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SPEAKERS

Sam, Bishop Graves

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Sam,

Sam 00:04

Welcome to The Table Talk podcast, a place where United Methodists across Tennessee and Western Kentucky can connect with one another in deeper conversation around life and faith. My name is Sam McLaughlin, and I'm the senior pastor at bellmead United Methodist Church in West Nashville. I will be your host for today's episode. We are kicking off season two with a one on one conversation with the new Episcopal leader of the Tennessee Western Kentucky conference, Bishop David graves. Bishop Graves' passion is sharing Jesus, seeing the overlooked, joining God and transforming lives and changing the world, one person at a time. His study of leadership permeates all his work as a pastor, district, Superintendent and Bishop. Join us as we get to know our new bishop. David graves, all right, as we get started today, Bishop graves, we're very excited that you're here, and we're excited to welcome you. We want to know everything about you. We'll start with just where did you grow up? Or tell us whatever else you'd like us to know.

Bishop Graves 01:04

Okay, well, Sam, it's great to be with you today, and it's great to be in the Tennessee, Western Kentucky annual conference. We I feel very honored and blessed. I'm a Tennessean. I grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee. I spent my first 25 years there, and my parents met in church. So I was going to church nine months before I was ever born. They were married in that church. They were married first, and they had me and my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, and so it was just a great experience to be part of the United Methodist Church. There. I was confirmed in 1972 in the newly formed United Methodist Church. So I love the United Methodist Church. And then I, you know, I spent, after 25 years, did youth ministry for 14 years, did that in the Chattanooga, Tennessee area. And then felt the call to go deeper in my education, got my master of divinity from Emory camera school theology. That'll make some people really happy. Yeah, some happy. Some not. I get that. And from there, I served on staff of a large membership church, served a small membership church as the pastor, been a pastor of a medium sized congregation, large membership, church all along the way. Just saw those churches grow exponentially and district superintendent. And then I returned back to Knoxville after 32 years of

living either in the Chattanooga area or upper east Tennessee in the Kingsport area, I kind of came back home. I got to serve Church Street, United Methodist Church, right on the edge of the University of Tennessee campus where I graduated from. So Go Vols and with that, I thought that was kind of where I would kind of end my ministry, that church just really fulfilled a lot of things that God was calling me to do, but people encouraged me to run for bishop in 2016 I was elected. So for the last eight years, I have served as a bishop in United Methodist Church. So I'm married to my wife, Nancy, 43 years. We have two children, Greg and Casey, and two grandchildren. I do have a son in law as well, and so that's kind of a nutshell, and I'll probably, I'll be sharing a lot more of those as we get to know one another in this journey as we move forward.

Sam 04:10

So can you tell us just a little bit more about the way you've experienced God's call upon your life and leadership?

Bishop Graves 04:19

Well, that that's a it's a very long story, but I'm going to try to just really summarize that a little bit. I when I was going to college at the University of Tennessee, my main guy, I was in business administration. What I felt like I wanted to do was to either work for a large corporation or start my own business. And that's really what I was focused on. I really wanted to own a sports franchise. So you got to have a lot of funding to do that. So I really wanted to own the Atlanta Braves. That's that was really my goal. In 1977 a guy by the name of Ted Turner bought the Braves for 10 me, and I only had \$10 going to college. And. And but I was working part time at the church I grew up in as a as a church custodian, and set up a lot of tables and chairs, took them down, stripped a lot of floors, did a lot of work in that way, and really experienced a lot of ministry. So everyone that's a part of the life of the church is so, so important to presenting the gospel from those that set up, take down, clean up. It takes every it takes a village, but one. It was one August night in 1979 and I was going through, locking up the building. It was in the sanctuary, turning off the air conditioner, turning off the lights. It was still daylight outside, so you could still see, and so I was walking out down the center aisle, and I was walking at the back of the church, gonna lock the door, gonna leave and go home. And I just, for some reason, I turned and looked at the pulpit. You know, I had been a part of children's sermons on those steps. Was confirmed at that altar. I was baptized at that altar. Had sung on the steps in choirs, but had never been in the pulpit. So I said, I wonder what it feels like to stand there. So I go up, have to go up a couple more steps. I stand there, look out over all these empty pews, and I'm just looking and I hear this voice. I can hear it in this moment as clearly today as I did in 1979 and it said, This is what I called you to do. And I very much an introvert, didn't like to ask questions in class. Didn't want to ask a stupid question. Always had these questions in my mind. Other people would ask them. The teacher would say, That's a great question. I say I had that question, but, you know, I just, you know, it's just a lot of fear. And so I was just thinking something else, and then I heard it again. This is what I called you to do, and what I realized in that moment, it was to present the gospel. And so I went to my pastor who led me through a series of discussions, went through the candidacy guidebook, and realized that God was calling me to ordain ministry in the United Methodist Church. And so that began a journey that's led me to this place today, and all along the way, I'm a student of leadership, and I've had to grow in my leadership. I've had to grow as an individual. But when you do that and you step out on faith, it's amazing what God does in and through you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sam 07:51

Are you still an introvert

07:53

To some degree? Yes, I am. I'm still, you know now my wife, Nancy is an extrovert, and so she'll stand and talk to you as long as you want to talk. One of the pet peeves is when the bishop is ready to go quit talking to Nina.

Sam 08:08

So that's interesting, though, because, you know, I do think sometimes you feel as if you have to be an extrovert to be a pastor, a pastor. And of course, there are a lot of introverts that are and so have you tell us just more about, like, leadership as an introvert in such a public space where everybody's looking at you all the time, you have to do this output of energy, you know, right, right, right.

Bishop Graves 08:31

You know, I think I've evolved in that over time, because people ask me, who are some of your leadership gurus you know that you kind of emulate and I've learned from a lot of different people, but where I really learned, I think leadership, was first through my my father, who really had to work hard to get to where he and and really had to change some things in his life. And so I observed that, and it was instilled to me, you work hard. Family is important, your relationship is important. And so it was. It was really through my dad, my Both of my grandfathers and my grandmothers, who just really taught me what it is to be in relationship with people and to care for people. For example, my grandfather, once we were camping, and it was just the two of us, and we were listening to a Braves game on his transistor radio. And then he would just, he would just say things like, you know, when you start earning money, you're going to give 10% of that to the church. He began to teach me tithing. My dad did as well. But he also said, you know, David, we have to treat people the same. And he began to talk, now, this is in the late 60s, early 70s. And he said, you know, people of color. It, and he talked about how they're mistreated, and he said, we as white people have to go the extra mile to help people be included. And I just saw him give so much away to people. And so he really was a witness, and he wasn't very well educated. It. During the Depression, he began to work for the newly formed Tennessee Valley Authority from the New Deal that really elevated his life and my grandmother's life and provided a really good income for his family, but he just really taught me about how we treat people and how we have to take the initiative. And so I think that really kind of pushed me, not pushed me, but nudged me to not just be silent, because so many times we are silent. And so I really had to work hard on that. And so getting up and speaking in front of people. I don't want to say it comes naturally or it just happens. I always get a little anxious about that, but it's doing it, and it's a God thing. You know, if you step out on faith, it's amazing what God does in and through you. And so when I went back in 2015 back to Knoxville, and I came across some of my classmates that I went to high school with, and teachers that taught me in high school. They were amazed, you know, and one of the things I had to do at Church Street was we were on television and back then we had to go down to the studio to tape we taped it on a Thursday morning, and you did it in such a way that you were taping it in real time on Sunday. So the first time I went to do that, we taped it between the person doing the weather and the sports they were preparing for their times and every once in a while, the weather person would say, you know, Pastor, that was a good sermon today. So I felt like I you know, but just those opportunities kind of move me in

ways that just, just really helped me grow as a person, which says to me that if God calls you, God's going to equip you. And, you know, just be open to that leading. You know, I've read all the John Maxwell stuff. I know all these principles, and they've all helped me, but I really think it, you know, it was I had a baseball coach, for example, who, when I was in high school, moved me from the outfield to first base, because he said, David, you know, you've got a great glove and you've got really good speed and footwork, but you have a really weak throwing arm.

13:01

And he changed my whole life, because in baseball, he changed my whole being able to play the game because he put me in the right position. And so as a bishop today, and is really a leader all through my life, the greatest joy comes. How can I put people in the right positions that God wants them to be in so they can be all that God created them to be. Because we have our strengths and we have our weaknesses, and my coach taught me, you know, just because I had one weakness didn't take me out of the game. So I appreciated that.

Sam 13:34

I'm wondering, what are some other, you know, pieces of advice or teachings that have really stuck with you over the years? So you said about your dad, you know, saying that about 10% or treating people equally, or all the same. You know, what are other tidbits that you've just carried with you in ministry and in leadership?

Bishop Graves 13:53

Well, there's several of them, and there's been several bishops that have been significant in my life that I served under. I remember Bishop Swanson, when I ran for Bishop, telling me, he said, David, you're going to have to do the one thing you do not like to do, and that's talk about yourself. He said, You would rather talk about anybody else but yourself and and. And that was true. And so there is a time that we need to stand up and speak for ourselves and talk about ourselves, but we also have that, have that humble side and and Bishop Ray Chamberlain, who was one of my bishops too, he taught me a lot about humility, I was really struggling, something really difficult had happened in my ministry, a setting that I was in, and that's going to happen to all of us, by the way, right? But, you know, I grew up we, you know, you don't show any signs of weakness, because if you show a sign of weakness, you're gonna get punished for that. But he said, you know, David, as much as your heart hurts tonight. Yeah, you can't even imagine how the heart of God hurts, and that's really helped me in difficult situations, especially what we've gone through the last three years in the denomination, through disaffiliation and just, you know, our culture is so polarized, and we can't imagine how the heart of God hurts. There's, there's things that, you know, sometimes you just have to, you just have to suck it up and get going. It really taught me the gift of listening. I think my being an introvert, plus these leadership principles really helped me to listen, and we need to do more listening and less talking and and it really helped me to come to the table with a diverse group of people. I mean, even people that maybe we don't like or have different opinions than we do, or that kind of just irritate the stew out of us, but yet we still be in relationship with them.

16:30

Some of the most difficult people I've had have become some of the greatest supporters just because you chose to hang in there with them. So that's been very helpful. Yeah,

Sam 16:39

those are really good. So this is not your first Episcopal appointment. You come to us from the Alabama, West Florida and South Georgia conferences, where you served through both beautiful and challenging seasons for the church. So what have you learned while leading through these disorienting and disruptive times. Yeah, some

17:01

of the things I've learned I'd like to forget, yeah,

Bishop Graves 17:06

I think, you know, now I'm serving two annual conferences again, right? Really, three, because I've got the central Appalachian missionary conference. That was one of the things that said, you know, you have experience in doing this, so we're gonna give you some more experience. What I learned number one, serving multiple conferences, I have more people praying for me than I ever have in my whole life, and I have felt the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit through people's prayers. It has been phenomenal. It has carried me. It has moved me in ways that I could have never imagined. So when, when you have more put on you, or you're more you're given more opportunity, yeah, there's also great blessing in that as well. I found beautiful people that love the Lord, are committed, carry a lot of the same values that I carry. I want to see the United Methodist Church be at its best and and to be able to go on that journey with people has just been a huge blessing to me. Now I've encountered some of the most difficult things that I've had to encounter It's been traumatic. We had covid on top of all that. But what I've learned, especially I don't know where all this is going to lead us. Historians will say, in 50 or 60 years, we'll kind of know where all this is going to go, and it's going to go, I know I'm not going to be here to experience it, but, but in the meantime, we're called to be faithful, and we're really called in this I just feel like the United Methodist Church has the greatest opportunity to reach the next generations, and there is space for everybody in the United Methodist Church, whether you're a traditional, you're a moderate, you're progressive, you just got to be willing to be at the table with everybody, and Jesus models that for us. And that's what's broken my heart more than anything. It's just because people feel like and everybody can have their their theological thought. They can have their I mean, thoughts on Scripture. That's why we've written books ever since books have been in print, because there are different perspectives and opinions, and the gospel calls us to come together and unify. And what has broken my heart is just seeing. So many people splinter and go in different directions. Our country is there at this point now. And so the beautiful part of moving forward is I want to give all of my energy to really focus on the mission and ministry. And I just wish everybody would say, you know, in the midst of all of our differences, we're just going to come together and focus and unify on that, and we don't have to agree with one another, but we are called to love. We're all caught. We're called to live out the fruits of the Spirit. I read the fruits of the spirit every morning because I want to be the best that I can be, so I'm looking forward to leading us forward and making a difference in our communities, and we just can't be distracted any longer. The Devil's having a field day with some of this stuff. Let's come together. Let's move on, even when we disagree. And I just know that the generations that are to come, and I

look at my grandkids and I'm here to help them now and in the future, just be the church, the Apostolic Church that God's calling us to be.

Sam 21:09

Can you say more about how United Methodists are positioned to specifically to bring people into the church or into relationship with Jesus,

Bishop Graves 21:22

There were some things at General Conference that that I would always do differently, or wish that would have been done differently, but one of the things General Conference did was really create space for everybody. You don't have to agree with it all. I was presiding when the social principle around paragraph around marriage changed. I feel like I gave a few years of my life and that Day Afternoon, to be honest with you, but I just felt like we got to a beautiful place when, around marriage, still a faithful man, a faithful woman or two persons. So he gave space. So if you have a traditional perspective around marriage, it's there for you. If you have a different, same sex, few, there is space there for you. And so, I just feel like, as I study the I study the life of Jesus, and I go to Luke chapter 15, and that's the parables of the three lost, the sheep, the coin and the Son, and maybe the fourth, the angry son. But those first two verses that we just simply skip over, where it says in the first verse, tax collectors and other notorious sinners. Other translations would say the scum of the earth often, often came to hear Jesus teach. And in verse two, says the religious leaders were all were right there, chastising Jesus. And I'm just picturing in the midst of all of humanity. You've got all humanity now represented in that scene that there were people on both sides that got it, and their lives were changed forever. I believe the United Methodist Church has modeling that all humanity can come. They can hear the scriptures and the Holy Spirit's the one that's going to it's going to change lives, and we can put all of the restrictions or take everything away we want to, but it's at the end of the day. It's going to be the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit working in people's lives. But the United Methodist Church now has created a table that everybody can come to, and we don't have to agree with everybody at the table, but we're called to come to the table and the future, the generations, you know, the especially the 40 and under there, there are people that have very traditional conservative views, but they Don't want to exclude people. Generation where I am they can have conservative traditional views, but they want to be exclusive. And that's not the gospel as I understand it. So of Jesus that I understand it. So I just feel like, if we can just continue to work together to move forward together in the midst of all of our differences, but we're unified in our mission and ministry together. That's where people are today, and that's where people want to move to,

24:37

not everyone, but I believe the majority, and I believe the majority of people were ready to move on. We're tired of being distracted by all this. Let's just be the church.

Sam 24:47

Can you say more about what the distractions are?

Bishop Graves 24:52

Yeah, distractions have been disaffiliation. You know, still the distraction. Can we? Can we still leave? We're going to have a process for that. I don't we just worn out with that. And then the thing of it is, there's always the next thing you know. And people find the next thing. We can't keep living there. Our culture's there. It's always, you know, just look at the political election. It doesn't matter who you're for. It's always the next thing that people are pushing at. We've got to live in the moment to be empowered, live out Ephesians, chapter three, verse 20, by the power of God, we will be able to do and I'm a testimony that more than we could have ever thought or imagined. I would have never imagined, in 1979 I didn't even know what a bishop was. I just went up in that pulpit and God spoke to me, I just want to help laity and clergy of the two annual, the three annual conferences that I have. But especially, you know, we're just focused on Tennessee, Western Kentucky, in this moment. I just want to help us be the church that God's calling us to be and to not let all these other parameters move us away from that. And that's going to take leadership to get there, and some boldness and some courage and a lot of faith, because I find that people prefer comfort over faith. In fact, I'm going to do, I think I'm going to write an article on that, because I've just, I've just heard so many people say, you know, Bishop, I just feel like I got to do this, because this is the this would this is going to be just the easier thing for me and my family, or this is going to be easier for our church. And I'm just thinking, when Has this ever been easy? You know, so I could, I could preach on that, but we'll listen

27:05

for another day. Okay, another day. Well, I want to

Sam 27:08

you know you said a little bit about leadership style too, or the leadership that you have to bring. And so what do you want us to know about your leadership style?

Bishop Graves 27:19

Okay, I'm a collaborative leader. I like to work with diverse people. That's hard work, but when you build relationships with people, even diverse people, it's amazing what you can do together. That's, that's the beauty of what I've seen. I'm a strategic leader. I like to use my time strategically. I like to plan strategically. I don't like to waste time. I like other people to deal with the weeds these days, and I like to just kind of focus on the big picture and kind of help grassroots bring it up from here, I like to empower other people to do to do their work. And a lot of people much more gifted than I am and and I just feel like when we work together with the midst of our giftedness, we get some great things done. As I said before, my greatest joy is seeing other people be successful. So it'd be collaborative leadership. I'm always trying to really grow in my leadership. I don't mind making decisions. I've had people ask me, Can you make decisions? Can you make them quickly? Well, I can make a decision right now in this moment but I found that sometimes I have to do that, but for the most part, I like to work collaboratively, strategically, and then we move forward. And there's a time, and other people will tell you that have been around me, when I make the decision to move forward, there's no turning back.

29:00

I don't like to procrastinate either. So I hope that gives you a little flavor

Sam 29:04

of that helps. Yes, what kind of vision do you think is needed for the church of 2024 and I think you've said this a little bit, but you know, what would you add to that? What vision is needed right now?

Bishop Graves 29:18

Yeah, I think the vision for the church is really focused on how people are going to come and really seek unity in the body, and to really get out of people's comfort zone and to have relationships with people that are not like them. The church that we've known is no more. It doesn't matter what is on your church sign, it's no more. When we know that over half of our population doesn't even identify with any church, the fields are ripe for harvest. You know where I've seen is that relationships are the first thing. If we don't have if we don't try to build relationships, and then we don't love people, we're never going to make inroads. I won't say never, but it's going to be very difficult to make inroads. And so we're going to have to move out beyond the walls of the church buildings. Really, they're they're important, and we enjoy them, and we need them, but the church is outside those walls. Wesley said that a long time ago. Jesus said that as well, and so we've got to recapture that. And I just believe next few generations, and the generations to come, they want to be a part of something that is doing, something that makes a difference in people's lives, and you have the opportunity to do that every single day. Kindness is one of my huge words. You can be anything in the world you want to be, so be kind. You know people that are in the secular world, working in hospitals, teachers, administrators, restaurants. I mean, they've just taken the brunt of people's anger and frustration, and a lot of them have been followers of Jesus, and we haven't been a good witness. So how you can be kind, even when the service is lousy and people are not very kind to you. The vision would be too that we just can't spend time hanging back and dealing with the stuff that we have had to deal with. I just don't want to spend another moment time to talk somebody into staying in the United Methodist Church. I don't know why you want to leave the United Methodist Church. So let's get on with it. Let's get going.

32:02

Thank you. So tell us some ways that you specific ways that you support clergy that are under your leadership.

Bishop Graves 32:16

I remember that when I was in confirmation class, my bishop, I Scott Allen, who was the first African American bishop in the southeastern jurisdiction, the newly formed United Methodist Church, came to my confirmation class, and he's really the first bishop I remember. He sat down in some of those little chairs at our tables, and he just listened to us. He asked us some questions. I can't really remember what he asked us, but what I do remember is this man had something special about him. I later would learn he was he. He radiated the Holy Spirit. And so for me, I've walked through difficult times as a clergy person. I just want to help clergy really fulfill their call. If I can take some of the burden off of them, if I can detract it from them in the local church to up here in the denomination. Clergy health is really mental health is very, very important to me. I struggle with that in my own life, and so that's for a different day as well. I want people to be healthy. I want people to take care of themselves. I want clergy to take their days off and have vacation and have healthy relationships with family, and I learned a lot the hard way with that, and I don't want some clergy to have to go through what I went through. So I want to do everything I can to encourage support, and I like to know this is going to take a while, because I've got two annual conferences, but you'll find over time that I'll, I'll kind of learn all of you, you

know as and I like to spend time with you And and I like to have fun, you know. I was with a clergy person a couple of nights ago, and we watched four innings. The Braves came together. So we're hearing a theme here. Yeah, we're hearing a theme. You can't own them. You can least watch, you know, just to be able to do things like that. I also want to equip people with tools to do, to give leadership. Because what I've learned you is, in the churches you serve, if a church is going to grow and you're going to get greater responsibilities, you got to grow in your leadership. I had to do that, you know, I came from an introvert that couldn't even ask a question in class, couldn't even, would not even think about speaking in front of to really just having to grow in my leadership and and sometimes I just feel like leaders. It's what Max would call we put the law of the lid, you know, we just kind of put a lid on it. So you got to be a lifelong learner. You got to be a lifelong reader. It's you do it the rest of your life. As you grow in your own personal faith and in your leadership style, I love to see clergy grow in their leadership. And so there's some things that we're thinking about doing to really kind of help with that. So I look forward to just having further conversation, and I'm going to be meeting with clergy and laity over the next several months, too, and not just clergy. We need the we need to have laity discern their call, because when we have the laity discerning their calling ministry. It makes the it makes the pastor's life so much easier, and that's one of the things that we have not done well as disciple and the United Methodist Church, the grassroots is the laity. And I want to encourage lady to Redis, discover your call where you're just not here to warm up a pew, you're here to do something, right? You have a Christian witness. That's right, exactly. And when you, when you're growing as a disciple, you're also going to show it out here in the in the world as well.

Sam 36:57

So I was, I'm curious to know, what are some of your self care habits. You know, your go tos to take care of yourself,

Bishop Graves 37:04

yep. One of the things I would encourage is that when you go to bed that you turn your phone off, or at least silence, you know? The other thing is, I'm a walker, so I like to walk five miles a day, and so I'm looking forward to, to to discovering some new landscape in my two new annual conferences, because you've also got to, you know, you got to get rest. I chose several years ago not to be on social media for several reasons. I'm not anti social media, but for me, that's been a real discipline. For me, another spiritual discipline for me is also my devotional life and reading, not just for preparation, preparation, but just really reading to help you know, your own spirit and and then spending time, you know, spending time with your family is really, really important. You know, one of my bishops told me one time, you know, you can give everything you can to everybody in your congregation, but at the end of the day, the people that are going to be standing with you are those family members. They're the ones they're going to be standing with you. So you got to give them your best the church. You know people are amazing. You know they they love you till they don't. But these, these family and then the close friends, and then to have, you know, then to have mentors. You know, one of the things that I learned really from Todd bolsinger, really kind of helped me formulate it, is I need to surround myself with people that are focused on the mission. They're focused on the mission more than they're focused on me. But also need to have people that are focused on me and not the mission. And when you because the mission needs to keep moving. So you need people to help, but you also need people to help you stay centered in that and to say, you know, you've kind of been negative lately, or, you know what? You know you

haven't seen to be your best. I mean, I like to have fun. I like to have joy. I don't mind conflict. I don't like to create conflict. But I don't mind dealing with conflict, because when we deal with it, we get to a better place. I'm you're going to find me. I want to. I want everybody to be involved. If we're sitting in a if we're sitting in a room and we're talking about things I'm in, somebody hadn't said anything, I'm gonna say, What do you think about this? You know, because I like to see everybody get involved in discussions, and being a bishop in United Methodist Church. Had a lot of experience in dealing with conflict, and I don't try to take it personally. People ask, what makes you mad? I think what makes me mad is to see injustice in the world, oppression, hunger, poverty, abuse. I Yeah, and the way to deal with that is for the church to be the church. I don't want to really spend a lot of time being mad. So people ask, How do we know you're mad? You know? Well, maybe I don't say much, you know, I don't want to come across speaking out of emotion, because that in our culture today, the first response is out of emotion, and I don't want to be that person that speaks out of emotion. So I hope that helps a little bit as we move forward. That's great. What do you do for fun? What I do for fun? Well, one of the things that Nancy and I like to do, but we like to go and just kind of do a fun thing on Friday. Sometimes we like to go to an antique store, and we never buy anything hardly. But sometimes we do, but I like going because I find things that remind me of my past. I remind things when I traveled to with my grandfather, the North Mississippi, the farm he grew up on, and to see the tools that they used back then or or just things that he had or my grandmother had, it just reminds me of my past. So we kind of have fun doing that. I'm a big sports person. As you can tell, baseball is my favorite sport. Of course, I'm a, I'm a, I'm a volunteer for life. And just remember, I've had to serve as a bishop in the state of Alabama and Georgia for the last several years. And so I'm out from under that War Eagle out there. Yeah, I had that too, Alabama, Auburn and Georgia. So, yeah, so college football. We love, I love my sports, but, I, you know, I'm not a golfer, you know, it takes too much time for me. I did play golf, but, you know, people, I know a lot of folks do, but fun is just kind of, really being with people and kind of having downtime and turn your phone off and kind of enjoying life.

Sam 42:40

All right, I'm gonna ask you three questions to end our discussion that you can answer quickly or however you like. What most excites you about ministry right now?

Bishop Graves 42:54

I just think what, what excites me the most is just what I just envision the future is for the church. We're in uncharted territory. We've never been here before, and that to me, some people say, gosh, I just wish we'd get to a new normal. I don't know when we're ever going to get there, but just the possibilities of the future excite me and and I just feel like God's positioned me to help other people in their role of leadership. So that's kind of what excites me, just the future of the church. Because I just believe the best days of the church are in front of it. I may not see it in my lifetime, but God has called me to plant the seeds. And so that excites me to keep moving forward. That's why you just kind of keep hearing me. We can't keep living here. We got to move on. Got to move on.

Sam 43:47

What are you learning and where are you learning it?

Bishop Graves 43:52

Well, I think where I'm learning is listening to people. You know, I was just with a pastor about three weeks ago, and just listening to his vision of what God placed on his heart to start a ministry out of a restaurant. And so they have a restaurant, but also they have a they're building and remodeling homes in the community, and they're just doing all kinds of cares and needs in the community. And so for me, where I'm learning it is, is really the collaboration. Because some people say, you know, you know, we were doing this, and we wish we'd have done it differently, and or we kind of messed up here and we learned this. But that's, that's the world we live in today, because we've never been down this road. We're building this plane as we go, and it's a little messy. And so to me, is what I'm learning is, is the collaboration with people and the conversations I'm having with people, and then to be able to take those collaborations and continue to have conversations with other people about that. So you know, if we're if you're not trying to learn today, you're gonna get lost.

Sam 45:09

Okay, finish this sentence. God is

Bishop Graves 45:13

God is at work. You know, God is at work. And I think the church is called to meet God, where God is at work, and that's different than the way we've been doing it.

45:24

it.

Sam 45:25

And can we add, God is able to do immeasurably more than we could have ever asked for or imagined.

Bishop Graves 45:32

Amen, you know, I just remember a Mother Teresa quote, you know, Mother Teresa said, you know, there's things that I can do that you cannot do. There are many things that you can do that I cannot do. God can do all things together. We can do great things. And I think she's so right.

Sam 45:54

Thank you, Bishop graves. We're really glad that you're here with us. If you'd like to learn more about anything that we've talked about today, visit our table talk website at TWK, umc.org/tabletalk. And if you'd like to add to our conversation or have a question for our bishop, we would love to hear from you. Email us at [table dot talk at TWK](mailto:table_dot_talk@TWK), umc.org, you