

Darrell Brazell
Founder and Lead Pastor
New Hope Fellowship; Lawrence, KS
Interview by Emily Stratton in Darrell's office at New Hope Fellowship; Lawrence, KS
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Transcribed by Emily Stratton

Abstract: New Hope Fellowship is a relatively new church-plant in Lawrence, Kansas. It began in 2004 under the leadership of Darrell Brazell, the current Lead Pastor. This interview features Darrell and primarily discusses New Hope's origins—the vision that Darrell had for the church, struggles and challenges that he faced in the early days as well as some that he continues to face, and how he began gathering people to be in leading/volunteering roles to get help him get the church going. The interview also discusses Darrell's heart for the church and primary focus in his ministry—overcoming various sexual addictions and healing broken marriages.

Note: Interview questions and comments by Emily are written in **bold** type while responses from Darrell are in regular type.

Alright, well we will begin then. So it is November 30th and we're here with Pastor Darrell Brazell here at New Hope Fellowship in Lawrence. And Darrell why don't we start by having you tell us a little bit about who you are, where you're from, what brought you to Lawrence... kind of that whole story.

Um, I grew up, as we were talking about earlier, I grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico mainly. And basically did a seminary program in Abilene, Texas—did my undergraduate and graduate degrees there—and then spent a few years in youth ministry and then eight years in pulpit ministry. And then we moved to Lawrence, actually with a different church, back in July of 1999, and served with that church for five years... just under five years. Or four years? Wait, four years. Sorry, it was a long time. And I resigned from the Wheatland church back in—I'll just go ahead and give you the details. I resigned from the Wheatland Church of Christ in, I think it was August of '03, and I resigned because of, just a leadership... the other leaders and I had just been in a constant struggle over direction, and primarily in a specific area of ministry that I felt God had called me to. And that was a ministry for those recovering from sexual addiction issues. And so I resigned in August of '03, fully believing that we would pull up and move to someplace else and work for a church someplace that would hire me as a men's minister, a men's pastor, or something along those lines.

And from the very beginning, even from the day I resigned, I felt a pulling, I felt a call from God was to start a church in Lawrence. And I said, 'well, that doesn't make any sense. Because how can I start another church here without drawing a line in the sand without saying choose me or choose them?' And I wasn't going to do that. One of the real strong commitments I made in, you know, my college and seminary program was that I would never split a church. But as I kept praying about it and stuff, I kept waiting on things, I kept feeling the calling, but kept... I couldn't get over that one road-block. And I don't know, about a month and a half after I had resigned, a few months after I resigned, one of the... an individual who was in one of my groups, but who was still part of the church that I had resigned from came over to my house on a Sunday evening and said, 'guess what? They made the decision to disband and disburse.'

And I was flabbergasted. One of the elders had mentioned earlier, but I thought it was, you know, kind of one of those momentary things. When I resigned he said, 'oh, well maybe we should just divide, you know, end the church.' And I was like, 'no.' I didn't think they would actually go that route.

And so when this individual told me that they had made that decision, I just pretty much had a clear voice of 'okay Darrell, now what's your excuse?' And so we started making plans. We spent most of the fall of 2003 just trying to get our minds around what it would look like, how we would go about it. And so we started New Hope Fellowship in January of 2004 and had visions of growing a, growing a large church quickly and those sort of things. And it was about a... not quite a year later, I was speaking at another church in town, at their men's group, and we were having a meal beforehand and one person asked me, 'so now that you've been doing New Hope for almost a year, what's that been like?' And it was just one of those moments of clarity where I just kind of blurted out 'like nothing I anticipated... and I'm very thankful.' Because instead of growing a large church, we'd actually dwindled down to about ten people at the time. But while we were much smaller, we had formed a community that had real freedom and real openness and the ability to really share life together. To be able to help one another get to old wounds and broken places and we were experiencing things we never knew were possible. And so it was a real—for me, personally—it was a real transition time of God rooting out lies, distortions in my life, as well. And so it was a thing where we were all growing together.

And so at the same time that the church has stayed small, our recovery groups have just continued to flourish. We probably... I don't have totaled numbers or whatever, but right now there's probably about, probably forty or fifty guys active in our recovery ministry—individuals who are wrestling with addictions to pornography, or other forms of sexual addiction. And they come here from... there's some who come from Lawrence, but the vast majority of our group members come from the region: from Emporia, Kansas City, and Topeka. For a while we had a guy who was driving up here from Wichita. In fact, we still have one guy who comes up about once a month from Wichita. And so God has just continued to open doors and provide us the opportunity to minister to individuals. I do a ton of couples counseling, and individual counseling through the recovery process. And so God has just continued to allow New Hope to be the name he's given for us. New Hope. And we've seen countless, we've seen numerous marriages that were—to be honest with you there have been several couples that when I met with them the first time and when they walked out the door, even I didn't think that the marriage could be salvaged. And now years later, one of them in particular, one person's story I can think of... he's now one of my leaders in my men's groups. And the journey that God's brought them on has just been amazing. And to see them... when I see he and his wife together, one of the things that really stands out to me is that it's obvious they really like each other. And after all they've been through, that is quite an amazing testimony to God's grace and his healing power.

And so New Hope continues, you know, has been and continues to be a light in a dark place. We have, in many respects, stayed kind of hidden. The community, well not necessarily the community, but there's just a lot of things that have gone into people not really knowing who we are or what we do. And some of that's good because it provides a certain safety and protection for those who do come here. We're starting to get a little bit more of a base for our church, though that the church and the recovery ministry are not as intertwined. So it is possible to come to New Hope and not be in the, you know, in the sexual addiction recovery ministry. But it's not possible to come to New Hope and pretend that everything is fine and that I've got all my life together and I've got it all worked out. We all acknowledge and are aware that we're all broken people with lots of hurts and wounds and need God to put us back together.

So I'm not sure exactly what you're asking for, but that kind of gives you a beginning place if that makes sense.

Absolutely. Yeah. So then I was interested in going back, kind of to that first year. You were saying that you had these plans of growing this big church right off the bat. And then after that first year, it was like, 'whoa! It's dwindled down!' and has kind of refocused. Tell me a little bit more about what was going on that first year and how those shifts started to take place.

Well it was just, to be honest with you, it was God really rooting out a lot of my own personal lies. And what I mean by that is I had some real deep-seeded beliefs that my value was based on how I was perceived by others. And so when you're in ministry, one of the most apparent signs of success is the number of people in your church. And so to have Sundays where there are only three or four adults here, it pretty well strips that away. And so it was God really bringing me to a place of understanding that I am his son, he delights in me, and that it's not based upon my outward signs of success. And so that has been very healing in my life, and that has also been able to give me a much firmer foundation to really be able to communicate that to others as well.

Okay.

Does that make sense?

Uh-huh, uh-huh. So then, during that time, how have these various ministry groups or recovery groups started going, as well as your own counseling side that you've been working on? How did those get established and how do people get connected with them?

Sure. Um, well I was already doing the men's groups even before we started New Hope. Again, that was part of what led to my resigning from the previous church. But then when we started New Hope, there was just a whole new freedom to it. That we could talk about it on Sunday mornings. We could... it was very open. Very clear for everyone that this was an integral part of the mission that God had given us here in Lawrence. As far as how individuals—well let me backtrack.

A few months into New Hope, I don't remember exactly when, my wife started a group for the wives of the men. Because the wives of the men in our groups are very hurting, very broken. They've been... invariably they feel a huge sense of betrayal, a lot of fears, a lot of questions. And so they need a safe place so that they can talk about what's going on in their lives. But there is also the reality that they are also very broken. That the reason they're... 99% of the time, there are some very significant reasons why women are drawn to men who have sexual addictions. Sexual addiction in just its basic nature is an intimacy disorder. It's the inability to have real, emotional, intimate relationships. And so the women, also through the recovery process, discover their own needs. Their own hurting, broken places. And so it becomes a place for them to heal as well. And so my wife has run that group for almost six and a half years now. And so individuals have come, couples have come, etc.

But as far as people have found us, some of it has been through, you know, other pastors sending people to us. But most of it has been, honestly, through individuals finding us on the internet. Through some different counselors in the area. We have several counselors. There's one particular counselor in Leavenworth who is constantly sending us people from military stuff over there. There's a couple counselors in the Kansas City metro and a couple in Topeka that are constantly referring couples and individuals to us. It's also word of mouth. People are in their own churches and they, you know, recognize that someone is struggling and they say 'have you heard about New Hope's ministry?' and 'no, I've never heard of New Hope.' And then they explore, and you know, we get a call.

I also do a lot of speaking. I do some speaking—there's a Men of Ours conference every year in January up in Kansas City and I speak there. And we also give away a number of free audio CDs. And our website has a plethora of free audio downloads and so when people find those, they typically will listen to some of that and find some hope... and then my phone rings.

Yeah. Yeah. And so, let's see, you were mentioning that there's the wives group and then the men's group that you're leading up. What other groups are there and is it always headed up by you and your wife?

Yes and no. We've also... I'm trying to remember. It was about five or six years ago, we discovered some materials called the Life Model material, and it's put out by Dr. Jim Wylder out in California. And it's just some phenomenal recovery material that applies in a broad perspective. Broad perspective to anyone who's struggling with any kind of addiction or trauma or abuse in their background. And so we've done a lot with their materials and in the last several years we've run this group called Restarting. And Restarting is for anyone who struggles with any kind of addiction or trauma in their past or co-dependency or painful relationships, etcetera, etcetera. And Restarting is unique in that it is a combination of a, how do I put it, the... well, Dr. Jim Wylder is just an amazing individual. He is, he refers to himself as a neuro-theologian, which is kind of, I think a term he made up for himself. But it's very applicable because he does a lot with neuroscience, with brain science. And then he's also a very able theologian. And he's done... he's been in counseling ministry for, I don't know how long, maybe forty years or more. And has just worked with some very traumatized people. And so out of that he has developed a model from a combination of things that deal both with the way our human brain works, and also the process of God's restoration.

And so we've taken those things in this Restarting course, in particular, and what it does, is it tries to help people build a recovery that's based on relationship and learning the rhythm of joy and quiet. And joy is being—it has a technical definition here in the sense of being with someone who is glad to be with you. That they've—one of the neuroscience things that we've learned is that infants are born with their prefrontal cortex, that part of their brain is absent. And what actually grows that part of our brain is this rhythm of joy and quiet, of being with someone who is genuinely glad to be with you. And what happens is whenever you... you can picture it this way. The best way to picture this is with a baby, because we all experience this with babies. You know, you have a baby—not a newborn, because their eyes aren't developed enough yet—but you know, you have a six month old baby or whatever or a year, and you're in a grocery store and you walk up behind them in the cart and they make eye contact with you and you smile. And then they smile. And you smile. And it goes back and forth. And what happens is that, the neuroscience behind it is that whenever we experience someone being glad to be with us, our brain releases a small dose of dopamine. And dopamine is the pleasure chemical. It's what feels good. Okay, it feels good. So I feel good. And so what I do is

communicate back to you that that felt good and I'm glad to be with you too. And so you get a dopamine spike and that process goes back and forth, you know, and each time it goes back and forth it gets amplified. And it's complicated to explain, but that whole process takes place at a rate of six times in a second. So in one second's time, there's been six complete back and forth transactions of joy and dopamine that feels really good. And next time you're around a small child, just watch it and you'll see it works exactly like I'm saying.

What'll happen while you're doing that is a child will get more and more excited, and then their brain gets to the point where they've had all they can have, and they'll look down and away. And it's their brain saying 'I need a rest.' But they'll only look down and away for a few seconds. After thirty seconds, maybe a minute at the most, and then they'll look back to see 'are you ready to go again?' And if the adults in their world have either modeled this in healthy ways, then they'll just naturally engage in this process with this child. Unfortunately, many adults have not been modeled that well, and they don't understand this. And so what happens, many times, is that a child comes back and he finds that there aren't glad eyes to meet them. Or what is often also the case is there might be adults that don't allow them to rest.

And so I'm kind of getting side-tracked a little bit, but this rhythm of joy and quiet is so powerful... but it's also easily interrupted. Because if the adult—if the others—are not in synchronization with them... or if they're absent or not synchronized, then what the child learns is that this isn't safe for me. Because it feels so good to have someone delight in me, but it feels so bad when that delight goes away.

But and so the Restarting, one of the basic principles of the Restarting program is helping people to understand that process and to deliberately go about it. Because the good news about it is while that part of our brain has its optimal growth in the first three years of our life, it's capable of growing our entire lives. So even an eighty year old person can grow more brain tissue through this rhythm of joy and quiet.

And so you can very deliberately put yourself in contexts and communities and relationships where you are accepted and delighted in, not based upon what you've accomplished or what you do, but just because you're God's child and we're glad for you to be here. And so that has been really foundational for New Hope. That we, you know, we believe God's called us to be a community of joy. Joy and quiet.

And so with Restarting, we've done Restarting now four... four or five times, yeah, I think at least four times. And then the second module of the thriving Recovery life program is a module called Belonging. And in Belonging, then we take it, really, in a much bigger next step where we actually do a lot more practical exercises on learning how to create belonging around us. Learning how to help people to create belonging rather than rejection. And how to learn how to recognize when their brain begins shutting down and starts pushing people away instead of inviting them in, and how to reverse that process.

And so, you know, our church and our recovery get intermingled and intermixed up at times. Because they really, they really have very similar goals. Our goal is to help people really discover who they really are in Christ, discover their own true identities, and discover the power and the beauty that comes being with people who are on that same journey.

And so the Restarting and the Belonging—well let me backtrack. But Restarting and Belonging has been open to anyone. You know, our sexual addiction recovery groups, we have a process where people come through me. They go through an intake process, etcetera, etcetera. But

Restarting and Belonging, and then, of course, our Sunday, and our Sunday morning and our Wednesday evening teaching times, you know, they're open to anyone. But so Restarting and Belonging has kind of opened a broader window to anyone who recognizes that life is hard. And things don't work the way that we think they ought to work. And that's been a real blessing for those who come and become a part of those programs.

So then, back-tracking a little bit, back to going ahead and making the decision to start this church up, um, how about kind of the logistics behind finding places and buildings and just the nitty gritty.

Well, some of... yeah, that's actually part of what God was using to call me into this ministry was that from the very beginning, literally, you know, a week after I resigned, the owner of this building actually approached me and offered this building to me rent free for six months if we chose, if I chose to start a church. And initially I, you know, told him no... that 'there's no way I'm going to do this,' etcetera, etcetera. And but that was one of the ways that, you know, that... one of the instruments that God used to call me to start New Hope here in Lawrence.

Um, logistically, that has been an amazing, confusing, crazy journey we've been on. We've been in this building from our first service in 2004, but in terms of finances and how we fund what we do, that's been more than a little crazy. In fact one of the things that we've jokingly said about New Hope many times is that we're the church of the unfunded mandate. And so we have had this big ministry for a long time and are not sure how we fund it. Over the last couple years, as we've had more and more people go through our ministry, our funding base has gotten much larger. Funds are still often month to month. There have been numerous months, in fact this last—I'd say the last six months—right at the end of each month, we're looking, 'okay, are we going to be able to pay all the bills this month?' And then right within the last day or two, or whatever the last check, or last amount we need comes through. And then, fortunately, about a month ago, we had a large—a fairly large—donation come in that's kind of been giving us a little breathing room. But we, we've learned through that process that God is faithful and he does provide for us.

There have been some lean times. There is, I guess it would have been a few years ago, that we had gotten, I don't know, I think it must have been close to six months behind on my salary. And so we were, personally, surviving because we had sold our house and there were some things along those lines. But God has always given us, you know... we've never gone hungry. We've always found a way. And we're still here, and we're getting a little stronger base all the time. And a little more clarity of doors that God's opening.

God seems to be opening a number of doors lately in a broader scope. More speaking opportunities for me in the area and other places. I've written a recovery manual that we use for our recovery ministry, and some DVDs of some teachings I've done at some seminars that are going out more and more around the country, around the world. And our website gets quite a bit of traffic, and emails from people... in fact, we have one donor from, who is, down in Australia. Listens online and sends money every once and a while. And you know, it's just strange how God works some of those things. And then I have an article coming out in January, in Leadership Journal, which is the flagship journal of Christianity Today. That's their flagship journal for pastors. And so it will come out in January and we will see... see what kind of response that gets and what doors God opens from there.

But I think one thing that I've kind of neglected to this point is that our church has not just been about sexual addiction recovery. It's just been about recovering our hearts. Again, my preaching is all online at newhopelawrence.com, and my sermons have always come back to just the biblical text and God's redemption story of how he created us of reflections of his image and his glory. And yes we've fallen, and yes there's all sorts of crud on top of each one of us. But beneath the crud is that original glory. And that's what recovery—in fact one of the things that I say, quite often, both within our recovery ministry and in sermons and teachings sometimes, etcetera, is that recovery and sanctification are synonyms. Because what we are recovering is the heart that Jesus gave us. And that's what sanctification is about. And so my sermons and my preaching has constantly been telling the redemptive story of God. How God has taken broken—you know there are, that's all he's ever had to work with is broken individuals.

Every, you know, every character in the Bible had major flaws, major problems. You know, the whole story of Joseph and Jacob and the twelve, you know, the twelve leaders of Israel originally, that is one of the most dysfunctional families you could ever be around, you know? And David's story. One of my favorite stories in the series I preached is the story of David through the lens of addiction and recovery. And one of the neat things about that is because we are small, and because our children are down stairs, I was able to preach through that probably like no other pastor in America has ever been able to preach through it. But David's whole family was just as screwed up as they come. And David, even after David and Bathsheba, you just see how David just refused to grab hold of his identity as the forgiven king and wanted to live in that place of 'Woe is me, look at everything I've screwed up. Look at my kids. They're all screwed up because I screwed up.' Rather than embracing the forgiveness God had given him, and moving into healthier and better places.

And so our, our message here, um, I believe, has had a very... a real clarity. The hope of the transformation that God wants to do in each of our hearts. And it doesn't matter how big the mess is. He's able to clean it up. And beneath the mess is always the pure gold. Because every single one of us is created in the image of a glorious God. And as we discover that, I mean, amazing things come out.

Another really exciting thing for us is, we have Jeannelle Praether, our very part-time youth, or children's minister. And I say very part-time only because we pay her very little, not because of how little she does! But Jeannelle has taken this concept of the rhythm of joy and quiet and incorporated it into our children's ministry. And so what's really cool about that, is like on our Wednesday night programs is that she's very deliberate about the structure and what the kids do. So early on, on Wednesday nights, they'll do their singing, they'll do the fun stuff. They'll do joy stuff. And then, towards the end, she moves them into quiet.

And let me back-track to where I was earlier on that rhythm of joy and quiet. One of the things from the brain science, that we've learned from the brain science studies, is that as damaging as it is for a child that doesn't get, receive joy, it's even more damaging in the long term health of an individual who if the adults in their world do not let them do quiet. If, you know for example, like if a grandpa comes in and plays with the baby. And every time the baby turns away to rest, Grandpa is 'no I'm over here!' and tickling, and those sort of things. But that is actually very harmful, because then the brain gets over-stimulated. And it becomes almost like a corrosive in the brain. And so one of the really, and the way this comes back with the children's ministry is that Jeannelle has just done a phenomenal job of working in this realm of joy and quiet, so that they end in quiet. They end with the lights down. The end with the reading of a story. Doing some kind of guided stuff with prayer time with Jesus. And the

amazing thing is... I have to children. Well, I have, now they are thirteen and eight, and have been in this for several years now since they were younger. And I've had many instances where my kids have both gotten calmly in the car, you know, after we're done doing that, that we've gotten in the car, we've driven home with very little conflict, you know, just a nice quiet time, and they've gone home and gone right to bed and right to sleep. And it's just kind of like 'wow! I've never had this experience in church, because normally they're bouncing off the walls and, you know, fighting on the way home and all that sort of stuff. But since Jeannelle's been doing this rhythm of joy and quiet, they get in the car in a very different place. And it makes such a wonderful difference for our evenings. You know, because Wednesday nights we, well, sometimes we do it at 6:30, sometimes at 7:00, but it's 9:00 by the time we get home. And, especially when our son was younger, when he was a bit younger, he needed to be in bed by 8:00, 8:30 at the latest, and so he was always at melt-down point. But while she's been doing this joy and quiet, it's been a totally different thing for him.

The other interesting thing about that is that the neuroscience science has also shown us that bonding takes place, not in joy, but in quiet. And so, it's just a neat thing to know that our kids are learning this both cognitively and experientially in ways that we hope and pray will allow them to have better and healthier relationships down the road.

Well great.... Sorry as I was jotting things down! Um, so then you were mentioning, that Jeannelle is just kind of doing some part time work. What are the roles of volunteers in this church? With kind of having that month to month budget, I'm assuming there's a lot of collaboration between people to pull things off. So in terms of building maintenance, is that something that people in the church volunteer to take of, or?

Sure. Yeah, we have volunteers that clean the building every month. We have one, one individual who retired a couple years ago from Chrysler and lives around the corner from here and is, he's been amazing as far as... he takes care of the yard and a lot of the building maintenance. And we don't own the building. We still rent it from a landlord, so if there's big stuff, he takes care of that, the big stuff. But we take care of most of the smaller stuff. And so we have, you know, it's kind of one of those two-fold things that everyone at New Hope helps in some ways, whether it be with helping with children's church, or cleaning the building, or helping with worship. There's, you know, we're a small, we're a small family and everybody chips in, if that makes sense.

Yeah. Great. And then, outside of some of the programmatic aspects of the church, what else goes on in terms of fellowship? Are there any meals that you share together? Just to get those friendships going outside of the ministry itself?

Sure. Well like last Sunday we had our annual Thanksgiving family, New Hope Thanksgiving dinner. And so that's always a fun time where we, you know, after church we go downstairs and just eat and share the day together. And so there's, you know, fellowship meals, those sort of things. There's also just more of very... oh, how do I put it... kind of a natural outgrowth of relationships of people inviting people over to their homes for meals or activities. Those sort of things.

One unique aspect that we have, that is a real struggle for us is that many of our people come from out of town. We have people who come from Topeka, people who come from Kansas City, people who come from Overbrook, etcetera, etcetera. So New Hope has kind of been the hub

that they come to. And so a lot of it is on... Sunday lunch has been a large, a significant relational connection. Usually, that's the question every Sunday: Where's everyone going to lunch? You know, where are we going today? And so that, you know, becomes a couple more hours of people fellowshiping and sharing life together.

Great, great. And then, I was also going to ask. Say I show up on Sunday morning ready for worship service. What's it going to look like? What can I expect to see?

Very, very casual. Our worship is, well, you know, our worship, honestly, is something we struggle with in many respects. One of my prayers right now is that God would send us, you know, a gifted worship leader. We've had... our history is that in the very early days of New Hope, we had an incredibly gifted worship leader back when we were so small. But he was a college student who was just home for one summer. And so we got incredibly spoiled one summer by Adam. And so actually we, and then since then, we've, at times we've used music Adam recorded. Sometimes we use Michael W. Smith or some other people. And then we've got some people, you know, we kind of go through some periods. We have some individuals in our church who do music, but they, how do I put it, right now they're not in a place to lead all the time, if that makes sense. And so we're in the place where, you know, worship is... I think the main thing that you'd find if you came here is that people are just glad to be together, and that one of the hardest things is just getting started on Sundays, because people are sharing life together.

But then we will, you know, we will spend some time together in worship and praise. And the we do share weekly communion. That has been a very, a valuable thing that, a value that we've held. That sharing communion together, sharing in the body and the blood of Jesus, through the sacraments of the bread and the wine, has been a significant part of our individual journeys, but also a significant thing for us to do together corporately. And then I'll preach. Right now I'm preaching through the book of Acts. And so the kids will head downstairs, and you know we, after communion I release the kids to go downstairs, and I release the adults to meet and greet. And so people get up and get a cup of coffee and start talking, and then we have to ring them back together again. And then I'll preach and share from what I believe God's shown me, given me to share with the people from, like I said, right now I'm preaching through the book of Acts. Just finished preaching through the book of Romans. And so I share what I believe God has shown me from the word and then we, then we leave the place and carry our conversation to Henry T's or CiCi's Pizza, or... just depends on whether the kids or the adults want out for the day.

Mmhmm, Mmhmm. Great.

But we're also, going back to the casual thing, it is a very casual place. We want anyone to come as they are. We believe that the externals of the dress, the clothes, the hair, um, body piercings, tattoos, or whatever, that those are really irrelevant. We're all people. We're all in a place where we need to be with God.

So then, kind of focusing on you, personally, what does your day to day routine look like as a pastor that's doing these counseling appointments, but also running the church, and... what does your life look like?

It's pretty crazy. Typically my days... um... typically I'll have, you know, two or three counseling appointments. And they can run the gamut from just, you know, a very enjoyable lunch with one of the guys in recovery, to a very intense couples session where the betrayals just come out and 'how do we... is it possible to put the pieces back together? Or have all the pieces of the truth come out yet?' And so there's a lot of... and I feel, we go through a lot of Kleenex boxes in this office. And so it can be a whole gamut. I could also never make it in private practice as a counselor because I don't even schedule appointments less than ninety minutes. Because I know that when we get into these messes, we need the time to work through them. So usually most of my couple's sessions will be ninety minutes or two hours long. And then in between counseling appointments I'm, you know, trying to take care of administrative things, writing newsletters, returning phone calls, um, scheduling—I hate scheduling—I so wish I had a... if I just had, if nothing else, it'd be worth it to have a secretary, if all she did was manage my schedule. So that I didn't have to constantly be going back and forth between people for times that work for me and times that work for them and those sort of things. But that's just part of my craziness.

And so as I say, in between counseling appointments I take care of administrative things, I try to study for my next sermon, for my next teaching event, or planning the next seminar or whatever it is. I'm usually writing something, whether it be a Journal World Faith Forum article or this article for Leadership Journal, or my recovery manual, or... there seems to always be something. There's always numerous projects at work in my computer. Umm... I'm a writer. And so I enjoy writing. And... so that's kind of my days.

Uh-huh, uh-huh. Sounds good. So then, I was also going to ask, do you have any memories or any stories of just any particularly joyous experiences, or particularly challenging experiences that should go down on the record? Like what comes to mind? What can we capture from your experiences?

Ohhh..... that's, that's hard. I mean, just from the standpoint of... stories is what we do. Every individual, every couple that comes to us has story after story after story. And they are sad, they're tragic, and they are amazing. And so... I'm also, you know, struggling. Do I have, do I have permission?... yeah, I have permission on this one.

I guess one of the stories that is just such a blessing to us is, as I semi-alluded to earlier, but I'd try to say... I'm trying to remember time-frame wise. I think it was about five years ago. A couple came to us. I don't think I even remember for sure how they found us. But they had just come back from Colorado from a weekend intensive as the wife had discovered his pornography use, discovered some stuff and during the time of the intensive it had come out that he had been with seventeen different prostitutes and it was a mess. In fact she got in the car and drove home and he had to find a bus to ride home. And so they started our recovery program. She was going to the wives' group, he was going to the men's group, and this went on for a couple months. And then it came out that he was still lying and hiding things. And the last thing... one of the last big blow-ups was that he had had a one night stand on, of all things, her birthday, just the week before.

And so I remember sitting in this office, and I remember she was just a mess, and he was a mess. And we talked it through. We prayed about things. She was, you know, they were here in separate vehicles. He was already out of the house. Those sort of things. And I just remember them leaving that day, thinking they're done. I mean, this is beyond, you know, this marriage is dead. It's gone. But strangely enough, that's about the same time that the husband

actually got serious, telling her the truth, and, you know, one of the things that he talked about from that point was 'I lie about everything. I lie about things that don't matter. I lie about what I had for lunch... I don't even think about it, it just comes out.' So he just started, every time he told a lie, correcting it. And learning a new patter and we, you know, I kept counseling with him, individually, and down to a couple occasionally. And for a while they were very separate. But, amazingly enough, they stayed together. And then they plugged in.

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And then they started, actually they started coming to a Wednesday night study when the first time we did a study on the Life Model. And they started opening up and sharing their stories and they both had a lot of neglect and abuse and trauma in their childhood, and they started talking about those things. And started seeing more life come into them. And that was five years ago. And now, if you met them at church on Sunday, you would have no idea that that was their story, because they're glad to be with each other, but glad to be here. God has done just such an amazing transformation in their lives. The husband has found sobriety in his sexual addiction. The wife has found healing, both from the trauma that he brought to her, but also the trauma of her childhood sexual abuse, and neglect of being disowned by her father, and all sorts of things along those lines. And it's just amazing to see, you know for me to even think about where they were that day in my office. And do see how far they have both come individually, but not just individually, but then as a couple.

And to see them now, as the husband... he's not a leader in the sense that he doesn't want to be the vocal person for any of the recovery groups. But he is such a leader in the groups because they guys in the group... just any time he opens his mouth and talks, you can just see that they just listen to him because they know. Even the guys that don't know his story yet, there's just something about him where they know that he's speaking truth. That he's speaking from an experience, from his own journey. And so the impact that they have, that he has in the group, is so much more than he has any idea of. And you know, we are seeing how that's impacting their children, even their grown children. And it's just such an amazing thing to see, to allow them... it's just one of those things where at times I have struggled, because I do, I'm in those messy places with people. And sometimes it does get overwhelming. Sometimes it's like 'okay, I've got to... I don't know if I can handle another one of these catastrophes today.' But then I think of this couple, I think of other couples that have been on similar paths. And it's worth it. Because it's so amazing to see God bring people so far.

Um, well, let me see how much more time... So then is there anything else that you'd want to share? Is there anything—any pieces of the history that I glossed over? Sometimes I go back when I'm listening to these interviews, and I'm like, 'oh I should have asked about this! I should have asked about that!... oh what about that?' Um, so are there any other key pieces of kind of the setting up or the establishing of this church that I missed, that should be told?

Yeah, well I guess maybe there would be one key element of it has been, and actually there's been... one of the things early on, for the first three or four years... three years of New Hope, I guess it was... it went on three years now. Is that we had another couple that had come through our ministry, and another individual, and they've all moved to Colorado, which is a real bummer, but a big part of our journey was that... was our Sunday nights. And what would happen is, I would put my son to bed at 8:00, and he's our youngest, and so these friends of ours, people from New Hope, they would show up at our door at 8:00, while I'm putting my son to bed. And my daughter's a little bit older, but she could read in her room and stuff, so we'd go downstairs and we would share life together. And it was our Leadership team for New Hope

and if there were decisions that needed to be made for the church or etcetera, etcetera, we would do that. But more than anything, what we did was we processed life with one another. And we shared our journeys. And there were numerous nights, even, that my wife and I's disagreements or fights or struggles kind of came in the midst of that. There were even a couple nights where she left and went on up to bed while everyone else was still there because it was just a painful place for us.

But what happened in that was that we all experienced community in a way that none of us knew community could be. And we experienced a place where, where we can be honest and open about the real brokenness in our lives. You know even just the general stuff that trips up marriages all the time. You know it was interesting because one week it might be me who was in a bad place. And then the other four would end up ministering to me. And then the next week it might be this person. That person. You know, it was never focused on fixing anyone. It was just focused on 'okay, where are we at? What's going on? Who's struggling?' And so whatever the struggle was, we would just talk and wrestle. And so most nights it was 12:00, 1:00 before they left! And it was some of those... it was just a really sweet, blessed time. I think in many respects it laid the foundation for New Hope to be a real community of grace. To be a place where we understood, experientially, that we are all broken people, and we need one another. That I'm not going to figure this out on my own. That I need you. I need others who would, you know, share their journey with me. That I can learn from their mistakes. I can learn from their wounded places. And I just really honestly said that in a lot of times I can't see it. You know, lies that we have believed from childhood.

You know, it's amazing how many times in our groups, or in this leadership group, or whatever, somebody will be telling something about themselves and about... well yeah, I can go ahead and say this one. It's like my wife. One of my wife's lies was that she believes she is bad at relationships. And every time she would say that it was like the other four of us in the room would look at each other and shake our heads, because if you knew my wife, one thing you would know from my wife the moment you met her, is that here is a woman who cares deeply about people. And if you ever spend any time around us, if you came, you know, to our house, etcetera, etcetera, you would leave there knowing that Debbie cared about you, okay? And so there was a long time when Debbie would say this and it just kept sticking in my... and then one Sunday it just, in one of our Sunday night meetings, where she, where that came out again, I said 'Debbie? That is such a load of crap!' I said, 'the problem is not that you are bad at relationships, the problem is that you are bad at bad relationships.' And it was just one of those things that came blurting out, and when I said it, the others in the room just said 'yes! That's it!' Because my wife is not a small-talk person. She doesn't, you know, she's not a surface-orientated person. She's a person that goes deep immediately. But one of her core lies out of that, is because she doesn't feel comfortable in kind of those, you know, very surface, inch deep, shallow places, she feels like she's bad at relationships. We're like, 'no, you're bad at bad relationships. You are great at relationships.'

And, you know, just using that as one example that I don't we could have gotten to without being in that community where we really got to know one another's hearts.

Mhmm. So then who comprised that leadership team that started getting together? Was that just carry over from the men's group that you were with or...

It was just, it was really people like... there was... we started New Hope with one individual. It was my wife and one individual. So really it was the three of us that were praying together and

putting the plan together. And then one of the couples that came actually is one of those neat things. It was a friend of mine who came, Harold Pierce, they used to live here. Uh, Harold and Liz Pierce. And they came to our first service, thinking they were just coming to support me. And when they were... I don't remember if it was in the parking lot or driving away after our first, first Sunday and you know, pitching the vision and stuff, and Liz just shocked Harold and said 'this is... this is the church we've always been waiting for. This is a custom-built church for us.' And so they were here at the first Sunday, they were here until they moved away. And so they were just, you know, one of the couples that God kind of brought to us. From the standpoint of leadership. And like right now, we're in the process of trying to develop a new leadership team. And it's hard because our kids are older, and our schedules are a little bit different and the other part about it is that the other three people that were on our leadership team, originally, their kids were all grown and out of the house. Or the third person was single and had no kids. So, they could come to our house from 8:00 to midnight every Sunday night. And so we, we're struggling to find what that, what the new leadership team looks like, if that makes sense.

Sounds good. Well anything else then?

Not that I know of.

Okay, well thanks for taking the time to share some of those stories with us—

Oh no, it's a pleasure.

--a little back ground, yeah.

I like telling stories.

Perfect. Well I'll go ahead and turn this off now...

(Darrell thought of another story, so Emily turned the recorder back on to capture it)

There is an interesting part about this building. And that is that it... an individual bought this building with the purpose of turning it to a commercial property, when Christ Community moved out of it. And when I was with my previous church, I found out the owner, I called them up on the phone, I had a long conversation with them and, you know, we were meeting out at, well... it's where Bishop Seabury used to be on the east side of town. Impossible to find. No air-conditioning in the summer. Very little heat in the winter. It was just a wretched place. So I was desperate to get in town, to get in something different. Anyway, I'm talking to the owner of this building and he's telling me his plans for turning it into a commercial property and making a ton of money on it. And it is on a very significant corner in Lawrence. But he hadn't been able to do anything yet. The city... he was having so much trouble with the city with rezoning and things like that, which eventually would be resolved. And anyway, I asked him 'well, what would you consider renting it for?' And he told me a number that I knew we couldn't do, and I said, you know, I just floated something out and said 'you know what? I might... could talk our people into this amount. Is there any way you'd consider it?' And there was along pause, and he said 'you know? I don't understand this, but I think God's telling me I should do this.'

So with the previous church, we rented the building. And I had several conversations with the owner of the building. You know, at different times he'd stop by, when we were moving in and different stuff, and I remember one day, we were, you know, in that initial phone conversation, one of the first things he said was 'the real value of this property is in a commercial property.'

That's where it has its real value, its real worth.' And from an earthly financial standpoint, he's exactly right. In fact, he turned down an offer at one point, I don't remember the time frame, from the Sunflower Bank that built over on Wakarusa that was a very significant financial offer. But anyway, what that comes back to though is that there was a time... I don't remember, maybe six months or a year after I was, you know, we were in the building, that I was visiting with the owner of the building and just kind of one of those moments of clarity when he said something that prompted it, and I just turned to him and, 'remember what you said about this church, about this property being too valuable'—in fact the exact words he used was 'this location is too valuable to just be a church.' And so what I told him was, I said, 'you know what you said that day?' And he said 'yeah.' And I go 'now that we're in this building, I've realized something. This location is too valuable to be anything other than a church that proclaims the grace of Jesus Christ.'

And it was just one of those off-handed clarity moments that come, you know. But on the day he offered me the building, he referenced that. He said, 'you don't know how that comment has haunted me, because I could have sold it at least twice by now. But I feel like God has told me no, this building needs to be a place where his grace is communicated in Lawrence.'