around, there's not any tension there. We have the first bathroom break and I'm sitting there
- 11:30:43:07 just waiting 'cause there's a rush to go to the bathrooms. And this young gentleman, I won't mention his name, but he was sitting there and he looked at me and he said, could I ask you a question? I said, certainly. He said, he said, I've got a problem. I've got something that's been bothering me for a long time. Could I ask you about it? Could you gimme some help on it? I said, certainly I will if I, I'll do whatever I can. And he said, when he
- 11:31:14:19 was a child, a family friend would come by, a man would come by to see his parents. And he enjoyed playing with me and I enjoyed playing with him. And it was wonderful. We had a good time and I really enjoyed seeing him.
- 11:31:34:13 [Stanley Lester]: And he came by to see my parents and they weren't there. So we started playing and the play became rough and he raped me. And he said, that's been bothering me since then. He said, what can I do? I said, I called him by his name. And I said, you have to realize that man sinned against you when he did that act to you. And when he did, he
- 11:32:11:17 called a wound to your soul, a soul wound. And God in his word are the only ones that can heal your soul. God's word says your word heals my soul. But
- 11:32:35:12 I want you to know too, that you created a soul wound when you, you have not forgiven him Because God says that's sin and sin creates soul wounds. So you've got two soul wounds there that that need to be healed. But also when there's

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sexual activity. And these, a soul wound is a God thing because it came when God said in the first four books of the Pentateuch, he said, I will remember

11:33:10:09 their sins to the third and fourth generation. So there's a soul wound form that becomes generational sin. If that person that cre, that committed that sin, if they don't go back and repent and have their song wound, it goes down and it'll go down to the third and fourth generation. And we see that. And we're seeing that in our world right now. Whether it be in alcoholism, racism, anti-Semitism. We see it. You hear about it, it's on the radio,

11:33:39:11 it's on tv. You see it. And so God's the only one that can hear that.

11:33:43:19 [Stanley Lester]: Then you get into sexual activity. And that's a God thing too. How do two people become one through soul ties. And when a man and woman in holy matrimony come together in sexual union, there's a sole tie formed. And so they become one. It's only one or two people I've ever heard teach on this. And one of 'em had been locked up. Her name is Katie Souza. And I thought I, when I first heard this about 12 years ago, I said, what? And I, so I'd listen to it and I'd listened to it. I'd listened

11:34:16:13 to it about four or five times before I could grasp it. So I said, I told him, called him by his name. So you've got a soul tie with this man. And if it's not confessed and healed by the Lord, well then Satan has direct access to torment you. It's like taking a cattle prod and sticking it in there. And he sticks it in that soul wound and sticks it in that soul tie. And it causes confusion

11:34:47:03 in your mind. It causes you just almost become disabled sometimes. And there also particular personality traits that go along with a soul wound. Particularly unforgiveness is usually anger and bitterness, hatred. And you see that when it flares up when you are and when you are placed in that particular situation, that soul wound will come up and just flare up and

11:35:15:07 man, you'll come right back at 'em. Go for their throat whenever somebody comes against you. So you've got to forgive that man, totally forgive him.

11:35:29:01 [Stanley Lester]: And you go, you've gotta come before God and do that. So I said, now you understand what we're talking about. And he said, yes sir. Okay. So we got up, we went, we finished out our Sunday, went through graduation ceremony. We come back the next weekend on Saturday to do what we call instruction weekend. And we teach 'em how to form small prayer groups in the dorms because that is the continuation ministry of Kairos Prison Ministry. Because once we leave, we're not there. We, we go

11:36:02:03 back usually once a week up at Coastal. But you can't do that over, over at and at Rogers just 'cause of the logistics. You just can't do it. So we came back on Saturday first bathroom break and when we come back we still sit at a family, but we're not sitting at a table, we're just sitting in chairs just like you and I are right

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now. And we get up, go to the bathroom, I'm walking out, I hear this tap, tap, tap on my back. Say, Hey

11:36:30:07 man, how you today? He said, God showed me that soul wounds and those soul ties. I said it, it took me back so much. I says, you forgave that man, didn't you? He said, I sure did. And then it was just a rushing crowd. I couldn't talk to him then. But later in the morning I'm, I'm talking to him Tom and he's sitting over there and I said,

11:37:00:22 tell me, how did God show you? He said, he showed me in a picture. He said it was like a TV screen. He showed me my soul wounds with that man. He showed me with his soul, ties with that man. And he healed 'em. And now I know that he's healed me. I can help other people be healed. He said, I

11:37:31:05 know that's happened to other men in this prison. We need to search out for those people so they can be helped too. And in six days, what else happened in the Bible in the first six days? What happened? The world was formed. The world as we know it. In six days I saw that man became, he went from being a morose, depressed, convicted felon to evangelist for the Lord Jesus

11:38:05:10 Christ. I will never forget it. And you know what? The frustration of me, I've never seen him again.

11:38:14:14 [Stanley Lester]: I dunno whether he got transferred, but I didn't work that much there at, at Coastal. So I don't know whether he was there for a while. You know, some of the guys that come through on the weekend, I see 'em for, I mean the ones we had at Rogers were great. I mean we had a large contingency there. Over a hundred people would come to the, what we call the monthly reunions where we come back and we bring food in and we'll give, they'll give talks, we'll give talks and it's like a CE. And it's, it's amazing program as far as that's concerned. But that has

11:38:49:06 affected me. I go back when I get discouraged and somebody's not responding like I want 'em to. I go back and think about that young man and what he brought, the Lord healed him so dramatically that his life would never, my life would never be the same because of that miraculous work of God. I don't know whether you've ever had a vision from God, but you know, it comes from God and you know, he's telling you a specific thing. I don't

11:39:18:19 know how familiar you are with a Book of Luke, but I mean Luke, you know, in the first three pages they about four or five people that have visions from God telling him what to do. And Our God is tremendous. And when he comes to you like that, he's got a specific purpose and mission in them and, but he healed that man's soul and

11:39:41:15 soul wounds... All right.

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- 11:39:47:14 [Tom Kohler]: That's one.
- 11:39:48:12 [Stanley Lester]: Alright. The rest of the rest of that story though, the rest of that story. Alright, that was 2017 And it bugged me because I didn't get to quiz him just like you are me right now. I was, I wanted to know the whole thing. I was wanted to know what that soul wound, that soul tie looks like. I'm curious about that as a veterinarian, you know, I want to know these things. That's how you, you know, how you learn. You get, you get in there and do it, but you just, the
- 11:40:19:02 opportunity is not there. So I went to see a pastor out on the south side, good man about a family situation. And I would told him the same story and he said, Lester, stop worrying about it because when you get to heaven, there gonna be a lot of people coming up and telling you, thanking you because of what you did for that man. He did for them. And that is one of the rewards that we receive in heaven when we do something like that. You
- 11:40:48:17 don't. And then it, it put my soul at rest on that. I don't, I don't, I I always consider that story because it meant so much to me, but I don't, I'm not affected by the negativity of not knowing everything, what happened. And so you take it in faith when somebody, another man of faith helped me
- 11:41:18:02 'cause he knew understood what I've been going through.
- 11:41:23:07 [Tom Kohler]: Now we're back to the chain.
- 11:41:24:14 [Stanley Lester]: That's right.
- 11:41:25:18 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah.
- 11:41:26:23 [Stanley Lester]: It's incredible.
- 11:41:28:21 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah, yeah. Do men who come from the outside and go into the prisons, what sort of relation, how does that change your relationship with other men?
- 11:41:51:23 [Stanley Lester]: You become closer to 'em, the men that, that belonged to Kairos. I mean, we've got several guys that have been in prison and have either gone through Kairos or, or been in a program that got them straightened out and have participated. I mean you gotta be out of, you know, there's certain regulations by the DOC Department of Corrections that before you can come back in, you know, as far as you gotta be out off
- 11:42:22:08 parole for five years. Something I, I don't, I don't know all the details 'cause I've never had to deal with it. I've just heard them talk about it. They are strong. They're strong because they've got personal experience. They can, and they are, I'll see one of 'em again tomorrow 'cause we're going to do some baptisms out at Coastal. And this particular man, he's really a nice person. But where we do the baptisms, it's almost like in a,

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- 11:42:57:13 a movable bathtub. So there's, there's a little bit of height to it. And some of these men that come to be baptized, particularly the Hispanics, they're very short in the statue and so they have to lean over and they put their head into the water to be baptized. So my friend and the other man that was there, they had to reach there and
- 11:43:22:13 grab him back pants, legs and lift him up
- 11:43:25:07 [Stanley Lester]: Put him down in there. And it was, it's a humorous story, but he got baptized and you, you can, you see that man now and his countenance has changed after they go through baptism, they come in there depressed and they go, they're baptized in the name of the, of the holy Lord and receive the Holy Spirit. And it's dramatic. Dramatic.
- 11:43:50:10 [Tom Kohler]: Are there examples where people who folks that come in from the outside meet somebody who's on the inside and then somebody gets paroled and the connection they've made through Kairos leads them toward their first job, their first house. Are there stories like that or is that verboten?
- 11:44:17:03 [Stanley Lester]: It's not verboten, once they leave prison, You cannot have a relationship where you become on that a participant's visitor list. If you start visiting on that, you have to step out of Kairos. So there is that division there and what we have to be really careful of, and I'm having to deal one right now. The fellow's having some
- 11:44:47:05 problems and he's wanting me to get involved in it. You, when we go in there, we are an advocate for Jesus Christ. We're not an advocate for the prison, nor we're an adv advocate for the prisoner. We're an advocate for Jesus. And we have to leave it at that because that, this is a, it's a very
- 11:45:09:04 needy, needy population in there. I mean, I'll let it go at that. I mean, because that prison has certain rules and, and the Warden is the one that makes the rules and we, we go in there as his guest and if we step out of line, we can be asked to be leave and, and you know, lose the privilege of coming in there 'cause it is a privilege. But they, they like having us there because things calm down and things always calm down right before the weekend and right after the weekend because you are looking at a
- 11:45:50:22 population that are used to using their fist and weapons and everything to settle problems rather than talking them through.
- 11:46:01:17 [Tom Kohler]: Do you have any idea how many men in Chatham County are currently active in Kairos?
- 11:46:09:21 [Stanley Lester]: We probably, we, we had a team meeting last Saturday and that's the first time in almost five years we've had a joint meeting of the two prisons because the Coastal got started back up in November of, of 21. And it was the

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first prison opened back up during COVID. I mean, because that the, we were scheduled to go in two weeks after COVID started the group at, I was not in that group that weekend, but they

11:46:44:14 had gone in on Thursday. They'd gone through the Thursday afternoon program. They were having dinner on Thursday before they dismissed and go back and the Warden came in and says, you gotta pack up and leave. Prisons are closed down. And so we didn't have any access to for a year and a half at Coastal. And, and because of the strength of, of Kairos there that the, the warden made a decision to, you know, to come back in. We did not get

11:47:13:11 back in Rogers there was a change in the warden, which is not unusual and you depend on a lot with the relationship with the Kairos group, with the warden and the assistant warden and the chaplain. The chaplain is the point person at the prison. And we didn't get back in that first weekend. Our la our last one was in November of 2019. We didn't go back till November of

11:47:42:00 2023.

11:47:44:02 [Tom Kohler]: Does Kairos have a budget or is it all volunteer? How, what's, how does that work?

11:47:48:13 [Stanley Lester]: We raise our own money. It cost us about \$9,000 for a weekend. And most of that is food because we feed them lunch and, and and they, they wanted us to do supper in Roger's last time, which was good because then we got, we ate supper there and then, so it was as a group, rather than us feeding them and then leaving and going to dinner ourselves where we've got to take care of that before we, you know, go back for a

11:48:19:22 rest. 'cause even though you're sitting a lot during the day, you can expend a lot of energy talking and listening, playing a lot of music, singing a lot of songs. Everybody has a band and you'd be great at it, I promise you.

11:48:40:20 [Tom Kohler]: Thank you. Let's talk, let's go back and...

11:48:44:08 [Stanley Lester]: Okay.

11:48:44:20 [Tom Kohler]: Go back into, let's go back to Wilmington Island Methodist Church social hall for a minute.

11:48:51:06 [Stanley Lester]: Okay. Okay.

11:48:56:13 [Tom Kohler]: All right. What other, what other ministries or what other things are happening congregationally that might be a little bit closer to home?

11:49:06:09 [Stanley Lester]: One thing, I'm on the missions committee and one thing that we do, we do it every week that people have the ability to call in, make an appointment and come in and talk if they need some financial help. And, and that

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goes like this. We can see several people on a Wednesday and then we might go several Wednesdays... Where Wednesdays where people don't call in, make an appointment, but they get financial

11:49:38:07 help usually in the form of payment on a utility bill. A gift card where they buy groceries. And then we have a small food pantry where we can give us some, you know, some of those mamas come in, they got three or four chillun' and we don't know the anguish, I guess I lived through it, but the

11:50:11:22 anguish of a single mom, you know, with one parent household and several children that, you know, I, one of the questions we're supposed to ask them is what kind of plan do you have for the future? Well some of 'em have been outta work and they started back work and they hadn't got enough money. But

11:50:35:10 some of them, you know, only get some kind of SSI

11:50:42:03 [Stanley Lester]: And I do enjoy speaking the words and, and writing down the verses for financial prosperity. When you give, it will be given back to you, pressed down, overflowing. People will give into your breath, but you got to go out and that has to be taught. 'cause faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And I enjoy doing that. Some people don't. And you know, I, I feel for 'em if they don't,

11:51:12:22 [Tom Kohler]: Where does the money come from to make, to, to give on Wednesdays?

11:51:18:09 [Stanley Lester]: It's, it's part of the budget of the church that, that we have a certain budget that we can. And as a matter of fact, our church disaffiliated with the United Methodist Church about a year and a half ago. And because of that, they were financial savings because you didn't have to send all this money to the central thing. And so they had this lump of money that had been budgeted, but they didn't have anywhere to

11:51:51:21 put it. So they gave the missions committee, they asked us to, they gave us certain amount, says bring a list of people, you know, bring a list of ministries you'd like to support. And so we, you know, spent some time going with that. And, and we have different organizations here in Savannah that will come and make a presentation to the missions committee. We have a monthly meeting and one I did not, I had never heard of is the Widow Society. And

11:52:21:11 it had been here for 250 years and there are a few people that are active in it and you know, they've, they've got it down now where I think there's a minimum age of maybe 60, but you don't necessarily have to be a widow, but you need some financial need. And they came to ask us to support financially to support their ministry so they can minister to it. Which it

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- 11:52:49:00 makes sense because that they're, most of the people we see are younger mamas that don't have a husband at home and they just get behind. And you know, when people get older and they have had been married and they've lost their husband, it it's difficult. It's difficult. And, and the people that
- 11:53:23:10 had it, I mean it's so it was wondered... I mean I just, I remember that in particular, you know. And then what's the mission on Fahm Street, Union Mission? They've, they've given,
- 11:53:38:17 [Stanley Lester]: They've given a pre presentation, we've support them financially. So they're, it's one thing once you get involved in that in the city, Tom, it's amazing how much help is needed. You know!
- 11:53:56:04 [Tom Kohler]: How big a congregation do y'all have?
- 11:54:02:02 [Stanley Lester]: I don't know how many people on the roll we have, you know, somewhere between 150 and 200 on Sunday.
- 11:54:10:20 [Tom Kohler]: A lot of gray hair or kids or what?
- 11:54:12:22 [Stanley Lester]: But they're getting more kids. I mean we have a little children's program where that the children would come up and the other day they have 21 children coming, sitting there. And then they would take them back and do a, a church with them and then they'd bring them back in at the end of the service. And there are more young people coming. I mean I've seen that. I, in other churches, The popul... The church population is getting older and there's young
- 11:54:44:01 people and this has been a concerted effort and they've got a good children's program. They've got a good children's school there. And, but you need both things. You need the older people there to support the church financially. But you need this younger group that's got the energy and there's, there's a lot of difference between the financial part and the energy part. I'm telling you, if you and I both know, I I, I'd love to go
- 11:55:15:14 back and work, but man my get up and go, ain't there no more.
- 11:55:19:05 [Tom Kohler]: Got up and went.
- 11:55:19:23 [Stanley Lester]: That's right.
- 11:55:20:09 [Tom Kohler]: Right. And I, I know like at the downtown churches traditionally anyway, the congregations downtown, at least ministerially they would meet and kind of have like, almost like a, a downtown congregational association of some sort. Is how does that work on Wilmington Island? Do y'all, do y'all connect up with the other congregations on the island and do things kind of in that way? Interfaith, or?

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- 11:55:45:06 [Stanley Lester]: Or Our our, our pastor has met with the other pastors out there about different things. But as such, I, I haven't seen that, I haven't participated in that. I don't that not that's dis distrust or it's just the, maybe the interest is not there yet. I think that it would be beneficial there certain, the ministry that we support it, it's
- 11:56:17:22 Franklin, what was Franklin pastor's daddy was a famous pastor.
- 11:56:29:15 [Tom Kohler]: Gimme a little more there.
- 11:56:31:00 [Stanley Lester]: They fix up the Christmas boxes. They mail out overseas to children
- 11:56:37:14 [Tom Kohler]: Locally famous pastor or? I'm gonna...
- 11:56:41:10 [Stanley Lester]: Billy Billy what, what's Billy's last name?
- 11:56:43:17 [Tom Kohler]: Billy Graham?
- 11:56:44:09 [Stanley Lester]: Billy Graham. Alright. Franklin Graham's...
- 11:56:45:23 [Tom Kohler]: Right, okay, I'm with you.
- 11:56:47:01 [Stanley Lester]: All right. He has a, he has a ministry, it's called Samaritan's Purse. And you fix up these Christmas boxes and they send them overseas to chillun'. They got different ages and what you put in there and everything like that. And we have been a pickup point for these people to bring in. The other churches have been very supportive of, of doing that. Where you get these boxes and people go out and buy Christmas presents, put 'em together and then they all bring 'em, it's a process
- 11:57:18:17 going on. Then we take 'em someplace and they ship 'em to do the Samaritans person. They go out from there.
- 11:57:26:06 [Tom Kohler]: And then I want to go back just to Wilmington Island for a minute. I, I've got my own idea about what Wilmington Island is like. Is there quote need on the island?
- 11:57:42:07 [Stanley Lester]: Yes. I think it's not as heavily populated with what I would term poverty as I've seen during my professional life in making house calls in poverty areas. But they are people that are in need.
- 11:58:14:20 I know that one thing that we've got to search out in our church of the older people and I have personal experience with, with one, how far do you go if you are helping people on a Wednesday that call in that you don't
- 11:58:42:21 know that are not a member of your congregation and these people are coming to the end of their financial resources. How do you take the missions committee?

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And that's something that we have got to discuss and come up with a firm plan on it. Because if some people get the assistance and the others either don't know about it or don't get it, it can create dissension in the congregation. And that that's something that we've really got to

11:59:13:17 work on. And you know, that I can give you specific instances and I'd rather for that not to be on film because it, there's some tender feelings there. And that

11:59:31:23 [Tom Kohler]: I think your point is that need is closer than we think.

11:59:35:16 [Stanley Lester]: Yes. The need is going to always be there as long as you dealing with people. It's just the level that you are. But you know what, when you serve people like that, there is the potential for God to settle your soul, and the highest compliment I had when I was doing the house call practice, I was seeing this nice lady, I've seen her children in

12:00:09:23 other parts of town, but this lady lived in the hood as she called it. And she, I want, she said, I want to thank you for coming, taking care of our four-legged babies in the hood. And you know, I just about broke out crying then too because it, nobody had ever said anything like that to me before. And you, you did that Tom, you went into the hood and that, I hate to see

12:00:39:18 people have to live like that. I don't know what the answer is. It's not giving it to 'em, but it's leading them to where they can prosper and that it, it takes a lot of cooperation and work. 'cause giveaway programs. I

12:01:06:16 don't know, I, I question you get into politics and all this stuff is going like going on now. It, oh boy.

12:01:16:13 [Tom Kohler]: Well I think that's part of why we have tried to... This, this project in a way was to remind ourselves that people are living in communities as just as people can organize themselves in ways to be helpful to one another over time in many, many different ways. We had no idea how many ways people could do that. But after 30 interviews, it's

12:01:51:08 stunning how many different ways that people can organize themselves to be responsive to other people. And there's no politic in that at all.

12:02:01:18 [Stanley Lester]: That's right. Right.

12:02:03:12 [Tom Kohler]: And so that's, that's really the

12:02:05:21 [Stanley Lester]: Basis basis for this program, man. That's good.

12:02:08:18 [Tom Kohler]: Absolutely. It's to, it's to remind ourselves that it's all, it's there. We need to notice it, celebrate it, and give other people a chance really to see, feel, taste, and touch it. So...

James Stanley Lester

- 12:02:22:18 [Stanley Lester]: Could I tell you what, it does something for you when you go in there and you help these people, you don't even have to get those compliments like that. I mean it's just seeing them not only survive but start to flourish.
- 12:02:37:05 [Tom Kohler]: Right. That's exactly right.
- 12:02:39:06 [Stanley Lester]: I mean, you know, you and I had some opportunities for education and the favor of the Lord and, and getting involved in different things and it's been a good career. But in some ways, see I'm, I'm involved in a bread ministry too. One of the Kairos brothers that they were picking up bread, they pick it up from Publix. And so I've worked on going to different places and we go to I just... Emmaus House, Old Savannah Mission. There are two Compassion churches that have food
- 12:03:15:06 pantries, a Lutheran church that has a food pantry that you're able to take all these to and, and stuff that, you know, it benefits everybody 'cause Publix would have to throw it away 'cause of going out of effect date. But yet we can take this and moves through the, and you wouldn't believe these
- 12:03:38:17 food pantries, how excited they are.
- 12:03:40:20 [Stanley Lester]: You bring a bag full of bread and that, oh boy, we're gonna be able to give out double portions today. 'cause it's so much and it, it's just used up and it, you know, you I've had to work at it to find places because you get so much it, you know, my freezer's only hold... And then, and then we take that, the pastries and we'll take 'em into prison when we have a meeting and everything like that. And it saves us money because it, here we are, we walk, we have to be careful not to take too much because the guys not only like to consume it, they like to take it
- 12:04:13:13 back to their rooms. And that's a no-no. Creates a lot of problems.
- 12:04:21:15 [Tom Kohler]: Well we've done, as I said, 30 interviews.
- 12:04:24:14 [Stanley Lester]: That's good.
- 12:04:26:23 [Tom Kohler]: This has been exceptional in its clarity and also in its spirituality. And I, I think I speak for the two guys behind me. We thank you.
- 12:04:47:08 [Stanley Lester]: You thank you. I'd like speaking that my faith. Yeah, well but I but I do it in, you know, in this setting. I mean you're doing it in truth and for people to know that there are people that care out there and that can, that people can be helped. That's right. 'cause man, there's so many people that just, this, this is a dark world for 'em. It's difficult and we don't know. I've got other stories I could tell you,
- 12:05:18:13 but it, it, it stretches your imagination.

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- 12:05:24:11 [Tom Kohler]: I think the way you led us through, what it's really like to go be present in Rogers and Coastal is not quite even sure what to say... It's a window into a world that hardly anybody has ever seen. And that seems like a very important window to me for people to have
- 12:05:58:03 a chance to look through historic, you know, because now that window's been opened on this piece of videotape.
- 12:06:06:14 [Stanley Lester]: Of course when, when whoever the convicted felon, when he goes to jail, his entire family goes to jail with him. I'm telling you, it's, it's awful to see. But then you got, there's some stories there that it can be flourishing with that family too. But you got to, they had really have to work at it, you know, just like this shooting up in Winder. You know, you wonder one what's going through that father's head when you
- 12:06:39:03 buy a gun like that for your son. You ain't buying a 22 to go out and shoot squirrels. Why do you go buy a gun like that? What were you thinking? And a 14-year-old boy, I would like to know, sit down and talk to him and then work through the Holy Spirit to see what kind of demonic being came in there to, for him to take a gun in there because he does not realize what
- 12:07:09:03 he has done. Not just to those people, but what he's done to himself. Because I've seen this when you put a 14-year-old boy in prison for life and that it ain't gonna be easy for him, it ain't gonna be easy. 'cause I've seen these guys come in there and you know, I can go into my forgiveness stories about when I was in unforgiveness and when you, some of the things, if you, if you're gonna be in unforgiveness, God does not allow
- 12:07:37:19 you to be in the sound mind.
- 12:07:38:21 [Stanley Lester]: It's based on second Timothy 1:7. You didn't give us a spirit of fear, but a power, love and a sound mind. And if you, when you're operating in unforgiveness, you are under the influence of a spirit of fear because you afraid that the person that's wronged you ain't going to get what you think is right, what they deserve. So if you don't use the power and the love of the Holy Spirit, then God doesn't allow that you to be in a sound mind. Well, when I discovered that, I knew who I was in unforgiveness, I forgave. I can be around that person now and I enjoy being around them. Don't have that much contact. And I, it's a long story.
- 12:08:12:08 But the thing about it is when you go down that path, you can, you can get murderous thoughts and somewhere along the line, that 14-year-old boy, it it, he'd probably been picked on something like that because a lot of 'em get bullied and everything like that. And they want to get back at somebody. And the people they shot weren't the people that did this to 'em. But yet he's going to pay possibly for the rest of his life in prison. And it is not. I mean, how long are you going

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- 12:08:38:23 to live? There's one man out here now that when he gave his testimony, I just about fell outta the chair. He said that could have been me if I'd have acted on my unforgiving thoughts. He says today I have been in prison 42 years, three months and three weeks for a crime he committed back in the early, somewhere back in the eighties, whatever, 42 years ago was. Yeah, yeah. And so, but his wife has stuck with him. He had a two week old son
- 12:09:12:04 when he was locked up. And that that child is 42 years old and they come to visit him every, at least once a month, if not every two weeks. The wife has become involved in Kairos Women's Ministry, Kairos Prison on, on the women's side. And she goes into the jail prisons in, in Tennessee. So there are stories like that, but too many of 'em where the marriage dissolves, the children are just,
- 12:09:40:22 [Tom Kohler]: It, it's a lot to take in.
- 12:09:42:17 [Stanley Lester]: Yes, it is.
- 12:09:43:19 [Tom Kohler]: It's a lot to take in. And I can see why, I can see how the men that go in from the outside do become, I'm assuming, pretty deeply connected to one another.
- 12:09:58:21 [Stanley Lester]: Yes. Because, oh man, y'all, y'all are saying we rocked out. We were with CBC 'cause some of the members have access over there. And this is the first time we've had, as I told you, the two teams meeting together, we had about 60 people in that room. And whenever you get a bunch of guys like that, you're going to have your share of sarcasm because we know each other. Firstly, it's just, it's wondrous and you make
- 12:10:28:11 some deep, deep friendship from it.
- 12:10:30:12 [Tom Kohler]: Just curiosity in that, in that room we're now describing 60 guys. I'm sure there's lots of laughs.
- 12:10:35:15 [Stanley Lester]: Oh it's, it's, it's just fun.
- 12:10:37:23 [Tom Kohler]: How about tears?
- 12:10:40:10 [Stanley Lester]: Yes. When they particularly it's talk about that's been, say a brother's died, her brother's got terminal illness, chillun' having problems. Yes. There's a lot of prayerful concerns that are, that are, that are taken care of. So it's, it's a very good supportive system.
- 12:11:05:02 [Tom Kohler]: Broad terms. The youngest man you've ever seen from the outside go in as a Kairos volunteer and the oldest man you've ever seen go in as a Kairos volunteer? Broad terms.

James Stanley Lester

- 12:11:17:20 [Stanley Lester]: The oldest one I saw is just joined for the first time. He, and I'd call his name out and you'd know him, but he's 93 years old. He's going, he's coming in as a regular team member and the youngest is probably
- 12:11:36:07 [Stanley Lester]: Late twenties, early thirties.
- 12:11:38:03 [Tom Kohler]: Wow.
- 12:11:38:15 [Stanley Lester]: Because it, the only thing about it, you don't find out about it till, you know, you've been active in church and everything like this and a lot of people were coming through Walk to Emmaus and they would, the other members have gone into a prison ministry and they'll go in there and they recruit from that. 'cause those people want to, you know, once you go through a weekend like that, you want to, you either get a lot from it and want to continue doing it, do it. And you go into prison ministry. We've had some wonderful Black men and I would say
- 12:12:14:08 that is our weakest area of being able to recruit from the Black population. 'cause so many of the pop prison population is Black.
- 12:12:26:19 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah, I'm sure. Yeah. Let me ask my guys, are there things that we've not gotten to that y'all wanna make sure we get to before we close?
- 12:12:38:04 [Eric Darling]: I don't have anything. I think it's...
- 12:12:39:16 [Mickey Youmans]: No, I I think it's great.
- 12:12:40:16 [Eric Darling]: It's great pretty far-reaching and inclusive.
- 12:12:44:12 [Tom Kohler]: I do too. Okay. This has been great. I mean, really good. Thank you.
- 12:12:50:20 [Stanley Lester]: Thank you.
- 12:12:51:21 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah, really good.
- 12:12:53:05 [Stanley Lester]: Y'all are fantastic. You always were. What I had seen you in so long.
- 12:12:57:12 [Eric Darling]: Thank you.
- 12:12:58:13 [Stanley Lester]: But we, we've been busy in that we've.