

Announcer:

Welcome to the Vanderbloemen Leadership Podcast. February is Black History Month. And to continue learning about the establishment, evolution and culture of the Black church, we spoke with African American Christian leaders to guide us through the history of the Black church and the critical purpose it serves as part of the full Kingdom. These conversations cover some of the critical events in early US history all the way up to current events in an effort to help us appreciate the roots and development of the Black church.

Announcer:

In today's conversation, our director of special initiatives and operations and executive search consultant, Chantel McHenry spoke with Pastor John Faison, senior pastor of Watson Grove Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

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Pastor Faison discusses the history of African American churches, specifically diving into the impact that segregation and gentrification has had on Black communities and the role the Black church has played to support these communities. Pastor Faison provides encouragement for how pastors can determine their calling and best serve their congregations.

Announcer:

At Vanderbloemen, we value constant improvement and invite you to walk alongside us as we learn more about how to better love and serve the whole church. We hope you enjoy Chantel's conversation with Pastor Faison.

Chantel McHenry:

Well, Pastor Faison, thank you so much for joining us for the Vanderbloemen podcast. I know that our listening audience is going to be so blessed to hear your perspective about the Black church and what's going on in communities in the Black church. Specifically, I know we'll dive into some conversations about gentrification, which is sometimes a taboo word, but it's a reality in so many communities of color. And so, I'm just so excited.

Chantel McHenry:

I got to meet you several months ago. I think it was maybe January or February, right before the whole country shut down because of COVID. My colleague and I were there with you and one of your great staff members, Renee, and some of your team, just talking through what was going on at The Grove and some staffing that you were looking for. I just had a wonderful time meeting you and your team.

Chantel McHenry:

So can you introduce yourself to our listening audience? Tell them a little bit about where you're from and who you are, and then about The Grove and how you got there and what's going on.

Pastor John Faison:

Awesome. Well, let me first say thank you to Vanderbloemen for this opportunity to be able to share and to you, Chantel for hosting and allowing us to be able to share.

Pastor John Faison:

My name is John Faison Sr. I have the esteemed privilege of being the senior pastor of Watson Grove Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. And for short, we call it The Grove. So we have a Grove Nashville and a Grove Franklin, so two campuses in two different counties in the Nashville area. We are a multi generational, multi campus church. We have five generations that worship with us every single Sunday from nine months to about 97, right now and everything in between.

Pastor John Faison:

We are a predominately African American church. We were founded in 1889 in a place called Una, Tennessee, right outside of Nashville, by former slaves. Our founders were slaves. It's a very, very interesting origin story. That those former slaves used to meet in a grove, a grove of trees, a clearing in a field. There was a white lady who donated the first land for them to build their first church. They could not use that land, because racial tensions at the time just simply wouldn't allow it. But, her name was N. Watson. Out of appreciation for that gesture, those first founding members named the church Watson Grove. And so, that's how we got the name.

Pastor John Faison:

We were in a outside county, or outside suburb of Nashville in 1889 all the way to about 1954. About 1954, we started to build in a place called Edgehill, which is in South Nashville. It's about three blocks from Vanderbilt and about a block from Belmont University, a very, very popular area at that time for African Americans. In the '50s, it was a bustling African American area of Nashville. So you had, Black doctors, Black dentists, Black professors from Tennessee State University and Fisk University lived there, Black business owners and entrepreneurs, construction companies. In fact, our church that we built in 1956 was built by an African American construction company that lived in the neighborhood. It was a bustling African American area, but times changed.

Pastor John Faison:

Times changed because of many different factors from redlining to urban renewal. What some people would call urban renewal is sprucing up the neighborhood. What really it does, in many cases, it was a de facto segregating of the neighborhood. It created geographical boundaries and geographical structures that end up splitting, excuse me, splitting or cordoning off Black neighborhoods from the rest of the city.

Pastor John Faison:

The HOPE VI Movement of the approach to public housing for persons of low income, that approach was to cordon off, again, African American populations and really to leave them to themselves and cut off lines of education and transportation and access to employment. And really, just leave them to fend for themselves. So these things happened.

Pastor John Faison:

White flight occurs. African Americans are in a neighborhood, your wealthier white citizens, many of them move away and go to the suburbs. Suburbanization was a part of this transformation. And so, what once was a bustling African American neighborhood through all these changes and shifts, some of them natural, many of them manmade and unjust.

Pastor John Faison:

Highway 65, Interstate 65 cut right through African American neighborhoods in Edgehill and segregated that part of the city. The same thing was done on 40 in North Nashville. So these are not uncommon factors, but these are factors that absolutely influenced how the neighborhood shifted and changed.

Pastor John Faison:

And so, we went from the African American church in a bustling African American neighborhood to suddenly an African American church in a neighborhood that was shifting and changing. Crime went up. Education went down. Income went down. For lack of a better word, Edgehill turned into the hood. You have public housing there. And then you have the belief that because this area doesn't have access to these other things, that somehow the folks in this neighborhood are inherently criminal. That becomes a part of the narrative.

Pastor John Faison:

And so, if you were a student that went to Vanderbilt University, or a student that went to Belmont University, usually in the freshmen orientation, they would tell you, "Stay out of Edgehill," because there was this inherent criminality believed with the neighborhood being what it was. But our church stayed.

Pastor John Faison:

The minister provided a food pantry and clothing opportunity, and college tours and exposure, and education to kids who were not getting it had we not provided it. There was a drug and alcohol ministry there, Narcotics Anonymous meetings and Alcohol Anonymous meetings there at the church. There were programs for summer camps and breakfast programs and afterschool programs provided for these kids by the church, because we understood our job as a church was to minister to the neighborhood and to the community whatever that community looked like.

Chantel McHenry:

Yeah. That's great. I would love to talk a little bit about... because what you're experiencing at The Grove is happening. So this was the '50s, right? We're in the 2000s and we're still seeing the same things happening, but it's progressively getting larger and larger when it comes to the redeveloping of communities around churches in urban areas.

Chantel McHenry:

Let's go back a little bit, let's say, back in the '50s and the '60s and the '70s as these churches... We had the white flight. We had the redlining. We have communities of colors primarily in urban communities. What became the role of the church at that point? What was the role of the Black church in those communities? What did the people look to, to gain from the Black church?

Pastor John Faison:

Goodness. The Black church was the center of the Black community. It really, really was. It was the place where you went for affirmation. You went for identity. And you went to be celebrated in a community that saw your inherent value. We're talking in the '50s and '60s. We're talking times where segregation was alive and rampant. We're talking about moments where Jim Crow was a every day reality, separate facilities, separate bathrooms, separate water fountains, separate entrances to restaurants. So Black

people living through the era were consistently communicated to that they were inferior. It was a consistent message of inferiority, until you went to the Black church.

Pastor John Faison:

And then you'd show up at the Black church, and while you were called racial epithets throughout the week, at church you were Deacon Jones. While you were in, called a boy and the N word in other places, or a little girl, we're talking grown women that were called girls, but they would come to church and they were Mother Jones. They were given that value. They were celebrated. It was the place where it was okay, safe and celebrated to be Black, right, and to be unapologetically Black and to connect your faith with a God who was walking with you through all of this oppression and all of these challenges and all of these day-to-day things giving you the hope to keep believing and to keep pushing and to stay connected to God knowing somehow, somehow, God was turning this around. God was shaping this. So the Black church then became the center place of Black identity and affirmation.

Pastor John Faison:

But, it also became the place where you really went for anything that you needed. At this time, usually, usually the Black pastor was the most educated person in the Black community by many cases. In many cases, the only college educated. Especially earlier than the '50s, but around the '50s and '60s that more access became available. But, people came to the Black church and to the Black pastor and Black leadership to help them navigate some of the challenges they were having in the city.

Pastor John Faison:

If you had financial issues, you would come to the church, because the church could get you connected with a Black accountant. If you were having legal concerns, you would come to the Black church and there would be a legal forum or a legal aid kind of moment wherein you'd meet Black attorneys and get some of your needs met and be able to navigate those challenges. So it wasn't just a spiritual place, it was a life place. It was a communal space. It was where every social and cultural need could be met through connection to community of people who were like you and who wanted to see you succeed and wanted to see you win.

Pastor John Faison:

It was also a place where children got affirmed and children got exposure and education. It was a place where if you had a kid who was about to graduate from high school and he was a top performer trying to go to college, the church probably helped fund that education. They would raise-

Chantel McHenry:

That's right.

Pastor John Faison:

... money and cookies and chicken and fish and do scholarships to send kids to school. It was one of the centers of Black community, of Black life.

Pastor John Faison:

When there was death in the family, the Black church was the rallying spot. That family wouldn't have to cook for a week. They could focus on grieving, because it was a revolving door outside of their house,

everybody from church. Somebody bringing chicken, and somebody bringing green beans, and somebody coming to take care of the kids, and bringing dessert and dropping off water. It was a communal, pastoral care space where families always got what they needed in the time of grief, but also in a time of celebration.

Pastor John Faison:

If they got married, they'd get connected with people who had been married before and say, "All right, maybe you need to look out for this. And you need to make sure this is all right." It was a space where Black life was celebrated and supported.

Chantel McHenry:

Boy, you have taken me back to my childhood, again, I tell you. Everything you have said, I have experienced, right. I've experienced the recipient of scholarships from the Black church that I grew up in, right, and rallying around family members when someone was deceased in the family. I mean, the food, you're absolutely correct. People stopping by and praying and just sitting with you and the family just to help you through tough times.

Chantel McHenry:

And you see so many leaders emerge. I mean, as you talked about even the early times when this was the only place we could come as Black people and be affirmed. It was such a great opportunity, for now, Blacks to step into leadership because they were not allowed to do so in their workplace, in their work environment. So this was the one place where they could take on that leadership role.

Chantel McHenry:

My grandmother was a mother of the church. She helped to sew and make the baptism gowns. My church, when I was growing up, we wore these little headpieces when we took communion, because you had to have your head covered. It was old school. She would make those for the church.

Pastor John Faison:

Wow!

Chantel McHenry:

It just brings back such great memories of growing up and experiencing that community in the Black church.

Chantel McHenry:

So will you tell me a little bit about what's going on at Watson Grove today? You guys have been in that community, as you say, you've been around since the 1800s. You've been in that community since the '50s. So what do you see happening now, today as we are in 2020? What's taking place in your community?

Pastor John Faison:

A quick word to describe it is gentrification. That's the overarching theme of what's happening in our neighborhood just like many urban neighborhoods throughout the United States.

Pastor John Faison:

There are life cycles in cities. So there is cycles when the suburbs become popular, and then the suburbs get saturated. And then there is a move back to the urban core. There's always opportunity in the urban core, but because of some of the social conditions in the urban core, folks who can go to the suburbs often go. But then it becomes a time and an issue of transportation back and forth. There is the challenges of the commute in the morning and the commute in the evening. Or, you live in the suburbs and you may not have access to the city. And so, it takes extra energy to do all of that, and it just makes more sense to move to the city. So what is happening is, you have those folks who were products of suburbanization are now coming back to the urban core. Well, part of that also is what they're coming back to.

Pastor John Faison:

I told you our story was that the area lost, not only a increase in crime, decrease in employment, decrease in income, but there were also some social and structural challenges that are associated with that. So when you're in the hood, the urban area, your property values decrease. The cost of land decreases. So the value of what you used to have begins to diminish on you, begins the drought. And if you're coming from the suburbs, you're looking for cheaper land. You're looking for cheaper housing. You're looking for better tax rates, and all of that, to come into areas. So what they end up doing is, they end up coming into urban areas and buying up, purchasing, these homes that were usually occupied by Black citizens.

Pastor John Faison:

Now, because of different challenges, different social issues, you got to read about this. We don't have time to go in depth. Redlining and prohibitive clauses and restrictive covenants and all of the things that prevented African Americans often from home ownership. They could not purchase homes because of the social, and in many cases, racist policies, right. So you got a group and a generation of Black renters in urban areas.

Pastor John Faison:

Well, those landlords who have now been renting to Black citizens for 20 and 30 years, they got families that they've been renting to, now see an opportunity to capitalize on this new popularity of the urban core. And so, they start to put in measures that will expedite the vacating of Black families, so that they can sell the property, make a ton of money, flip the property. It goes from a rancher that served the Black family now to a three-story tall and skinny that serves an affluent white family.

Pastor John Faison:

Now, hearing this story for the first time, people would think this is an isolated incident. I'm telling you there are portions of entire cities that are flipped and changed in over five, anywhere from five to 10 years, because of this kind of process. And so, what ends up happening is, as wealthy families come in and build higher quality homes, more expensive homes, now folks who own in the urban corridor, usually predominantly African American, their property taxes increase. The values of their homes increase, but their property taxes increase as well.

Pastor John Faison:

And if you've got seniors who live on what we call a fixed income, they know exactly what they're going to make each month and they set their lives and bills according to that, well, when the property taxes begins to increase, it impacts them in a way that people don't understand. It messes with their system and their budget. And so now, they've got to make choices. Do I pay my property taxes or do I go see my children for the summer? Do I pay my property taxes or do I eat three weeks out of the month instead of four? Do I stretch? How do I make these shifts and changes? Well, you got to pay property taxes, because if you don't pay your property taxes, you could be put out of your home. And in many cases, if you got folks who can't afford them, that happens.

Pastor John Faison:

Then there are people, elders usually, who live in these predominately African American neighborhoods that are now being gentrified. Poor, again, older and don't have the acumen to understand that the value of their property has just gone through the roof. They built it for \$60,000, \$80,000 in 1958. But in 2018, it's worth \$350,000. But, they don't know that because they've not kept up with it. That's not their area of expertise. And guess who knows they don't know? Predatory realtors know they don't know. So, if you paid \$80,000 for your house in 1958, and I offer you a quick sale of \$150,000, and you don't know inflation and you don't understand that the property value has increased, you think you made double for what you paid for it. But, you have just been robbed. You got paid \$200,000 less than what your property is worth.

Pastor John Faison:

Oh, and by the way, with your \$150,000, now that the area is gentrified and the rates have gone up, where around here are you going to live? You can't. So now you've got to go somewhere outside the city and try to find somewhere. This cycle perpetuates. These are real life issues and stories that many of my members have talked about, that many of my members have lived through. So what that does is that impacts our church in manifold ways.

Pastor John Faison:

First of all, many of our residents, many of our members, can no longer afford to live in the neighborhood and the area they want to live in. They just can't afford it, can't afford the rent, can't afford the mortgage, just can't afford it. So they have to leave and go to different places. Well, that now separates them from, again, that center of the Black community, the Black church. It puts them at a distance. So they may be just coming on a Sunday. They may not show up for Bible study because it's too much. There is too much gas. It's too much traffic. It's these challenges, right.

Pastor John Faison:

Kids that would normally be around the church and be a part of the church's life and summer programs and all these other things, now live outside and it's a 20 to 30 minute drive. Well, they can't do homework and youth group on the same night, right. So it becomes a challenge for that. It also becomes a challenge for us in terms of geography and just basic church plant structure.

Pastor John Faison:

Our parking lot is for our church use, but as our church has grown, we've outgrown the parking lot. Well, normally, in a space like that, people would use street parking to park. They park on the street, come back, go to church, come back to street parking, we're good. Street parking is always available. Nobody owns it. Well, as gentrification happens and new residents come in, they want their street parking to be

able to park in front of their homes. They form neighborhood associations that then require and go through the city to get permits to park on the street. Well, if you need a permit to park on the street, it's hard to park there on a Sunday and go to church. So now, we have barriers to attendance.

Chantel McHenry:

I have to say that, can we just pause right, pause there for just a moment. Because I can tell you, as I'm listening to the domino effect, my head is spinning. I cannot imagine, as a pastor who is at a church that has ministered to that community, and you are just one person I'm talking to, and I'm sure there, as people will listen to this podcast, there will be pastors that will raise their hand and say, "Oh yeah, I'm right there. I'm right there. This is what we're dealing with, the same thing."

Chantel McHenry:

Can you speak to them? And just tell me, how do we turn the tide? As we see what is happening in our urban Black communities, inner city community, how do you find encouragement, one, but innovation too, because now you have to learn how to minister in a new way? It's not the neighbor that probably was cooking your dinner as a pastor, bringing it over to the church, so you and your family could have Sunday dinner, right. You don't even know the neighbor that's next to the church now. Just give us some wisdom on, what can the pastor do?

Pastor John Faison:

Let me first say, gentrification is not something you can stop. It is not something you can reverse. These are cycles in cities that absolutely occur. And by the time you see gentrification starting, it's been starting for 20 years.

Chantel McHenry:

You late, yes.

Pastor John Faison:

Right. You're 20 years behind the game. So I would encourage urban pastors, I would encourage you, that when you see land coming available in your city, particularly close to you, position your church as much as possible to purchase it, as much as you possibly can. Budget-wise, all that kind of stuff, you got to plan. You got to forecast. You got to strategize. We know all of that. But, you got to look down the road. You cannot just be planning for next year. You got to be looking three to five years.

Pastor John Faison:

You really have to figure out what you're called to. We know our purpose. Our purpose is to lead the church. Our purpose is to provide leadership to souls and to encourage, to empower, to strengthen the [inaudible 00:26:35]. We know what purpose is. But for me, purpose is not calling. Purpose is what I'm supposed to do when my gifts and my passion connect. Calling, I believe, is the place to which I'm supposed to use these things. So you have to wrestle with, are you called to this area? Are you called to this space? That's not just a question a pastor has to wrestle with. Churches have to wrestle with this. For every church, it's a different answer, right. Maybe I'm called to those people that I serve, but I'm not called specifically to be in this space.

Pastor John Faison:

So in many cases, some churches sell their property. And whatever polity you got to follow to get that done, and it ends up blessing the church and the church pays off bills and pays off mortgage and goes and starts somewhere else where they'll be able to minister to those members that are connected to them, that's some people's calling.

Pastor John Faison:

For us, we are very clear. Our calling is to this area. Our calling is to this community, which means then, we have to adapt to what this community looks like. I cannot be stuck in remembrance only, and wanting it to be what it used to be. It just ain't. It's just not. So I've got to now begin to adapt and strategize. And for us, that meant doing church in a different way.

Chantel McHenry:

That's good.

Pastor John Faison:

It meant for us, because we have parking challenges and all of that, yet, we were growing. So we grew from about 300 members in 2012 to about 2500 by the end of last year. So that's a steady growth pattern. But here is the thing about growth, if you don't have room and prepare for it, it will stop. You'll put a cap on it. It'll reach a ceiling and it'll plateau and begin to stave off.

Pastor John Faison:

So we decided, man, the growth is good. The growth is empowering us to be able to reach more people. The growth is enabling us to accomplish what we believe are the vision and the mission of our church. We want that to continue. So then, we've got to shift to be able to make sure that growth can continue. For us, that meant multiple services. Again, this is pre-COVID. You got to give the caveat, pre-COVID.

Pastor John Faison:

Pre-COVID, we ended up going to ultimately about four services. So we do three in Nashville, one on Saturday night, one on, at 7:30 on Sunday morning. We do a 9:30 in Franklin. I'll talk about that in a second. And then we do 11:00 back at the Nashville campus. So we ended up doing four services, which meant, we had to change how we flowed. We had to shorten our offerings. We had to shrink what we did, so that people can get in and out of the parking lot. We offered church at different opportunities, different times, different days, so that folks who may not want to do the dance on Sunday, looking for parking in the rain with two kids they got in tow, can come to Saturday night. And then Saturday night, it's a 75 minute service. I preach the same sermon that I would preach on Sunday. It's always casual. And then we offer a to-go meal for anybody who wants it on the way out.

Pastor John Faison:

You mean to tell me, I can come to church, I can bring my kids, we don't have to get dressed up, so to speak, I can bring them straight from AAU then soccer matches on a Saturday, from the mall, and bring them here, we get a 75 minute service, it's the same word pastor's preaching and I get a to-go meal on the way out? I ain't got to cook tonight. Oh my God. You mean to tell me, I can get all that on Saturday and [inaudible 00:30:16] work on Sunday? Count me in.

Chantel McHenry:

That's right. That sounds like a win-win.

Pastor John Faison:

Listen, if I wasn't the pastor, Saturday night would have been my service. That's all I'm saying.

Chantel McHenry:

That's right.

Pastor John Faison:

Easy, simple, but offering new encounters, new ways to get people connected.

Pastor John Faison:

Then around 2019, we launched The Grove Franklin, which of course is in a different county. Nashville sits in Davidson County. Franklin sits in Williamson County, different space, different environment, different demographics, different geography, different everything. But, what we discovered was, from our data... That's another point. Make sure you're collecting your data. Make sure you got accurate data, because if you're making decisions that are not based on data, you're just dreaming. You have to make decisions based on data.

Pastor John Faison:

Our data showed us that while people were... while the majority of our congregation didn't come from where we were, we found out from where they were coming from. And so, the campus model and the multi site model then puts us in a place where many of our partners, our members, are coming from. We discovered Williamson County was one of those spaces. And so, we ended up going into a movie theater and launching The Grove Franklin. It was challenging. It was costly. It was taxing. But, it was absolutely a blessing.

Pastor John Faison:

We knew God was calling us to do that. One of the ways we knew we were being called to multi sites was because we didn't want to leave the area where we were, but we knew that we had to expand our reach in order to minister to the folks who were coming to us. And so for us, the multi site mission answered the calling. It equipped us with the technique and the tactic to respond to the calling that we believe we have.

Pastor John Faison:

So in the next 15 to 20 years, we believe, we have anywhere from two to four more campuses in us, because we're not going to build a big box. We're not leaving our urban area. We're not leaving our community that we love so dearly to go to the suburbs and build something major, right. That's not what we're going to do. We're going to stay where we are. But, we understand our calling is to be a community church. That's who we've been since 1889. That's what we began to see fleshed out once we got to Edgehill.

Pastor John Faison:

We're a community church. So we don't want to be a commuter church, we wanted to be a community church. For us that means, whatever the community looks like, we're going to be embedded. We're

going to be involved. We're going to be connected. So we're now in the process of looking at what that means for the Nashville campus. And ultimately, it will become the model for the other ones. What that means for us is, we got to offer something more than church.

Pastor John Faison:

And so, this new plant, this new model, this new design of what we think in Nashville is going to include some stuff that churches may not be including, housing. We want to build housing. We're going to provide commercial and retail space. We're going to put together some parking that fixes our problem, but also offers parking as a ministry to the community. It won't just be a church. It's going to be a community hub, a space where everybody in the community frequents.

Pastor John Faison:

The sanctuary will also be a gathering spot where we can do forums and conversations and meals and community things. Now, as we wrestle with this COVID-19 thing and we don't know how long it's going to last, the need for that communal hub has even been reinforced.

Pastor John Faison:

We sit in a food desert. Food insecurity is a major issue for us. So we're going to build a grocery store on our church campus. I mean, this is what it means for us to minister to the community and to be present and to provide what the community needs today.

Chantel McHenry:

I love that. You have just given some pastors great ideas and inspirations on how to... Because some of them may have felt that their only way out was to leave the community, to uproot the church that's been there for hundreds of years and take it into the suburbs. But, there are ways to get around that and still serve the community.

Chantel McHenry:

Tell me a little bit about as the complexion of the community changes. So now you have more affluent whites that are moving into the Nashville area. The ultimate goal is not just to minister the gospel to Blacks, but it is to minister the gospel in the community in which the church lives. How do you now reach across racial barriers and begin to minister to those in your community now?

Pastor John Faison:

For us, it is through intentional engagement. It is about being present in that community and being a resource for those folks who end up showing up. However they got there, they are part of the community. We believe that the way we reach them is not knocking on doors and passing out tracks, right. That's not going to do it.

Chantel McHenry:

They're not going to answer the door.

Pastor John Faison:

They're not answering the door. You going to catch the Ring, right?

Chantel McHenry:

That's right.

Pastor John Faison:

You might talk to somebody, you might not. It's not [crosstalk 00:35:40]. So that's not the model that we have. We believe, that what we offer as a community is useful, helpful and transformative for anybody, regardless of ethnicity, color, creed, regardless of where they come from.

Pastor John Faison:

Now, this does not mean we lose our identity. We are not seeking to become a multi cultural church by the multi cultural church definition, the industry standard, right. That's not our goal. I don't believe that's our calling. I don't believe that, that's what we were created to do. We were fashioned as an African American church from 1889 all the way to this present day in 2020. I don't see anything wrong with that.

Pastor John Faison:

Often, the multi cultural lens says that there is something wrong with the Black church, because it is predominately Black. I'm telling you that the Black church was the product of an oppressive system. If we had been allowed in white churches, there would be no Black church. But, we weren't. That's not what it was. And so, the Black church now is this incubator and ecosystem around which the Black community now finds its identity, finds its communal fellowship and finds its affirmation. Why would we snatch that away from people who need it so desperately, especially in a time of polarization and a time of racial injustice?

Pastor John Faison:

The Black church, we are that space where folks can be... where folks get affirmed and get reminded that you are created in the image of God with your Black self. You're not deficient and inept. You are not missing anything. You are the image of God. You are still made, shaped and fashioned in the fullness of who Christ made you and fashioned you to be. Where else is that message in America being preached and taught regularly? Nowhere. The Black church does that.

Pastor John Faison:

And so, we're not seeking to be a multi cultural church just trying to grab people from different ethnicities. Now, we're open to anybody that comes our way. Any ethnicity that has ever spent anytime in a Black church will tell you, it's one of the most welcoming spaces you'll ever find on this planet. You walk in-

Chantel McHenry:

It's true.

Pastor John Faison:

... and you are, "Baby" and "Sugar," from the time you walk in the door until the time you leave. We're glad to see you, waving when you come in, waving when you get back. We're going to help your kids in the car. We might even offer you a plate on the way out.

Chantel McHenry:

That's right.

Pastor John Faison:

It's going to be one of the welcoming spaces in the Kingdom of God. And so, I don't see a reason, I don't see purpose behind us neglecting the identity of who we are. Yet, at the same time, I believe that we're called to be that in that community in such a way that anybody who needs us, who needs the faith we profess, and needs the witness we bring, can be impacted and transformed by.

Chantel McHenry:

I love that. That is inspiring for me as a Black woman, one who is raised in the Black church, because what I heard you say is that the mission of the Black church has not changed.

Pastor John Faison:

Not at all.

Chantel McHenry:

It is still to affirm. It is still to provide a place of safety, if you will, a place of camaraderie, a place where you can come and see people that look like you that are striving and aspiring to serve the Lord with all of their heart.

Pastor John Faison:

Yes.

Chantel McHenry:

Dr. Faison, this has been a phenomenal conversation. I cannot wait until the listeners get an opportunity to hear this and get inspired. This is Pastor Faison with Watson Grove in the Nashville area, look him up. Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it.

Pastor John Faison:

It's such an honor to be here. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Announcer:

Thanks for listening to this important series on the history and evolution of the Black church. We hope you learned as much as we did from this conversation.

Announcer:

At Vanderbloemen, we're passionate about helping Christian organizations build and maintain an environment where people of different backgrounds, cultures, and interests can come together to advance The Kingdom in a fuller way.

Announcer:

Please reach out to us if you're interested in our diversity consulting practice, or if we can serve you in any way. Thanks for listening.

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