



PASTOR NATE SHARES HIS

testimony

By Tom O'Boyle

In his new book on the prophet Jonah, author Timothy Keller makes the point that for Jonah, and indeed many Christians, the way up is oftentimes down.

"The usual place to learn the greatest secrets of God's grace is at the bottom," Keller writes. "But it is not simply *being* at the bottom that begins to change Jonah but *prayer* at the bottom."

On Sunday, Senior Pastor Nate Devlin provided authentic and vivid testimony of his journey to Beverly Heights Church 16 years ago which resulted from a wilderness experience that brought him down before coming up.

His talk shed light on the circuitous and trying circumstances which happily culminated last November when he succeeded Rick Wolling, his mentor, as the church's 8th pastor. It provides powerful witness of God's providential grace for Nate, his wife Holly and their three children as well as the church he now leads.

In Nate's story, he wasn't in the belly of a whale at the bottom of the sea. Instead, he was in bed with a pillow over his head, crying out to the Lord and about to crack.

The wet and dreary day he defines as the turning point came in January of 2003. Nate was working in a church from which he earned no income. He had seminary training but the wrong degree, it turned out.

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Now in his third month as Senior Pastor, with a busy Advent season behind him and his staff, Nate Devlin spent the second half of his talk sketching out his vision for the five ministry essentials he inherited from Rick Wolling.

The essential strategic direction for Beverly Heights is set, Nate made abundantly clear in his comments. In fact, as Nate revealed during his talk, his dissertation for his Doctor of Ministry degree from Trinity Seminary in Ambridge, was an examination of the five ministry essentials and their practical application to the pastoral work of Beverly Heights as seen through Christian formation.

Moreover, as a person who was mentored as extensively and thoroughly as Nate was by Rick, folks shouldn't anticipate a deviation from the prior agenda, Nate indicated.

"Rick's always been a tremendous advocate and friend and I love him dearly and if you don't know that yet about me you haven't been here," he said. He quipped that Rick's daughter Becca nicknamed Nate "shadow" because of how closely he followed and watched Rick during their lengthy mentorship, which ran more than 12 years.

"Rick was genius in helping us develop the five ministry essentials blueprint and I have no intention of departing from that blueprint. It is well ensconced into the DNA of our congregation. I recognize that. I appreciate that. I believe in it. I bought into that mission and vision and I want to continue that."

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He'd interviewed for nine jobs in 18 months without any offers. His prospects of actually pastoring a church that might provide gainful employment and lead to a ministerial career looked bleak.

"It was God's purpose and plan. It was our desert years. We spent those years struggling and suffering and working hard for no pay," Nate recalled. "Things were not working out ... and we were seeking the next thing. ... After the ninth [rejection] over 18 months, I was the closest to clinical depression I may have ever gotten."

"I had just gotten another call that I wasn't the right guy and I remember laying in my bed just on the verge of cracking and saying, 'Lord I must have missed it. I don't know what you want me to do. I will go to Brazil, I will go to Africa. Whatever, just give me clarity.'"

Then a call came, at that very moment, which changed his life, and ours. His head buried in a pillow, Nate was in bed when Holly entered the room to announce that Rick Wolling was on the line.

Rick wanted to know if Nate would consider teaching a class for Lent. Rick needed help, too, with the recent departure of his own associate pastor, Terry Timm.

"I can't hardly pay you anything but we'd love to have you come and teach a class," Nate recalled Rick saying over lunch at Max & Erma's in Cranberry. "I still know the booth where we met."

He has pleasant memories when he and Holly first came to a worship service at Beverly Heights.

It was God's purpose and plan. It was our desert years.

"Holly was like a rock star, which was kinda neat," he quipped, because of all the people she knew through her association with Mary Wolling, for whom she worked at Jubilee Christian School. "The generosity of spirit with which I was received was tremendous."

That teaching gig led to an internship paying him \$13,000 a year. Nate couldn't believe his good fortune. "I'd never been paid to do ministry in my life. ...You're gonna pay me to do ministry?" he recalls thinking.

And although he had to sell his cherished guitar collection to finance completion of his Master's of Divinity degree, from Trinity Seminary in Ambridge, it was a 5 1/2 year wilderness experience that he wouldn't trade for the world.

"I'm extremely grateful to be here, extremely grateful to be your pastor. All the waiting was worth it," Nate said.

Judging from the enthusiastic applause from the standing-room only crowd, that sentiment is shared widely.

You may listen to the entire audio recording of Nate's "Meet the Pastor" talk by visiting beverlyheights.org.



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While wholesale change will not occur, Nate laid out an ambitious agenda. Here are the highlights of what he said about each of the five essential practices.

WORSHIP

"Worship is job number one and it will remain job number one," Nate said. It is the core practice or hub around which the four other essentials orbit. No change is anticipated here. The former New Worship Design Team is now the Worship Design Team, to promote more integration of the folks who work on both contemporary and traditional services.

DISCIPLESHIP

"We are working to bring greater clarity and definition to discipleship. We want to bring more definition to what we mean by discipleship," Nate said. While this essential doesn't now have a formal vision blueprint, Nate indicated that Family ministry will be the major focus.

He said the recent elevation of Lisa Tyger to the new position of Director of Family Ministry reflects this.

Nate mentioned the influence upon him of the "brilliant" 20th century British theologian Lesslie Newbigin, who spent the early part of his career as a missionary in India and was a prolific writer in the latter half of his career.

Newbigin is especially noteworthy for his later writings which emphasized the serious need for the church to once again take the Gospel to post-Christian Western culture, which he viewed not as a secular society without God but as a pagan society with false gods.

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"Newbigin spent a whole second career writing brilliantly on how to reevangelize the West. He had a strong view of the value and necessity of the local church," Nate said.

"God establishes churches for places and we're God's outpost here in Mt. Lebanon," he said. "It's not just Mt. Lebanon. We have a special responsibility to the place God has given to us."

Recalling the time when he and wife Holly moved into Mt. Lebanon five or six years ago, "our kids were one of two or three kids on the street. Within five years that's totally changed because generations are retiring and moving away or passing away and families want to move into Mt. Lebanon. We are just filled with families in our area so we want to be effective to you as a church and your families and be effective in trying to reach the lost around us. We've put a lot of time and attention and resources into families because we want to see that develop."

FELLOWSHIP

This is another ministry essential which needs to develop a clearer vision blueprint. One constraint in maximizing our Hospitality and Life Together programs is our facilities limitations, Nate indicated.

"We can't all be together because we don't have the space to do that," Nate said. The kitchen is also inadequate for the current demands placed upon it.

"If you don't believe in miracles you should because we pull dinner out of that kitchen on a weekly basis. It's a weekly miracle given some of the equipment," Nate quipped. "In order for us to move into the future and expansion in terms of Hospitality and Life Together [programs] we're gonna have to see some changes in our facility."

He said Jen Tan, the new hospitality coordinator, has plans to grow herbs in the big empty space in back of the building where the old crabapple tree was. "You'll find that on your plate someday. That's a way of both serving you and saying something to the surrounding community," Nate said.

MISSION

Newbigin's ideas have most shaped Nate's thinking in this ministry essential.

"When it comes to the area of mission, my mind goes local. I am a localist. That's just the way the Lord has oriented me and developed me," Nate explained. "That's not to say we don't have responsibilities to global missions but I think our primary responsibility is to the place God has put us in."

We've put a lot of time and attention and resources into families because we want to see that develop.

The area between Dormont and the Liberty Tunnel is the corridor he defines as fertile territory. "This is where I believe the Lord has called us when it comes to local mission in the same way the North Side was underserved for all those years," Nate said. "You don't have anything like that between Dormont and the Liberty Tunnels."

That's the place. The program, he thinks, may be English as a second language and providing training to people in need of those skills through possible partnership with Literacy Pittsburgh, which is the state's largest provider of ESL education to adults.

"The third thing we need is a person. It needs primary leadership from somebody," Nate said.

Ed Glover, the director of Urban Impact, has agreed to train a person if we can find him or her. "I'd like us to explore partnering with an urban missionary who'd partner with us along this corridor and seeing what we can do to help support them," Nate said. "I'm praying about a person."

STEWARDSHIP

"Our facilities need some help," Nate said. "If we want to have a common place where we can have multi-purpose gatherings, we need a larger space."

In addition, the preschool is "busting out of the seams and there is opportunity there. We can develop additional classes."

Both the organ and the piano need upgrading or replacement - "we've run all the tread off those tires." And while air conditioning in the sanctuary may not be a necessity, "it sure would be nice."

Tom O'Boyle is Director of Communications. He can be reached at tom@beverlyheights.org.

updates

ADULT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION (ACE)

You will have the opportunity during the next two weeks of the ACE time at 10 a.m. to “Meet the Staff,” as they share thoughts on their new jobs. A new class series starts Jan. 27 when Dr. David Ayers of Grove City College begins a 6-week class on marriage which coincides with release of his new book, *Christian Marriage: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Grove City College has produced a video promoting the class and his book which will be available on our Beverly Heights website as well as theirs.

EVERYONE LIKES TO EAT, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE PREP?

We all enjoy the wonderful hospitality and warm food that Jen Tan coordinates, but she needs volunteers to help provide it. Any and all assistance is needed in the kitchen for either Linger Longer or Wednesday Night Heights events. Please contact her at 412-580-2065 or jen@beverlyheights.org.

PRISM EVENT WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Members of Beverly Heights will join with our mission partner PRISM (Pittsburgh Region International Student Ministries) for supper and Bible study Friday evening, Feb. 8, at Bellefield Church in Oakland. We'll have a good opportunity to converse with the students! Interested? Please contact Katie Doyle at 412-279-8740 or 4thedyls@earthlink.net.

PROMOTE LITERACY BY BECOMING A TUTOR

Literacy Pittsburgh is offering free training workshops for prospective tutors in Mt. Lebanon in January. No teaching experience is necessary. The organization offers adult education classes in English as a second language training as well as high school equivalency tests. Attend two 3-hour sessions on Tues., Jan. 15 and Thurs., Jan. 17 from 6 p.m. until 9 p.m., at Mt. Lebanon Public Library. Pre-registration is required. Call 412-393-7645 or email rhatcher@literacypittsburgh.org.

Visit literacypittsburgh.org/volunteers for more details about tutoring students in reading, writing or English as a second language.

TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY FOR WOMEN

The Tuesday Morning Women's Bible Study invites all women to join them for a 9-week study of the book, *The Gospel-Centered Life*. Please come to an introductory meeting on Tues., Jan. 15. The book study will start Jan. 22 and meet each Tuesday through March 19. Meetings begin at 9:15 a.m. and end at 10:30 a.m. Childcare is available. To reserve childcare, to request a book, or for any questions please contact either Nancy Moore 412-831-2282 or Christy Cramer 412-831-1051. We'd love to study with you!

MARCH FOR LIFE

The annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., takes place Jan. 18. That's the 45th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision which expanded the “right to privacy” and determined that women have protected constitutional rights to terminate a pregnancy. Anyone who wants to ride on one of the South Hills Bible Chapel buses can register on its webpage under “events.” The buses depart at 5:30 a.m. and will return about 11:30 p.m. The cost is \$55 and includes a boxed meal on the return trip. People should bring their own lunch, snacks and water. If you have any additional questions, please contact Bob Thomson. His email is rwthomsonsenior@gmail.com.

AN ALTERNATIVE TO ABORTION

Our annual campaign to support alternatives to abortion will commence during the worship service Jan. 13. Families are invited to fill a baby bottle with change or checks to support the work of our mission partner, Pittsburgh Women's Clinic and Human Coalition. Amy Lavelle will speak at both services about the work being done there.

SNOW TUBING WITH DAD

Mt. Lebanon Evangelical Presbyterian Church, a sister congregation of ours, will host a snow-tubing event at Hidden Valley Resort on Sat., Jan. 26, at 1:30 p.m. RSVP by

Jan. 21. Please contact Cliff Luft at cliff.luft@gmail.com for more information. Children must be at least 4 years old. Cost is \$28 per adult and \$25 per child.

IF YOU SING IN THE SHOWER, HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO GO PUBLIC

If you have an interest in joining the adult choir, now is the time! Rehearsals begin again Thurs., Jan. 10, from 7:15 p.m. until 8:30. We would love for you to be a part of this ministry. Contact Elissa Winkler for more information at elissa@beverlyheights.org. (As a longtime choir member, please indulge Tom's commentary: Choir is one of the absolute gem activities of Beverly Heights. This is not just because we are singing praises to the Lord; it is a group which enjoys tremendous rapport and collegiality. Elissa is a splendid director who maintains the high standards set by Mary Wolling, her predecessor, and I urge you to consider joining us.)

FUSION ACTIVITIES

Full-dinner meals are provided for the 6th to 12th grade students who participate in our weekly Fusion gatherings. This could not happen without the help of many volunteers who provide the meals. Partnering in this essential element of our Sunday evenings has been such a blessing to the students! Volunteers are needed for upcoming Sundays. Please email Bob Kelley (bob@beverlyheights.org) to sign-up for a meal for one of the Winter/Spring Fusions.

Fusion resumes Sun., Jan. 13, from 6 p.m. until 8. A fun overnight trip to Splash Lagoon is planned for Jan. 18-19. Space is limited so sign up as soon as possible.

