

Jermain Ray

- 15:07:09:14 [Eric Darling]: Got it. Ears on. I think having that door open does help. Okay. We are ready when you are, Tom...
- 15:07:35:21 [Tom Kohler]: Well, good afternoon.
- 15:07:36:19 [Jermain Ray]: Good afternoon.
- 15:07:37:17 [Tom Kohler]: Thank you so much for being with us.
- 15:07:39:04 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir. It's a pleasure.
- 15:07:40:08 [Tom Kohler]: I'm going to ask you, if you don't mind, to tell us who you are and also to spell your name.
- 15:07:44:06 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir. So my name is Jermaine Ray. I am the program director down at the Old Savannah City Mission. My name is J-E-R-M-A-I-N-E. Last name Ray, R-A-Y.
- 15:07:56:12 [Tom Kohler]: And then pronoun wise, how do you identify?
- 15:07:58:23 [Jermain Ray]: I identify as a he. Yes, sir.
- 15:08:01:04 [Tom Kohler]: Very nice. Thank you. Let me ask I, if it's okay, I'd really just like to get to know people.
- 15:08:06:12 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir.
- 15:08:07:12 [Tom Kohler]: So, I would be very interested, if you don't mind, and if you would just say, well, I was born in, and kind of just bring us up through, you know, your childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, et cetera. If you feel like it's important for us to know who your parents were or your grandparents were, I'd be happy to start there. And as you sort of tell that story, what I'll be doing is taking some notes and then I'll be circling back and asking some questions based on those notes.
- 15:08:36:01 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir. Yes sir. Alright. Alright. Well, yes sir. So my name is Jermaine Ray. I was born in Wilmington, Delaware. I was raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I spent my whole life between Philadelphia and Delaware. I graduated high school and went right into the army after graduation. I did four years in the Army, two years in the National Guard. After I completed that, I got out and I started moving furniture for a living. I worked for Allied Van Lines, a, a big, big moving
- 15:09:11:09 company. Couple years in, I ended up buying my own truck to become an owner and operator. I did that for almost 20 years before my life took a downward spiral.

Jermain Ray

Being on the road 9, 10 months outta the year I started drinking a lot and I started doing various drugs and pretty soon my career went down

15:09:37:06 the tubes quickly. After that, I found myself wandering around doing various jobs for the next two years before I decided that I needed some kind of help to get my life back on track.

15:09:50:09 [Jermain Ray]: I was coming down to Florida and I stopped at Savannah, Georgia. And while I was here, I was talking to a gentleman while I was eating lunch and he told me about the Old Savannah City Mission that they had a program that helps adult individuals get back on track with their life. Eventually I joined the program, it was a two-year program, I did one year there. And the director at the time, he told me I wasn't gonna do the second year of the program because he wanted to hire me there. So I ended up taking a job there as an office assistant for a year, a year and a

15:10:24:21 couple months before he passed away. And Pastor Larry McDaniel, the founder, came back and took over as executive director. He seen the role that I played around the mission and he called me into the office and he offered me the position of running everything at the, in the building. So for the past three years I've been running the main building, the, the two bargain centers we have. I'm also in charge of lining up volunteers

15:10:54:01 that comes in, scheduling them to come in. I also, I'm in charge of the warehouse. We have a warehouse where we have hundreds of pounds of clothes that comes in daily that we need separated. We separate those into categories. We give our friends and neighbors a shower every day that they're coming in and a change of clothes. So we're constantly going through clothes for our friends and neighbors. So that's just some of the

15:11:23:11 general day by day activities I do at Old Savannah City Mission.

15:11:28:04 [Tom Kohler]: Wow. That's a lot of moving parts.

15:11:30:19 [Jermain Ray]: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

15:11:33:01 [Tom Kohler]: Let me, let me ask you if I could you a public school kid?

15:11:36:00 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir, I am.

15:11:37:04 [Tom Kohler]: And so public school and were you, were you raised in the church?

15:11:41:15 [Jermain Ray]: I was raised in the church to a certain age when we got old enough where we could tell our mom, no, we're not going. She didn't force us to go. So around 12 years old, I stopped going to church completely. And I think that's one of the things that led me down to the destructive path that I took later on in life that I learned today as I am in the church actively today.

Jermain Ray

- 15:12:03:20 [Tom Kohler]: Brothers and sisters?
- 15:12:05:02 [Jermain Ray]: Yes, sir. I have three younger brothers, no sisters.
- 15:12:08:18 [Tom Kohler]: So you're the guy.
- 15:12:09:08 [Jermain Ray]: I'm the oldest, yes, sir. Yes sir. I was, I was raised with, my stepdad was White. My two younger brothers are, are mixed. So us being raised in, back in the, you know, the seventies, you would think it was a tough time for interracial, you know, household. But in the area that we were, we didn't, we were in like a area that we considered Little Italy and they accepted us and, and we had a, a great childhood.
- 15:12:39:05 [Tom Kohler]: That's, that's I that's a wonderful story to hear. You hear so much of the other side of that coin.
- 15:12:45:07 [Jermain Ray]: Yes, sir.
- 15:12:46:01 [Tom Kohler]: That's, that's great. How, how did you pick the, the furniture business? Or did, did...
- 15:12:50:17 [Jermain Ray]: I, when I was in the military, I was a EMT combat medic. I was a medic on the helicopter. And during the time that I was there, I just didn't want any more blood and gore in my life after doing it for six years. So when I got out, one of my high school buddies at the time, he was working for a moving company and he said he, he could line me up with a job. And since I was in, in shape back then, I was able to, to move the furniture. And I, I enjoyed what I was doing. I enjoyed the
- 15:13:23:17 traveling state to state. So I, I pretty much fell in love with what I was doing.
- 15:13:29:05 [Tom Kohler]: Do you mind talking a little bit more about the journey? I would say the part of the journey where you kind of took a, a left turn and then wound up in Savannah. And I'm also curious about where you had that lunch?
- 15:13:44:21 [Jermain Ray]: Right, right. So...
- 15:13:46:14 [Tom Kohler]: And who that was?
- 15:13:47:09 [Jermain Ray]: Right. So after I, like I said, after I got out of the, the truck driving business by, not by me, but what my actions that caused me to, to pretty much lose everything. I just floated around, like I said, from job to job, there's always a moving company in a different state that you could go to and work, you know, with a driver. So I, I kind of just moved around and I found myself in Aberdeen, Maryland working for a, a mom and pop carnival. And I did that for over seven months. And I woke up

Jermain Ray

- 15:14:23:01 one morning and I was like, this is, this is not, this is not me. I don't, I don't wanna do this anymore. And it was in October of 2019 and I left Aberdeen and my thing was to come down to Florida to start a new, you know, new life down there.
- 15:14:41:11 [Tom Kohler]: Are you driving a car, or are you...?
- 15:14:42:10 [Jermain Ray]: I was driving a, a, my, I was driving my truck. I had a pickup truck at the time. That was about the only thing that I, I did salvage out of everything that I, so I, I still had my truck. Yes, sir. So I came down to, I was on my way down to Florida and just getting close to Savannah. My drill sergeant at the time was from Savannah when I was in the military. And she used always telling me how nice Savannah was. And since I was coming this way, I, I stopped off and like I said, I was down around
- 15:15:12:14 lunchtime and I found myself going down Bull Street and I stopped at, it was a fast food place right down the road. And I stopped there and there was a lot of guys out there. There were homeless men in the area and I didn't know at the time Popeye's fed them food if they needed it. The, the manager there had a a, a soft heart for the guys he used to feed 'em. And he asked me if I wanted something to eat and I, I said yeah. And sitting there eating with the guys, I started telling him a little bit about my story. And one of the
- 15:15:45:00 gentlemen, he was, he was 75 years old at the time, and he told me about the Old Savannah City Mission and he said they, they helped guys get back on track with their life. And I was the type me being me, I was like, I'm not doing a program because I felt like I didn't need a program. You always have that little ego, you know, I felt like I didn't need it.
- 15:16:06:10 [Jermain Ray]: But the more I started talking to the guys that actually worked there and they were telling me about the program, I started softening up and I did a, I spent a couple nights just to get the feel for what they did there at the program. And I like what I see as far as the pastor coming in during lunchtime, you just don't go in there and eat. You go in there, you sit through a sermon and sitting through the sermon, one of the pastors is just, something went off in my head back from childhood when I went to church and I said, I think I'm gonna give this program a
- 15:16:38:23 try. And they had a 30 day trial period that you could go there with no repercussions during the 30 days if you decide to leave. There wasn't no, you know, animosity or anything. So I said, I'm gonna give it a try. And I gave it a try and it was something that I, I wish I did back then of continuing to go to church. 'cause that's what I was really missing out in my life was the, the church aspect of everything.
- 15:17:07:03 [Tom Kohler]: So the, I'm going to use the word that's not religious...
- 15:17:10:20 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir.

Jermain Ray

- 15:17:11:19 [Tom Kohler]: Okay. So the magic. The magic of the mission is what?
- 15:17:16:04 [Jermain Ray]: The magic of the Mission is, is the, the, the teachers and the speakers. That's really what got to me was the fact that they had a, a thing at the time called Band of Brothers. And it was a all men's bible study group that met, and that was the, the first time I experienced felons, judges, lawyers, doctors, everybody from all walks and one hall together without the care of who did what in their life. And it
- 15:17:49:18 was a, it was just a overpowering feeling to see that these guys all band together as one to, to come for a Bible study and they don't care what your past was like or anything like that. And that was the main thing that really got in my spirit of staying there because I was like, everybody's not bad. You know, everybody's, you know, the, I always had a thing with cops and, and the, and the judicial system. And once I realized that they
- 15:18:19:02 were there and they were human beings just like us, and that they were there just for the same thing to get the, the, the, the spirit of the Lord in them early in the morning, it was a overwhelming feeling for me. And that's really what grounded me as far as staying in Savannah.
- 15:18:37:04 [Tom Kohler]: So there was something about sitting next to a judge...
- 15:18:39:06 [Jermain Ray]: Exactly. Yes, sir.
- 15:18:41:22 [Tom Kohler]: That helped you?
- 15:18:42:23 [Jermain Ray]: It was, I sat next to my, my first time there, I sat next to Judge Edenfield. He passed away, but I sat next to Judge Edenfield. Didn't know he was a judge at the time. He was just a another person there. And he started talking and it was just like, where you from? And I told him, he was like, where are you at now in the Savannah? I said, I'm at the Old Savannah City Mission, I'm in a program there. And he talked to me like, how's it going? And you know, he gave me some confident words of, you know, encouragement of like, glad to see that I'm, I'm trying to
- 15:19:16:00 get my life back together. And that's really what touched that people from all walks of life. They just band together just as one. And that's, that was really the, the big thing for me as far as the, you know, the fellowship and, and different, different categories.
- 15:19:32:15 [Tom Kohler]: And you said early in the morning, how early are we talking here?
- 15:19:34:13 [Jermain Ray]: We're talking six o'clock in the morning. I mean, we're usually up at 5:30 in the morning. And we get there at six o'clock. It's from six to seven 30 in the morning.
- 15:19:43:11 [Tom Kohler]: This continues to on?

Jermain Ray

- 15:19:44:12 [Jermain Ray]: It's on, we go every Tuesday and Friday.
- 15:19:48:01 [Tom Kohler]: Is it at the mission or in a different place?
- 15:19:49:11 [Jermain Ray]: No, it's at a different place. We hold it at different churches, one's at Garden City and one's down on Bull Street at Life Church. Yep. It's a breakfast in the morning. We come there, we have breakfast, we fellowship. And then Pastor Kenny Grant gives a 45 minute sermon bible study in the morning.
- 15:20:07:17 [Tom Kohler]: Let's talk about Pastor Grant for a minute. Where did he preach?
- 15:20:10:15 [Jermain Ray]: He was at Calvary. He moved back to his hometown. Don't get me to know where it's at, but he moved back to his hometown to a smaller church. He said it was just time for him to settle down and, and not have the, you know, the hustle and bustle. But he lives an hour away from Savannah and he religiously comes every Tuesday and Fridays for, for Band of Brothers. And he's been a big asset to the mission as far as anything we might need bibles or anything, he's more than willing to go out there and, and get those items for us.
- 15:20:38:23 [Tom Kohler]: Can could, could you tell a couple of stories about men and or women you've known through the Mission who you have seen come in the front door metaphorically and once they did what they needed to do and walked back out that door have really, quite frankly become almost different people?
- 15:20:59:01 [Jermain Ray]: Yes, sir. So like I said, I run the, the, the program there, the 13 month program. We had a, a gentleman there by the name of Joseph Snow. Joseph Snow, when I was in the program at the time, he was in the program with me and he ended up exiting the program, leaving it. I went on, like I said, to become an administrative assistant and then running the building. And he came back during that time two years ago and he asked for help and everybody was like, he's been here four times. No,
- 15:21:30:16 no. And I'm like, well, I'm in charge of the program now and I believe in everybody needs a second, third, fourth. I, I'm just looked at how many times in my life that I've, I've had that second chance and I've had that third chance and I blew it and I had that fourth chance that I blew it.
- 15:21:47:17 [Jermain Ray]: So I told him that was in the past with a different director, that you were in the program, you didn't do it with me, so I'm gonna automatically let you back, back in. And I let him back in. And he went through the program with no hitches. He ended up leaving, getting a great chef job at a, at a high dollar restaurant in Savannah. He ended up purchasing his first car ever in his life. He's 60 something years old and he just purchased his first car that he's ever had in his life. And he hasn't looked back, he hasn't looked back. We have success stories like

Jermain Ray

- 15:22:21:02 that all the time. We have individuals that graduated a program that's going on to be nurses that's going on that, that drive getting their CDLs. So we have different individuals there that's really grasped the concept of it's a different way, take it outta your hands and leave it to the Lord's hands and, and everything will be okay. So we've, we've had many of successful graduates that went on and did, did great things or our chef right now at the time he was in the program,
- 15:22:51:03 failed out of the program, went to jail for shoplifting, spent a year in jail before they realized that he wasn't supposed to be there. And he said he is not leaving unless he could come back to Old Savannah City Mission and get back in the program. So he ended up coming back, getting in the program, doing what we was supposed to do the second time. And he's been the, the chef in our kitchen for the past seven years. We also have a gentleman that graduated the program and he runs our Bargain center, our
- 15:23:20:18 30,000 square foot bargain center. And he's turned that into almost a half a million dollar a year business over there. So we have had successful stories in the past.
- 15:23:34:01 [Tom Kohler]: How, how does the, the organized faith community, the other churches, et cetera, mosques, synagogues, whatever, how, how do they relate to the, to the, to the Old City Mission? How does all that work?
- 15:23:46:16 [Jermain Ray]: They've been great. We've had, we've had, and like I said, we don't care what religion they come to volunteer. Just last year I had a hundred Mormons at one time. You know, they said, Hey, can we come here and volunteer? And I was like, come on by. Three tour buses later! But we didn't care what nationality, religion it was. We knew that they had it in their heart to serve. And that's what we believe in is the servitude of helping our friends and neighbors in the area. Compassion Christian Church
- 15:24:20:04 is another big church in Savannah that we partner with. Isle of Hope Church. We have a lot of different churches. And what I do is I try to go around to the churches and, you know, let 'em know I'm from Old Savannah and I might go to a Sunday service with them and see how they do things and just to get her name out there as far as that. So they've been a great, a great great help to us as far as, they're the main ones that runs our building is our church groups and our volunteers
- 15:24:48:16 because we could keep our staff small with the volunteers. We have a staff of, of seven people between six buildings that we're, we're running, we have seven full-time staff members and we serve over 300,000 meals a year that goes to that building. And our, you know, I think our budget, I think pastor said is at roughly 2 million. And all that comes from the generous donations of the different churches and different organizations in the area

Jermain Ray

- 15:25:17:04 that's gotten, we have our word out there and they've seen what we have done over the past couple of years and it's really made a difference as far as our volunteers stepped up.
- 15:25:28:00 [Tom Kohler]: And I'm just, I mean we're talking about hundreds of volunteers a year?
- 15:25:31:23 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir. I, I have, we have, every year we have a thing called the Great Day of Thanksgiving we do for the community. Anybody from the community could come out and eat, have a big Thanksgiving dinner with us where we have the dinner, all the fixings, we have raffles, we give away different items. Last year I think we had close to 150 volunteers. So that'll tell you the amount of people that we serve during that time of year. It's a big event for us.
- 15:26:00:09 [Tom Kohler]: Absolutely. So on one day you had 150?
- 15:26:02:17 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir. Run out to do what they volunteer Yes sir.
- 15:26:04:22 [Tom Kohler]: The right thing to do.
- 15:26:05:14 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir.
- 15:26:06:10 [Tom Kohler]: On a day that many people would choose to be with their...
- 15:26:09:08 [Jermain Ray]: Choose to be with their families and, and sometimes I gotta tell 'em I got enough volunteers because I love the fact that so many people are willing to, the day before Thanksgiving, we had it the day before Thanksgiving, that they're willing to come out, like you said, instead of having time with their family, they're willing to come out and serve. But it gets to a point where if you have too many and they're standing idle, you feel like they didn't have the right experience with them. So I try to keep our volunteers down to a bare minimum because I, I know there's a lot of groups that want to come and volunteer during that
- 15:26:41:03 time.
- 15:26:42:22 [Tom Kohler]: How are, are you active in a, a congregation outside of the Mission or does your faith life pretty much contain within the Mission? Or are you a member of an ex external church or? How does that work?
- 15:26:57:06 [Jermain Ray]: Well, pastor, during the time he started the Sanctuary Church and the Old Savannah City Mission, he was trying to build up the church. So he, he passed the, the Mission to somebody else while he built up the church. So our Mission is affiliated with the Sanctuary Church, Sanctuary of Savannah Church. So that's the church that I, I attend when I'm able to, like I said, I'm usually working six, seven days a week. So when I'm able to get to church, I always, I always try to get

Jermain Ray

- 15:27:26:15 there. But Sanctuary is my church of choice.
- 15:27:29:11 [Tom Kohler]: Okay. And then I'm just curious, I'm gonna ask a couple more questions about you now. I so when you spend money in Savannah, like what I call street money, go out to dinner and stuff like that, what do you like to do? I mean, what, how, how, how do you enjoy the, what do you enjoy doing here in Savannah? Just as a human being?
- 15:27:48:17 [Jermain Ray]: My enjoyment, like I said, I've been running the Mission for the past three years and I've been on a, usually on a six, seven day work week. So I don't have a lot of time to really get out and enjoy the time... What we do like doing. I have time during lunch and we like to go out during lunch to different restaurants and, and trying out different restaurants in the area. So that's, that's one of the things that I like about Savannah.
- 15:28:14:03 [Tom Kohler]: Do you still live at the Mission?
- 15:28:15:01 [Jermain Ray]: Yes, I do.
- 15:28:16:06 [Tom Kohler]: Okay.
- 15:28:16:21 [Jermain Ray]: I actually still, I got an apartment there.
- 15:28:18:17 [Tom Kohler]: Okay. I don't think I understood that.
- 15:28:20:13 [Jermain Ray]: Yeah. So I got an apartment there. I'm, I'm moving out this year finally. But you know, with me being there, I was able to monitor the activity throughout. When you have somebody in charge 24/7 living there, the friends and neighbors are less likely to act up inside the building. Like I said, I haven't had a major incident inside the building or building stays clean 24/7. The friends and neighbors know that it's not for us. We're not cleaning this place up. We didn't spend a
- 15:28:51:12 million dollars of renovations for us. We spent it for you guys. So now that they see that they're actually getting the things that they, I do a lot of things for 'em throughout the year. I, I have a big Easter dinner for 'em. I have a big Super Bowl party for 'em. I try to treat 'em like we will want to be treated and how I want to be treated. I stay humble because I know where I came from and I know where I could go back to. And that humbles me a lot as far as the way I interact with our friends and neighbors. And they
- 15:29:22:03 know that when I do have to raise my voice or something that they did wrong and that I'm not like that 24/7, if they do the right thing in the building, I have no say so in the matter. But if they act up, I have to keep everything intact for the, for the sake of the building.

Jermain Ray

- 15:29:40:02 [Tom Kohler]: You know, it, it occurs to me when you say you friends and neighbors and when I think about your neighbors, meaning the people in the neighborhood...
- 15:29:49:12 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir.
- 15:29:50:14 [Tom Kohler]: Things are changing.
- 15:29:51:22 [Jermain Ray]: It is.
- 15:29:52:14 [Tom Kohler]: Changing fast.
- 15:29:53:03 [Jermain Ray]: It is.
- 15:29:54:03 [Tom Kohler]: What is the politic of that right now?
- 15:29:56:16 [Jermain Ray]: Our, you can ask any of the stores on our, on our block. They love it because when I took over they, before I took charge, the thing around there was just to call the cops. Well the cops were coming for every little thing and they're getting tied up on tedious things that should have been handled in-house. So what I did when I took charge, I went around to all the different stores, houses in the area and I gave him a business card with my personal number and I told him, listen, don't call
- 15:30:28:19 the cops, you know, get call me and I can immediately rectify the situation better than the cops. 'cause all the cops are gonna do is take 'em, take 'em to another part of town, drop 'em off, and then they gotta find their way back. Well, two days later they're back. What I could do and I tell 'em is I, I tell 'em if they act up, I'm not feeding you for a week. When you not feed a man for a couple days and his stomach starts rumbling, he's real quick to apologize and, and once he comes and says, listen, I'm
- 15:30:59:22 sorry I had a bad day. All's forgiven. It's all forgiven. I let him back in the building. But if they still tend to act up, they're out for that, usually that seven days. But we haven't had nobody reach that seven day point because they know that we have good food there. We don't have your regular soup sandwiches. I tell the kids groups all the time, we have river boat, they give us all the leftover food from when they come back on their,
- 15:31:27:12 their cruises. So these guys have beef wellington, steak, we have contracts with Longhorn where we get the, all of their food, the Trade Center when they have a big convention. So these guys are eating good here and they know that they eat good.
- 15:31:42:03 [Jermain Ray]: So the food there is a big ordeal to 'em. So when you take that away, that's enough punishment. And we don't like to see anybody go to jail. We don't feel like any, we know our friends and neighbors have a hard time on the street and we understand and that's why we try to tell 'em, don't act up in front of

Jermain Ray

they got a businesses, they still have a business to do. They still have to make money to take care of their families, come across the street and if we can help you out with a situation, we will. You know, so we have a good reputation with all of our

15:32:13:20 business owners, all the, the residents that stay up and down our street. No questions whatsoever. Our police department comes there once a month. We set up a thing called Questions with Cops where they come to the building and they ask the friends and neighbor, is there anything that's bothering you? And that's a time where they could talk to the police, the police could let 'em know this part of town you can't hang on. So, and it's a good communication with the, the community to have the police department come

15:32:42:11 there and then they stay and they help serve lunch or they stay and herb serve dinner. So that, knowing that the police department's there helping out all the time, that tends to keep the, the crowd down to a, a, a medium level there where we don't have any big problems as far as our neighbors going to any city council meetings complaining.

15:33:04:21 [Tom Kohler]: Do you consider, do you consider yourself an administrator or a minister or is there another phrase?

15:33:12:20 [Jermain Ray]: No, no. I always tell individuals all the time, I'm not a pastor. Most of our building is made up of pastors or preachers. I think there's only me and another, another individual there. I, I just consider myself running a building an administrator. I give words of encouragement, but I always tell the guys when they come to me with major spiritual questions, that's what the pastors of the preachers of the building are for. I'm, I'm, I'm still a baby in the Bible myself, so I can't answer big technical, you know, questions like that. So I sort of

15:33:47:22 send them to the other people in the building for their religion views.

15:33:55:01 [Tom Kohler]: A baby in the Bible?

15:33:56:05 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir. Yes sir.

15:33:58:22 [Tom Kohler]: And then is your mom still with us?

15:34:02:01 [Jermain Ray]: She is. My stepdad passed away about five years ago. He passed away. He had a, he got a heart transplant and it didn't take so he ended up passing away. But my mom is still still living to this day. Yes sir.

15:34:18:21 [Tom Kohler]: And I would imagine she's pretty happy about what's happening?

15:34:21:04 [Jermain Ray]: She, she saw a hundred percent difference in me. When I first completed the, I was close to completing the program, they gave me a, a pass to go home to visit my family and I went home and everybody seen the, the complete change, the complete 360 where I, I could see beer and wine and not

Jermain Ray

having a thought of touching it 'cause I know where it could lead me to. So she seen that difference and she seen that A

15:34:52:00 lot of my friends I didn't contact when I got back home. And that was a major, major thing that helped me is because I sought help outside of my state where I didn't have any friends, any families to sort of hold my hand. I was a complete different new environment in Savannah. Didn't know anybody, didn't know nothing about Savannah. So my time in the program was completely inside the building because I didn't want to go anywhere 'cause I didn't know good parts of Savannah bad parts and I didn't want to, that

15:35:24:03 wasn't my whole perspective. My perspective was to get well and to get better and to change the, the destructive path that I was headed down. So that really helped me out as far as not having any family or friends around to interfere with what I was trying to do in my life at the time.

15:35:42:11 [Tom Kohler]: Can you remember when you first kind of stepped into the building, so to speak, can you remember things that went on that you pushed back against?

15:35:50:21 [Jermain Ray]: I did. It was a lot of things that I seen when I first got there and some of the handling, some of the staff there, I didn't really think they were fully committed to helping their friends and neighbors. And I understand that they're, when you're dealing with them for years after years, they do tend to wear you down a little bit. But I seen some things that need to be changed. Security was the top thing for me. These friends and neighbors coming in the building for a seven day bed, we

15:36:26:02 weren't checking 'em for knives, guns, bombs inside their book bags or anything. So we didn't know if they were bringing in, if illegal paraphernalia or anything. We didn't have any cameras to monitor 'em throughout the building. So I thought that was a big thing that we needed to change. So when pastor put me in position, a lot of things, that was one of the first things I did was made sure we had a ample security system that

15:36:51:20 not only I could monitor from there, but I can monitor from my phone from anywhere. Once the friends and neighbors seen that we had a security system that's sort of humbled 'em too because they know that they're on camera and they know they're being watched and they know they couldn't act up like they used to in the past when something happened at building in the past it was just hearsay 'cause there wasn't no proof. But now they knew that we had a camera system and they knew that we had proof. So that changed a lot of

15:37:22:18 their demeanor. They didn't come in there as rowdy as they used to. We have a liquor store straight across the street from the, from the building. It's easy enough for them during the summertime to go across there, get inebriated, come across, coming the building and act up. So that was one of the things we, we changed.

Jermain Ray

We don't mind a friend and neighbor coming in there inebriated because we're supposed to help anybody.

15:37:48:06 [Jermain Ray]: But there's a point to if you're coming in there and you're a safety risk that you, I'm afraid that you're gonna fall and injure yourself, then that's the only time we don't let any individuals in the building. But besides that, we let everybody in, whether they're he, she, they, you know, we just tell 'em this is a male facility for our transgenders that want to come and visit us. It's a male facility. So you have to respect the building. Same with Muslims that come in and may come in for dinner and then knowing they gotta sit through a Christian service.

15:38:22:08 That's the way it is. So that's the way it is. You gotta adhere to the rules of the building and they do. They, they, they understand and they do.

15:38:33:17 [Tom Kohler]: And then what do you, where do you think you'll be five years now?

15:38:39:01 [Jermain Ray]: I'm still running the building. Pastor. He's pretty much, after we build this women's shelter, that was the one of the last things he wanted to do. Like I said, he's 80 years old, he's ready to, to retire, but he doesn't wanna retire till the women's shelters built. So we're in the process now of raising the funds for the women's shelter. And after that's built, what I'm thinking is, you're trying to turn it over to me, but you know, I'm just happy with running the building in itself

15:39:09:07 because I really formed a bond with these friends and neighbors and I, I say friends and neighbors 'cause we don't like calling anybody homeless or, you know, saying here's the homeless man here. We consider our friends and neighbors because like I said, the five years I've been here, I've known the people since I've been here. And some of 'em listened to what I said and got off the street. But some of 'em were still on the street. But we consider them our friends and neighbors. You know, that's pretty much the only family I had down here for the last five years was the men and women

15:39:41:17 in the area.

15:39:43:08 [Tom Kohler]: So this feels like at this point this feels like life's work?

15:39:47:04 [Jermain Ray]: It is. And it is. I, my goal when I first got here was to graduate the program, get my mind back on track and go back, moving furniture. And during the time here it, it just didn't, that was my way of thinking. And the Lord said, no, I got something better for you. And when he placed me in that position, and I had bumpy roads when I first started because it was all new to me. I didn't know nothing about, you know, directing anything. You know, I moved furniture so I didn't, it was new

Jermain Ray

- 15:40:19:07 with the office and, and dealing with volunteers and, and different organizations and grants and everything that came with a director position. My first couple of students I had in the program failed. You know, and I had to put 'em out and I felt like I was failing, you know? And I went back to pastor, like, I, I think I might have bit off more than I could chew. And he was like, no, it's not your fault that they came in
- 15:40:47:12 here and didn't do what they were supposed to do. So you can't beat yourself up over it. And once I, you know, got home and prayed about it and, and I realized he was right and I may not be able to help a hundred, but if I could help that one individual it felt like I did my job. And, and that's the attitude I have nowadays. I can't save everybody, but the few I do save, it's, it's worth it, you know, to see a complete change because my mentor seen a change in me and seeing where I came from and where I am and
- 15:41:19:02 I'm happy when I see one of my students in the program graduate and, and go on to bigger and better things, it makes me happy.
- 15:41:27:05 [Jermain Ray]: One of 'em, I have a student that's ready last next week. It's next week, last week in the program. He graduated two years and during that time he got his CDLs and he got a job at a dump truck company. So I hate to see him leave the nest. Like I told him today, it almost brought tears to my eyes. 'cause you get to know these guys, you know, like I said, they're, they become family to you because you're around them. I'm around them almost 24/7. So it's like me raising a, a child, you
- 15:41:58:19 know, up and, and I really enjoy it. So I I, they're, they're gonna have to, to kick me out or haul me out to get me from doing what I'm doing now.
- 15:42:09:04 [Tom Kohler]: I doubt either thing will happen.
- 15:42:12:04 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir.
- 15:42:14:10 [Tom Kohler]: Let me ask these guys, are there pieces of this that you feel like we haven't gotten to yet? Or do you feel like we are pretty good?
- 15:42:21:21 [Mickey Youmans]: No, I'm, I'm maybe a, a short, you know, just a gather sort of like the future, future vision. A future vision, a compressed future vision.
- 15:42:37:15 [Tom Kohler]: Okay. Organization vision is like.
- 15:42:41:15 [Mickey Youmans]: Yeah, well this is the just Yeah. Spiritually too. I mean, you know.
- 15:42:45:15 [Tom Kohler]: Okay. Yeah. As you look forward in your life and you look forward to life there, the City Mission, I mean, what's your, what's your, as you look forward in your life and maybe look forward to life there at the City Mission. I mean, what are, what are your highest hopes?

Jermain Ray

- 15:43:06:09 [Jermain Ray]: My highest hopes for the Mission is to get everybody not to be at the Mission. You know, the biggest accomplishment for me would be I have 45 empty beds up in Open Bay. That means that these guys got the proper housing and the proper help that they might've needed. I know it's not good for the mission aspect part of it, but the more empty beds I see in the Mission, the more I know that these guys are starting to
- 15:43:36:14 get it through their head. A lot of our individuals nowadays are younger individuals that are coming in usually from 18 to 25. We've seen the rationales in like the last year. What's happening is mom and dad's getting tired of 'em at the house 'cause they don't wanna do nothing 'cause they put'em out. I had a program, I didn't have a program, but the Mission had a program set up called Affordable Housing Program. It was to help individuals that couldn't afford the, the rent in Savannah.
- 15:44:07:23 We had rooms upstairs that sort of set up like rooming houses where they pay a, a small fee a month and they're able to stay there and get the amenities of the building. When that ended, what I wanted to do was use those rooms to help the younger generation get back on track. So I started bringing in younger guys that I seen on the street trying to hone them into getting jobs and knowing better with themselves. It didn't work. It didn't work and I, I knew what I went wrong. It was like they were too young and
- 15:44:41:10 they knew everything in life. And that's how I felt when I was that age too, you know, so it just didn't work. So I went the complete opposite way. There was a lot of individuals that was coming there for lunch and dinner service.
- 15:44:55:00 [Jermain Ray]: Elderly individuals that were living off of, you know, their Social Security and a lot of 'em were sleeping in their cars 'cause they couldn't afford a place. And that really struck me, you know what I mean? That these guys worked all their lives. I mean, and, and they couldn't afford with their Social Security, just couldn't afford to live and, you know, so I opened it up for elderly men to come there and it's
- 15:45:26:06 worked. I don't have a problem whatsoever. They're quiet. I, you know, the only time I see 'em is, is rent day. And they, it's been great. And those guys are the ones that are more willing to help around the building. They don't have nothing to do during the day. So they might want to volunteer and take the desk or go in the kitchen to help with a meal. So those are the individuals that right now, and I feel like we most need the help is, are, are ones that's live their life and, and can't afford the, you know,
- 15:45:58:09 live anymore with the cost of living.
- 15:46:01:06 [Tom Kohler]: Wow. Okay. So are, are you a, are you a business? Are you a nonprofit?

Jermain Ray

- 15:46:07:22 [Jermain Ray]: We're a nonprofit.
- 15:46:09:09 [Tom Kohler]: Are you a family or are you a community?
- 15:46:12:03 [Jermain Ray]: We're a nonprofit organization. We don't receive any government funding because we preach the gospel. During COVID, when all the other missions had shut down and were government funded, we stayed open, we stayed open, we housed the individuals we could and we fed every day. And we had the churches help us. Compassionate Christian gave us a, a trailer with showers inside of it in a washer and dryer. So we were able to park that at the Mission and still give our friends and neighbors showers during COVID every single day. 'cause I know it was hard for them. Nobody
- 15:46:45:11 was letting anybody in so they couldn't even find a place to use the bathroom. So we wanted to be able to help our friends and neighbors during that time. So that's why we continue to stay a nonprofit organization.
- 15:46:57:05 [Tom Kohler]: I'm glad we got that last little story story in 'cause that's a very interesting story. That really supports the, the, the rationale of why you've chosen not to receive government funds.
- 15:47:06:06 [Jermain Ray]: Correct.
- 15:47:06:16 [Tom Kohler]: That's great. We need to watch our time just so we need to watch our time. It's coming up on four. Okay. And I've heard somebody kind of roaming around a little bit, so I'm a little worried that John might have gotten here and we don't have, we're not letting him in. So I want to be careful about that. Are we feeling okay about this?
- 15:47:23:11 [Eric Darling]: I think so, yeah.
- 15:47:24:03 [Tom Kohler]: Okay. Yeah, it was very good interview. I think it was wonderful. Yeah, we're good. Okay. Yeah. Well I don't know what you expected about what we got more than we expected. So we appreciate it.
- 15:47:33:08 [Jermain Ray]: Yes sir. No problem. No problem. Alright sir. Yeah.
- 15:47:36:09 [Mickey Youmans]: Keep up the good work.
- 15:47:37:18 [Jermain Ray]: I, I'm trying, like I said, I just, I I had it in my heart, you know, to, to, to stay. I love Savannah. I love the, at the time, five years ago, I felt like the small town, but everything's built up in five years, you know, so it's like, it was a small town five years ago. Now it's turned into a big city, you know, but I, I still enjoy the, the historic feeling and everything. Yeah. I, I've, I've lived in big cities all my life. Philadelphia, California, Texas. So when I got to Savannah and
- 15:48:12:19 just the trees alone, going around, seeing the trees and everything and the historical houses, it just gave me that small town feel. And I think that's what I

Jermain Ray

needed. I needed to get away from that hum drum of the big city. I hear you. And, and just settle down and, and do the, do the right thing nowadays. And like I said, I, I don't, I don't do a lot. Like I said, if he's asking for hobbies or anything, I don't have any my, my, my love right

15:48:40:11 now. And my passion is just the, to serve and to help these guys out that are on the street. Right. You know, you can tell that. Yes sir.

15:48:48:08 [Mickey Youmans]: You can tell that. That's wonderful. So the, the community is lucky.

15:48:54:00 [Jermain Ray]: Well, yeah. I'm lucky to have the community, like I said, I'm lucky that...

15:48:57:03 [Mickey Youmans]: It works both ways.

15:48:58:02 [Jermain Ray]: Yes, sir. The mayor's been a big help to us within the last two years. He's doing the, doing did a lot of stuff with us. We just had an event a couple weeks back where he, he's everywhere. He is everywhere. And he's been a major support to, he brings donations down to the mission now by himself, you know, in his car. Hey, I got these. And he drops 'em off and Wow. And we, when people see that, they know that we really have the support. And when they see the police department there, you know, like I said, with Questions with Cops or coming to volunteer, helping

15:49:28:11 to serve a lunch, that it really, it really helps us, you know, and it shows the community that we have the mayor and the City of Savannah backing what we're doing. So we really have picked up our pace as far as our donations, everything.

15:49:46:02 [Mickey Youmans]: You know what... Could you do this for me? Could you start that thought again and start and say it's, it, I, I feel good to know that and say what you just said.

15:49:54:00 [Jermain Ray]: Yeah. So I, I feel good to know that we have the backing of the community. Like I said, for the past couple years, we had the district attorney come down, take a tour of the building. We had the mayor come down to the building. It was really active as far as the Great Day of Thanksgiving. He came down and gave a speech. He comes down and donates the police department, comes down there, volunteers for helping serve lunch or helping to barbecue outside. So when the community sees that

15:50:24:13 support that we have, they're more willing to donate to us. And, and I'm not the type where somebody calls up and says, Hey Jermain, I wanna donate to the Mission. What do you need? I'm the first thing off of me is I need cleaning items. I need socks, I need underwear for our friends and neighbors. We get enough money and support from different agencies and other places that I try to take care of the things that we need inside the Mission.

Jermain Ray

15:50:50:20 [Eric Darling]: Coming down the hall?

15:50:54:21 [Mickey Youmans]: Huh? No, they, they, they're out there. They know that.

15:50:56:17 [Eric Darling]: Oh,

15:50:58:08 [Mickey Youmans]: Oh, Did.... Were you listening then? That was a good one.

15:51:01:09 [Eric Darling]: Yeah. No, that's fantastic. Okay. That's great. Alright. Good stuff. Yeah. Alright, we're cutting. Alright, Thank you. Yes sir.