

Seth Davidson

Founder and Lead Pastor

Vintage Church; Lawrence, KS

Interview by Emily Stratton at the Vintage Church office; Lawrence, KS

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Transcribed by Emily Stratton

Abstract: Vintage Church is one of Lawrence's newer non-denominational churches. The church originally began under the name of "Heartland K-10" in 2003, as a multi-site operation to Lawrence from Heartland Community Church in Olathe, KS. But after a few years of being in Lawrence, some of Heartland K-10's leaders felt the call to shift Heartland K-10 into an independent church-plant, rather than continuing to be a branch of Heartland Community Church. In this interview, Seth Davidson, the lead pastor and founder of what is now Vintage Church, discusses how he worked with Heartland Community Church to phase Heartland K-10 out of Heartland Community Church and turn it into Vintage Church. Other questions discuss Seth's vision for what Vintage would become and what the church is like at the time of the interview (what its services are like, how the church functions as a community and what kinds of fellowship, service, or activities people in the church do together).

Note: interview questions and comments by Emily are written in **bold** type, while Seth's responses are in regular type.

Alright, so it's going... Anyways we're meeting here at the Vintage Church offices in Lawrence, meeting with the Head Pastor, Seth Davidson, and we'll get going. [reads permission statement] ... so then do you consent to participation?

I do consent!

Okay, great. Well Seth, then, why don't we go ahead and get started and can I have you tell me a little bit about your background, just who you are as a person, where you grew up, and what brought you to Lawrence?

Yeah, sure. Um, grew up, was born in the late seventies, so still kind of young as a pastor. Grew up in a great home, my folks are still together. We were, it was a Christian family and that's obviously shaped who I am, um, quite a bit. We've been in Kansas—I was born in Topeka—we've had a few stints in Colorado and California, but for the most part, we've been in the Kansas City area. I did athletics and debate and different things in high school as well as getting involved with YoungLife, which is a nondenominational Christian ministry. That kind of sparked my interest in doing ministry as a career.

I went to Kansas State, the other Kansas school—

--Rival!

That's alright! I was an English major, but knew I wanted to do ministry, so out of college I went to Liberty, Missouri—another small college town, just twenty five minutes north of the KC

metro—and was there doing youth and college ministry. I met my wife there and we were married in 2005, so, married five years. We just adopted a son in December, so I'm a new dad. It's awesome! Love it. It's very demanding, but very, very cool.

We've been in Lawrence, it'll be going on six years in January. So yeah, love Lawrence. At first it was kind of challenging, with the whole KU/K-State thing, but there's something in the water here and I've now turned to the dark side, according to my Wildcat brethren. And my wife is an avid Jayhawks fan. And so, love being in Lawrence, love the town—the diversity. And it's great being here, so... is that good enough?

That's good enough! Um, then why don't we go ahead and... I was reading on the website about Vintage's beginnings as just the College Community group up on campus and what can you tell me about that? How did that get going?

Yeah! That started, um, it had to have been ten to twelve years ago. There was a group of college students who were connected at a church in Kansas City that we called Heartland Community Church. Used to be at 83rd and Lamar but has since moved into Olathe. Basically 151st and Merlin. But that's where I grew up going there, or got connected in college, they had a vibrant college ministry. And so this group of students would continue to go from Lawrence back to Heartland because they didn't find a church home that, really, they thought, that was kind of what they were looking for. And so Heartland started this group, College Community, it was just a presence on campus.

At the time, one of my best friends, Isaac Anderson, was leading that group, or got connected with them. So I think they started out just praying, and they'd get together on Sunday mornings in Wescoe Hall, and just a smaller group of anywhere between eight to ten, maybe upwards of thirty to thirty five people. So that's where it started.

Kevin Cloud took that over when they planted Heartland K-10 Church. And it was really this group of College Community folks who got connected there, and that church was in Olathe. And the original vision was to reach Olathe, Desoto, and Lawrence communities with kind of a Heartland Church out west. And it was that College Community group and maybe five young families who got connected to Heartland K-10.

Did I share enough about the College Community piece? Um, that was your original question, I guess I'm going a little further than that...

Oh, you can always take the questions in any direction you want to. Um, of course I'm always open to more elaboration, but, by all means, feel free to run with the questions in how you see fit.

Yeah, well I had very little experience with College Community, other than one of my closest friends leading it. And I did come and speak probably eight to ten years ago, just when it was that little group in Wescoe Beach, or Wescoe Hall. I came on board when Heartland K-10 had been around for a few years, and they were realizing that it was too much to assume that college students or Lawrence community would drive from Lawrence into Olathe, particularly, folks that, you know, might, might be you non-Christian or kind of exploring their faith or wanting something a little bit different.

And kind of the thought was that there are great churches in Lawrence, but very few with any that seemed to be reaching the kind of person we wanted to reach... maybe, maybe young, maybe a little bit less 'Christian' in their upbringing, less traditional, nondenominational sort of thing. So, but realize that even if Christians would make the trek, those who were seeking wouldn't. And so the thought was, 'well can we create a Heartland K-10 presence in Lawrence?' And so it was, again, this College Community group that started out more as freshmen and sophomores that by now were seniors graduating. They were part of that launch team for probably a year, year and a half, they thought about 'what would it look like to do a second site out here?' And I came on after they had begun doing some trial services and, so they'd been going three months before I got on board. That would have been fall of 2005... I think September 2005 was when it began.

They met in Smith Hall, kind of the big, the big room that was a neat feel, kind of a seating on three quarters of the room and that worked really well. And the strategy at the time was they would begin a Sunday night service—so the same preacher, same musicians, same media elements, everything would just kind of drive down K-10, set up shop there, and do a service for the Lawrence community. And it wound up being mostly college students because it was on campus, that's who, who came. So, I think that went fairly well with it. In three or four months they about maxed out Smith Hall, you know, seventy or eighty folks. And they, they had an intern—a post college intern—who was in charge of that community, who wound up saying, 'hey, I don't think this is for me.' Um, so he bailed—had to do with being interested in a girl somewhere—and you know, I mean, it wasn't a bad thing, it just wasn't the right fit for him.

So that's when I came, and it started January 1 of 2006. And it's been a cool, cool journey, um, over time trying to grow and expand the age and demographics of our church community. We continue to come back to just the idea of our mission statement, which is 'Connecting those who are spiritually disconnected to an authentic community of faith in Christ.' And so early on, we realized that we weren't really able to reach a broad subsection of the Lawrence community because we're on campus. So it's convenient for students, but not for non-students. So, but the one place where, I think, kinda, everyone can come and feel welcome... when you think of Lawrence, you think of Mass Street, to be honest. And so we thought, 'well? We think students will come to Mass, but we don't think the masses of Lawrence will come on to campus.' So we made the decision early on to move to the Lawrence Arts Center, which is kind of one of those—it's funny looking back, but, you know, it was going to cost us about \$20,00 a year in rent, and we didn't know if we could afford it! But we knew that we needed to make a step like that and our, kind of by then we had some young married couples and, you know, we were trying to grow a core group of families. So we did! We moved into the Lawrence Arts Center, and that was a great home for at least a couple years. And, and you know, it was, it turned out as we thought. It was kind of a neutral ground where people would come and we didn't lose momentum with students, but we gained momentum with Lawrence's families.

A few years—probably three years—into our little Lawrence Heartland K-10 thing, we realized, again, that... kind of coming back to that mission, we were a multi-site church, we were called Heartland K-10 in Lawrence, 'well what does that mean? What does K-10 highway have to do with your church? Are you the Heartland church at Vermont and 7th Street?' No... so that, that name didn't serve us well, and even the way we were doing services... though about 90% translated to Lawrence, there was a good 10% that didn't. Can you bring out a speaker from Olathe? Um, really likeable, but people, kinda, in Lawrence could sniff out that this isn't one of our own, or you know, kinda like an imported Olathe church. And so, coming back to our mission, we said, 'well, maybe the best thing to do would be a true church-plant.' And that's what we opted to do, and Heartland K-10 who became, kind of, our parent church, was on

board with that. Because they thought it was the best way to reach our community and so I became the head pastor at that time and we created a three-year plan to kind of wean off from that. Because we, you know, they did all our books, and our organization, and brought out a lot of stuff for our services and so it took time to get all of that in order. But it's been great because I feel like we've planted a church on training wheels. You know, they say that probably 85% of church-plants don't make it past the first three years. And it's, it's hard work! No doubt about it. And it's even so much more so because, well when there's not a tithing base, finances are hard. When there's only one full time person, and you're trying to start a church, and preach every week, you know, that's a lot happening there.

And so, for our first three years, I didn't have to worry where my salary was coming from. I didn't have to speak every Sunday. And so it really gave us time to kind of get established as a church, and by the time that three years was up, which was probably our five years into being here, we were an autonomous church, and adopted the name 'Vintage.' Thought that would fit with Lawrence, and fit with who we are. That's been important to us from the beginning that we would be authentic to ourselves. And so the name Vintage comes from John 15, which is Jesus saying 'I am the vine, you are the branches.' So Vintage means 'of the vine.' But it also, culturally, means it's kind of that 'old but new.' So our hope is to take the unchanging truths of the gospel, kind of that old, and then translate it in ways that might be new and relevant and speak to people today and um, you know, to be creative with how we, how we teach, how we come across. Just, in the same way, we want to represent who we are, who Christ is in us, we want to do so for our community in ways that are unique to Lawrence. And so that's kinda, that's kinda our story, where we've been...

About a half a year ago we outgrew the Arts Center, and moved to Central Jr. High School that had more space and could be a place where we could be for quite, quite some time. And we enjoy it. It kinda has that vintage vibe. And it's still in the heart of down—maybe not 'the heart'—but pretty close, I mean, it's still downtown, you know, so.

So hopefully I answered a number of questions there! But that's a little bit of the history there...

Yeah, yeah! Absolutely, and I was jotting down some ideas for things to follow up on as you were going on. So, jumping back a little bit, um, to when you kind of first hopped on board in 2005, tell me a little bit about what led you to join up with this and, and just some of what was going on with you, personally.

Yeah! Yeah, well personally, um, I was... I had been part of another church for five years. And for the first three or four that was a perfect fit. Um, really, and it's really a great church, great people... but personally, I got to be in a place where I went through some hard, hard stuff and that, that I had to wrestle through a bit of—and crisis of faith is a too strong, but anything less probably isn't strong enough. I mean, I had to...I, I kind of went through some challenging things there, and the church was great and kind of helped me through that. But one of the things I was wrestling with was that it was part of a 'seeker church,' which basically is the idea that we do a Sunday service for non-Christian seekers, quote-unquote, and then we'd do a mid-week 'believer' worship service. And just thinking about people today, I mean if, I think if people are... I mean, people are interested in spiritual things, and so if they want to check out Christianity, there's just this thought that's kind of deep in me of 'well, they want the real deal.' They may not agree with where we're coming from, but at least give us, at least be yourselves around us. And I'm not saying anything bad about the seeker church, I'm saying for me, one thing that was going on was 'okay, we need to do that together.'

I always want to be reaching out to folks who don't know Jesus, but I would hope I could have the same conversation with a Christian that I could have with a non-Christian. And so the idea of doing that altogether, just the church to be the church, that was a big thing that was going on in me. So that, but I was, I was kind of in that, kinda in between place, trying to figure out what the next step was... I wanted more than to just be a college pastor, but I didn't think I was ready to be a head pastor. Um, I had kinda jettisoned, wanted to be part of a seeker church, but I didn't want to be a part of a traditional church, so I was just kind of in this limbo place. I knew I was called to ministry, but wound up stepping down from that church after taking a couple weeks to just think and pray and... had been given permission from my church to do so and they, the pastor said, 'if you want to be here, we want you to be here, but we want you to be *here*.'

And uh, during that time I just felt like God was saying, 'go into a land I will show you.' It's Abraham, in Genesis chapter 12. I felt like that was an invitation, so I left that post, but didn't know where I was going to wind up. So it was a step of faith, but just knew it was right. And during that three months, kind of in between things, that's when I proposed to my wife, and worked as a painter, making a little extra money to pay for the wedding ring, and my buddy Kevin Cloud gave me a call. And I knew about Heartland K-10, I didn't think I was interested in Olathe, but when he mentioned Lawrence, and the college town, and when he said, 'hey, we'll do this together,' this kind of partnership model, that really intrigued me. And so to me, it seems like God—a God thing—and kind of, I had a three to six month window, where I would have been available at the same time that's the same three to six months they were starting, and their lead guy decided not to continue... and so it just seemed like that was God directing me here. Um, and I've love, loved being here.

So that's what was happening personally. And just as the church, you know, I was really excited about Lawrence. I really thought there was a unique niche we could meet. Kevin was open to the idea of being what we call more 'missional' rather than that kind of 'seeker' background that I came from, that would let me be more of a 'shepherding' pastor than a, you know, lead CEO-style pastor and so all of those things just seemed like the right, right fit and Lawrence was just a very compelling location, so that, that brought me here.

My fiancé at the time also said, 'I think you should go, and if you do I will go with you.' And that was one of those other confirming kind of things all coming together so...

Well neat. Um, I was also interested in, in hearing a little bit more about this three-year weaning plan, and how that kind of took shape and what that looked like. Could you elaborate a little bit more about that?

Yeah, absolutely. Um, well it was wrestling early on because we sat out to do one thing, which was to be a multi-site church, trying to share resources to maximize impact and, but that became a bit challenged in, like I said, of 'okay, if we're going to reach Lawrence, some needs are a little bit different.' So we were, things were kind of, there was some tension. I would say healthy tension, but things we were wrestling through. But to Kevin and Heartland K-10's credit, it didn't take them long to, particularly when—I felt for a while like I was between all of our congregation and Kevin and the mothership and I was kind of trying to be the go-ahead. But as soon as I kinda said 'yeah, I think we need to do something different,' to Kevin's credit, he said 'yeah, I think if we're going to follow our mission, I think that makes sense. And if you feel like you're called to be the leader, um, then we can sign off on that.'

And so the three-year plan, I mean, the first year was more—they continued to do, Kevin continued to teach quite a bit. Probably more like half time, or a third of the time, instead of two thirds or three quarters, but he still taught quite a bit. We did all the books! All the infor—all that stuff stayed in house. Um, and we took, we challenged our congregation to give, but they would still give to Heartland K-10 and so that was year one that we started kind of weaning off.

Year two was, as best we could, we took on things ourselves. So we began the process of transferring books. We hired an administrator at that point, a ten hour a week administrator. Um, I spoke more. We did our own series, instead of Heartland K-10's. Um, and our goal at the end of the year was to be completely through those transitions.

And then year three was Heartland K-10 would be available as needed. And I think, each year they progressively would give less from their budget towards ours and we progressively needed to supplement that, um, and by year three, we were pretty close to being on our own. And definitely by the end of the year we were completely on our own. We continued to—I continued to—to meet with their staff that first year, year and a half, and after that I kept meeting one on one with the pastor throughout the end of our time.

So, that was... it's like training wheels! You know? I mean, most, most places kind of, you hit the ground running with nothing, and here we had, you know, we were really fortunate. So..

Cool. That's great. So then a couple times you've mentioned that you have this desire to be able to reach out to Lawrence, in ways that are really unique to this place. So what is that calling? What is this unique outreach in Lawrence? How does that take shape?

Yeah, yeah. Well, just knowing the culture of Lawrence, I mean, there are certain things that anyone who lives here realizes. I mean, one, it's, it's a highly educated community. So most people have at least an associates degree or at least more-so... Politically we're more left, we're more, you know, a blue dot in a sea of red, sort of thing. So that takes shape in terms of who we are. We're pretty young. The median age is twenty five. And so, so knowing some of those things about our culture, um, we want to embody that a little bit. And not even so much... I mean, we're not just trying to do that because we're trying to reach folks, though we are, that ultimately also embodies us a little bit. Now I'm not saying we're all twenty five or democrats or whatever. If anything, we've really tried to strike a balance because, though Lawrence is those things, it's also... it's so diverse. I mean, it's, it's kind of a microcosm of a large city all within, you know, ten city—or ten mile radius-ish. And so there, there is just a lot of diversity and so we would hope that instead of polarizing—whether it's politically or, or anything else—to kind of seize that excluded middle. Um, and to say that we're different and that we're unique and that's okay, because, um, we, we value Jesus and his kingdom and, and we won't always agree on certain things. We want to stay true to those essential things, which are written on our website, but there are a ton of nonessential things.

And so we've tried to be a place that epitomizes balance and that we're able to dialogue and debate. And you know, at the same time, we do think that people may not—even if they don't agree with you—they ate last want you, want you to stand for something. And so we... that's part of trying to, when we come together on Sundays, we, we do want to encourage people, we want to challenge people, but according to Jesus and the scripture, not according to preconceived, kind of, groups that we tend to... we want to, we want to say, 'okay, you're politically this way,' or you 'do this!' or you know, we would try to... there are certain things that

Jesus, in the scriptures, stands for. That there are a lot of things that we, because we come from a certain perspective, individuals would say, 'well because I see it this way, Jesus must as well.' And I don't think that's the way, the way it is.

So that's kind of, I would hope to be kind of our ethos and our values. We do value the arts. And so, I mean, Lawrence is very artistic, as well as, I think, God is the ultimate creator. And so we're going to give a, a message to try to share with people... the arts can help to do so. Both in terms of reaching people, but also in terms of illustrating truths, maybe in a, a new and different way. So we attempt to do it in that manner.

Um, if you show up on Sundays we have, you know, a 'rock band.' And part of that's, I mean, I think that's unique in, in Lawrence. But also, that's just kind of who we are. We've got a number of artists and we just kind of like that style of music. We'll use some video pieces.

We also, in my 'seeker' background, we kind of got a way, we kind of did away with all the, anything traditional. And I think, to some degree, we're a rootless generation. You know, half of, half of folks in this upcoming generation grow up in broken homes. And so there is a desire to rooted somewhere and we try to go into the storehouse of church history and take things, whether it's the Lord's Prayer or creeds, or different things, that, you know, if it's just rote, and it's just something to do, that can be—has been—a turn off for folks. But if you can get a the why behind what we're doing, if you can explain those in ways, then the younger generation, especially, we've found some affinity to that because it provides some roots, that otherwise might be rootless.

So those are a few things about maybe how that takes shape. Every Sunday when we're together we assume that non-Christians are there, so we're glad that they are. We want them to feel welcome. At the same time, we assume that they're there because they want to encounter Jesus or see authentic Christianity and so it's a part of being ourselves. It's... because we'll try to be ourselves... and let them eavesdrop into the conversation. Let them know we know they're there and are glad. But to try, try to keep... keep kind of the message high, to let scripture speak for itself. Maybe to be... I try not to be extremely academic in terms of using that language, because I want it to be accessible, but we want to give people depth when they come. Because... we've got a document that is, you know, two thousand years old, written in, I mean, it's an amazing book, and spiritual truths are buried deep and so we would hope that we would give a lot of depth there too. And know that sometimes people won't agree and that's, that's okay. You're, you're loved, but kind of to do our best to be authentic to Jesus and to the faith and to invite others in...sort of thing.

I don't even remember what your question was, but...

No no no, you're doing great! I was talking about what made the, the Lawrence scene unique, so--

Yeah.

So, so it was good. And kind of touching on what you were finishing up with, so if I were to show up on a Sunday, what would it look like? What's kind of the order of the service? And, I know you mentioned having this artistic emphasis and a rock band, and being welcoming but a little, a little bit more detail would be great!

Yeah. Yeah our hope is that you would show up and be greeted by folks, not necessarily the person handing out the bulletins, but we would hope that we're all just a welcoming community that enjoys being together. And you can grab a cup of coffee and meet some new folks and walk inside and, um, if we had a liturgy, so to speak, generally we have a song that the band performs—a worship song that the congregation would participate. Then there's a welcome, and so, do a few announcements, welcome newcomers, give people a chance to greet. Generally, we'll do two more songs, though we do change service order depending on if there's a better way to make a point or do communion at the beginning rather than at the end. But generally we've tried to craft it so that the worship kind of draws people in, you know, those first three songs. Then maybe an artistic piece. Um, you know, maybe a media that someone has put together. A song that goes with the message. You know, what we did last time... we're in a series called Follow Me that's about discipleship and so it was some quotes from the Bible, also some quotes from, you know, some ancient rabbis and things, and then just footage of um, you know, someone walking kind of in Galilee to 'Walk With Me' was the song by Caedman's Call. So that just kinda, kinda helps people transition to 'okay we're talking about this idea of what it meant to be a disciple' and springboard from there into looking at the lives of the men who walked with Jesus and what that might speak to us. And so those lead to the message, where we share for about thirty, thirty five minutes, a biblical message that hopefully is relevant and challenging and helps people understand scripture, and then apply it in some way. And we hope that then the message leads into communion. And so that, you know, in the Protestant-evangelical realm, we kind of got away from traditions, even including communion, which is the one thing Jesus said 'do every time you meet.' Which isn't that—I'm not attempting to put down people who view it differently, I'm just saying we would hope that instead of the sermon being the high point of the message, where some skilled person gets up and speaks eloquently, that communion would be the high point. That the worship and then the exposition of scripture would lead to encountering the reason of Christ through communion. And so it's a time where we can, as individuals and as a community, you know, repent of things that we need to. Kind of, own our confession of the faith when we take the bread and the wine and hopefully encounter God through that. And we'll have two songs at that point as people come forward during that and um, you know, then there's... at the end I'll thank people for coming, I'll maybe contextualize it a little bit and then send out with a, just a blessing. So, yeah, well we hope to be ourselves, kinda be authentic as we're attempting to follow Jesus. We hope to always be welcoming. We hope to, maybe, communicate the old truths in ways that are accessible, and then to kind of send out our folks with the idea of 'we've been blessed by God as his family and our charge is to be a blessing to the world' and so that hopefully church isn't just an hour on Sunday, but that we are the church, and we go out into the world, and that sort of thing.

Cool, cool. Um, well back-tracking just a little bit, obviously you have great, great connections with Heartland, um, but in starting up did you, in terms of other churches that were in Lawrence, was there any tension, or was there support from other bodies around in the Lawrence area, or just smooth sailing? Did anyone think that you were going to be pulling members away from their churches by setting something up?

Yeah, that's a good question. In general, I felt quite welcomed by the churches in Lawrence. You know, another thing unique to Lawrence is we're fairly unchurched. I mean, on a given Sunday only 30% of the population goes to church. And so what that means is we can have as many churches—I mean, there's a great need. And so I, as best as I can tell, most churches and pastors have that idea, and that default. So I've experienced a 'kingdom-mindedness,' a blessing, a 'hey, you do what you do, we'll do what we do,' um, I meet with a group of pastors,

we meet once a month and, I'm there probably four or five times a year because it is hard to make the time. But, it's kind of... we, we want to be unified in that.

That isn't to say there weren't a few churches, or a few leaders that didn't feel threatened. I had a few encounters, um, I remember one where we were, we were outgrowing, well, we wanted to move from campus and so I, we wanted to move downtown and one option was some different churches and most churches were at least cordial and friendly. One church felt a little threatened because we were reaching young people and... But, that was one out of many that did not respond in that way. So in part of that is as humans we, we have that... and I think it's helped that over time, at first though people were quite—though many were quite—welcoming, there was a sense of 'are you going to be here in two or three years?' And, and people want to make sure that if new churches are coming that there's a, just hoping that it's orthodox, that it's solid, that it's not, kinda some, not just fly-by-night, or kind of steering in a different direction. And I think over time we've developed trust and credibility and community as well. So in general, I think there's enough things that Christians have to be worried about that, often there's enough darkness in our world, but also in Lawrence, that hopefully that which is light can be, can be pockets of light in different places and in general, I think the churches felt that way. And, and I felt that in the church in Lawrence.

Good. Um, so my next question would be branching just beyond the Sunday evening services, what are the other programs that Vintage does? I remember seeing on the website some home groups or small groups or what kind of ministries and other organizations come out of here?

Yeah, for sure. Um, we do have small-groups. Some are co-ed and meet in homes and are generally families, post-college. And then we also have discipleship groups that are generally same-gender, and often times are for college and high school only. So we do want to get people connected there because, you know, we grow more in the midst of community. And, you know, it takes people who have been around a little bit longer to want to share with others, and also just to, you know, we would go through hard things and if we're isolated, it's so easy to get picked off, one by one, but if you're surrounded by people who care about you, that can help, you know, so we try to get people plugged in there.

We do have what we call our Leadership Team that are the leaders of all the ministries, so that's our Road Crew that sets up and tears down and, or, our Connect Group that tries to help welcome people and get them connected, or, you know, just all of those things. We meet with a group of leaders one time a month and try to support them and encourage them and we encourage everyone in the congregation to be involved with volunteering in some way. In ways that they're gifted, hopefully. Um, because part of the spiritual life is... you can't always receive. You've gotta pour out so that you can receive. And we're like sponges. There comes a point where we get saturated and we have to pour out. So we encourage people to serve in our church.

And one thing we're moving toward more and more is just realizing the kingdom of God is much bigger than our church or other churches and so sometimes we can, without trying to say 'okay if you're going to do your Christian work, we'll you've gotta serve in OUR church to do so' and we don't try to do that, but that can just come across. And so we've tried to push back and say no, we want to be a missional community. We want to be about Jesus' mission and his mission isn't just building our little church. And so we, we try to encourage people to do... you know this, in October, there was an orphans run that supported orphans from Kenya and so we

encourage folks to do something like that. There's a guy in our community who—I'm sorry, that was with Ethiopia—the guy from our church community, this summer, a college guy went to Kenya and really had a heart for a group of people there and so he's trying to start a non-profit, the Dandoori Orphans Project, and so we've tried to encourage that and say, 'no! Do that! I mean, that's really going to make an impact in our world, how can we support you?' So we're trying to be more intentional about things like that, what would be kind of what I would say is 'missional.'

So sometimes, maybe just paradigm-wise, oftentimes people think of church just as 'something I go to.' We hope to be a place where church is something that we are and then we get sent out from there. And so, we want to view our church kind of as maybe more of a missionary outpost in our culture and then to make a difference in our city, in our world, for the cause of Christ. And that means sharing the good news with your words, and that means being the good news with your life, and that means taking the good news, in tangible ways, to the poor and the oppressed and the marginalized. And you know, within Christianity, it's been polarized to some degree in the last forty years as some 'social gospel' or evangelism. And, I just don't see any dichotomy in scripture...and it, it's both. And I think, I think the church in the West, at least portions of it, are coming to that realization and trying to do that more, to be honest. But that's really important to us, and so we want to do that and to kind of be blessed to be a blessing.

And, you know, part of that is strategy—if you will. I'm convinced that non-Christians in Lawrence aren't really going to take us, the church, seriously if we're not concerned about the same things they're concerned about, which by the way, are things that Jesus was concerned about. So, whether it's stewarding the earth, or caring for the poor and oppressed, I mean, there is a strategic purpose—if we're going to reach our population that doesn't know Christ, we need to be doing those things. But it's not just that. I mean, scripture says 11,000 times, 'care for the poor.' And if it was important to God, and I fit was important to Jesus... if the kingdom is bigger than just building my little church and getting Bibles in the pews, I mean, I think he's really... I think that's really important to the God whom we serve. So we want to try and do that. I don't think we do that perfectly, I don't think we do it well yet, because our default as people, and as Christians, is to be concerned about ourselves, first and foremost. But, we would hope that more and more are being challenged and becoming like him when we're together. And that as that happens, we'll know he'll change us too, going out and into the world.

And so this social gospel or evangelism is one of those balance 'both and' rather than a, an 'either or' sort of thing. So, those, those would be... it would be hopefully less programmed, like 'here's something the church does' and more grassroots of 'hey what's God doing in your heart and how can we support that?' I don't care if it has the name Vintage on it, I care that the kingdom is being expanded and that those who are lost are hearing the good news and those that are suffering are being met in Jesus' name, and so to go do that.

So we've got all... there's the YoungLife program, or ministry here in Lawrence and a lot of leaders go to our church and you know, I've had leaders come up and say 'how can I get more involved in Vintage?' and I say 'well, now here's some ways, and we'd love for you to be involved, but you're already pretty involved. Why don't you keep doing YoungLife? And keep coming to our small-groups, so that you can be poured into, but don't spend five hours serving a church, spend those five hours at Free State High School, loving on high school kids.' Let's call that kingdom ministry. I mean, there are a ton of non-profits in Lawrence, and everybody needs volunteers, everybody needs money. And a lot of those are doing things far better than we can do by ourselves. So if we can encourage... I mean we, we said, especially at Vintage with a lot

of younger folks, we are energy and passion-rich, and financially we're not so rich. And so, you know, it's okay. And even in terms of, we've only been around six years and, I mean, three are other things out there that are doing really effective ministry and how can we support that? How can we send people into those things? You know, again, who cares what name is on it if things are happening and... we got a lot of room to grow, but that would be our heart and our hope, sort of thing. So... does that answer your, your question?

Yeah, no. That's awesome. Um, and so then, um, on the financial aspect of being this missional community, and supporting these other organizations, are... I remember reading that there's kind of a 10% tithe that will go towards supporting those, so what are those other things that are being supported is that going into YoungLife, or Dandoori, you mentioned, um, could you just list some of those orgs that you...

Yeah, absolutely. Um, well if we were, if we were doing what I would hope we were doing, our congregation would be tithing 10% to Vintage. And then Vintage, in a sense, would be tithing 10% out into the community. I'd love for that to be more, and over time we'll get there, but what we do currently is, this is our 6th year, and so we give 6%, and next year it will be seven. Um, but we do, YoungLife we support financially on a monthly basis, there's an organization in South Africa where there's a soup club that we sponsor that feeds kids on a monthly basis and we support that monthly, and then we have some resources set aside that we can kind of give to special projects, so, the Dandoori Orphan Project had an event that we were able to contribute financially to that. And we do some, some things like that. We've tried to support Central Jr. High, I mean it's kinda like, I mean, we, we kinda like being a, being in the school. That's part of our mission field and so mostly what we've done is, they've said, 'it'd be great if you could provide meal—provide breakfast—for our teachers, because there's not a budget for that a few times a year.' So we've started doing that. Over time I'd love to find ways that we could support more and better, but right now, it's like, they're happy as a clam that we're supporting them that way.

Over time, what I'd love to do if, as we're being more of a missional community, have some of our small-groups adopt, maybe a ministry or a partnership. And so, you know, let's say a Tuesday night house group gets passionate about the Leo Center or the Humane Society or somewhere else, well, what I would love to do is encourage them to do so. Have them make a difference, kind of in a grassroots way, and then they would kind of request resources based upon what they needed. And so hopefully that's a more organic, empowering way. But that resources then go to things that we're already a part of, relationally, that we believe in and try to support, and for the congregation to, to for those things kinda that God births in them, for them to be able to do. Um, we're not quite there yet. I mean we need more definite, we need to figure out what some of those things are, we need to have ways of... and that's one thing, doing that as a group of people, I think what'll filter... I mean, there are 127 non-profits in Lawrence. Most, if not all, are pretty worthy! You can't support all of them. You've gotta prioritize some way. And so what we're trying to come up with, 'okay, here are the types of organizations we would want to be involved in,' not organizations specifically, but 'here are values, here are things we want to have happen. Okay! You guys figure out what that is for you to serve... okay, so we're behind that because you're behind that.' And so that's, in the future, that's where I hope more of our money would go to, as we empower people to do things. But it's, it's a journey getting there. Hopefully by our, by our tenth year, we'll be at 10% and we'll be doing more of these sort of things. Right now it's, when something comes up and we feel led, we support it financially with that remaining portion. So that's, that's where we're at up there.

Good well, I am interested now in a little bit more about those small-groups. Um, how do they take shape, are they kind of Bible-study focused, fellowship-focused, a little bit of both, or, what do those look like?

Yeah it's all, all across the board. And part of that is a real strength that we've had. We've just kinda let people, we've said, 'okay now you're a leader, we, we trust you to go do that.' And therefore they can be fairly diverse. And we would hope that there is a Bible-study and/or growth component, we would hope that there's a fellowship component there. And so we've kind of unleashed people to do that and that's been good. We're actually at a time where we're really needing to rethink a lot of that because we have more people wanting to get involved than we have space for. And we've not done a very good job of bringing up and training new leaders to lead more groups.

And so, we're at a point where, I mean we've got fiver or six mid-week house groups and we've got probably twelve to fifteen small, same-sex discipleship groups. And I think that's great for the people who are involved, but we're needing to create more ways for people to be involved, more ways to create leaders, and maybe a bit more, be more strategic with the groups because over time, you know, our default is just to kinda, kinda get inward focused, that's just what we tend to do as people. And so that's what we do as Christians. But to find ways that we can counteract that in our lives and in our church.

And so one thing we're trying to do there's, we have a strat—a community strategy team that's trying to rethink this and try to think 'okay, what are we trying to do? Why are we trying to do it this way?' And still keep an organic nature, but say 'okay you can do whatever you want, but it needs to be these things.' And so some groups might study a book in the Bible, some people might read a different piece of Christian literature, some that might be more kinda life on life, and to have some flexibility there, but to say, 'okay, every group needs to have at least seasons in which they're open to have new people come and every group needs to have some way in which we're outward focused, to become more small-missional communities where we're serving.' And so we're trying to rethink some of that, just trying to be a little bit more, more specific. Because if we're, we're going to bring on more leaders to get people connected, we just need a bit more clarity there to be able to support them better.

So we're in a bit of a time of transition. And I think that will help us do some of the things I've mentioned. But that's, that's kinda where we're at right now.

Okay, so for those that are leading the small-groups right now, are those all part of the Leadership Team?

Mmhmm.

Okay. Got it. Um, let's see. Why don't we.... Sorry as I'm trying to collect my thoughts here! I take this long awkward pause...

Sure!

I was noticing we're approaching an hour, so I don't want to take up too much of your time, but...

Well, it's, it's up to you... I've got a phone call at 2:45, but I'm okay until then.

Alright, okay great. Um, well why don't I just have you... are there any stories, any, any specific challenges or any great victories that you can recall from your own time as being a part of this church? That um, that we should have recorded?

Yeah, absolutely. Um, there are a number of cool stories that have happened. Um, one that comes to mind is a kid by the name of Brian. And I won't give last names, but Brian, you know, grew up in Lawrence, was involved in churches, but it never took root for him. When he was in high school, he went through kind of a bad break-up, kinda just chucked the whole God thing. But through that time his younger brother was involved with a Bible study with a gal named Jamie who's one of our leaders, and he just, he doesn't even know why, but he called her up and kind of hit this rock bottom place and just said 'hey can we get together?' and so Jamie and her husband John started meeting with Brian. This would have been three or four, probably four, four years ago now and so through their relationship Brian started coming to church and he kinda, he's a real intellectual dude, so just didn't think science and faith and all that fit together. But through this friendship with John and Jamie, they helped him through his life stuff. He also could ask them questions and they didn't treat him like a leper, I mean, they answered most of his questions, or if they didn't, they would go find the answers or, um, kinda help him through that.

So over time he started coming to Vintage, and he tells a story, the first time he came to the Arts Center and the rock band was, you know, he came early and they were rehearsing, and thought 'oh no! this is going to mess up church.' And he realized it was church and so he just really was connecting and enjoyed our church, but really what he enjoyed was John and Jamie. And over time, those questions he had, he got a lot of answers, but even more than that, he just realized that there was more that he kinda wanted—what they had. And so I remember being in small groups with John telling me about Brian, this kid that he thought was brilliant, that he really loved, and asked these great questions that, that would just devour books. John would mention, 'oh, I liked *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis' and then the next week Brian would have it, he would have finished it. God was just at work in his life and over time the 'hey you Christians believe this' became 'hey, we believe this.' Kind of that I... or you-we, you-I shift happened.

He came to faith and really grew, and when our college director had him in a small group, and now Brian is our college director, and he leads other guys, and he is now in one of my Bible studies and he's like... he's just an incredible young man. He's getting to graduate from KU and just that life that was changed.

Another cool story... so Brian comes to Christ and starts leading, you know, he leads a small group of guys and they have, a number of them weren't, kind of thought they were Christians, but looking back, kinda realized that they, they weren't. But in last year in September, the same night after church, two guys in Brian's group, who he had invited to church and kinda poured into them, they both had kinda difficult break-ups with their girlfriends. Same thing Brian had dealt with. Kinda got to rock-bottom and both came to Christ on the same night, kind of individually. And then they called one another and was like, 'hey, I came to faith...' 'No way! I did as well!' And both those guys then, people really in Brian's group, were poured into, and

they were baptized in May, and now these guys are leading others. I met Joe, whom you met, was one of those guys, and he's now leading a group of guys.

And so just people like that, those are some cool things. Seeing the way people have been touched and changed by community has been a neat deal.

Um, there was a guy who, named Aaron, who kinda had, was kinda melancholy sort of guy and just kind of saw the world in grays and blacks and got involved in our church and got involved with just a group of friends, and started serving on a Road Crew and really started growing. And though he continued to be melancholy, saw some life and hope and he bought a new bike. He was excited about it. He came and, we were at the Arts Center, and he attaches it to a pole there, and it gets stolen during church and he's bummed beyond belief. You know, he'd saved up and so anyway Kirk, our Road Crew leader, who was also in Aaron's small group, had the idea, 'Aaron's birthday's coming up, let's pool money to buy him a new bike.' Invite him out, we'll throw this church party, but is really more of a birthday for Aaron, he just doesn't know it. He shows up and we have the opportunity to give him this bike and he's just floored because no one's ever done this, you know, things like that.

Kind of a harder, sort of story, in that, that College Community group. Um, John and Jeannette, young married, they were in college, got married, were part of our core group. Jeannette's younger brother wound up taking his life. It was just a horrible thing to deal with. At the same time, they were trying to move into a new place, and you know, kind of the poop all hit the fan at one time. Um, and I remember me getting the call from her about that. And just my heart going out, obviously, and yet one of those where I just knew God had a... I mean, you never know what to say. Even as a pastor, you don't know what to say. And yet, just felt that God kind of gave me a sense, even personally, just to speak into them, and to know that he was still in control, even in this hard situation. And seeing that happen in others in our community, and so they're, they have less than a day to move, and there's a, they need to move all their things out so the church gets around and helps them move their things out and they have to replace some carpeting because the dog had chewed it and they don't know how to do that. Well, there's a guy who can fix the carpeting and, you know, she has to drive into Western Kansas and people from our church go with her, and myself, and four guys show up, just to be at the funeral and we just... you know, I'm not remembering all the things that happened, but what stands out is just how the community surrounded them and to hear Jeannette's response about how much she was blessed by Christ in the midst of community, in the midst of that crisis, um, you know, that was one of those where it's like, 'okay, the church is being the church here.' It was kind of a neat, a neat memory.

We, recently in probably the last eight or nine months ago, I said we're energy and passion rich, financially not so much... God's always provided for us, for what we need, which has been awesome, but for five years into it, I'm still the only full-time guy. You know, we've grown from fifty to seventy to now, two fifty to three hundred on a big night. That's, that's a lot. And so, but we've said for a number of years, 'can we afford to hire? Or can we not afford to hire?' We can't afford it, so we can't do it, but we, we're probably at a place where we can't grow much further, and so we, we did, we called it a vision campaign, trying to come back to what our vision is—what we're trying to do. And our next step is to hire a person, and so we did a capital campaign, not for a building, but just for enough to hire another person and see the community come around that was awesome.

But I remember one thing—it, it's hard to ask for money. Even if you believe in it, and even if there are people in your church who, who they own the church—own it, meaning they receive

from it, it's not like just asking for a hand out from a joe—but those things are hard to do, but we kind of do what we need to. And so we kind of break down and 'okay, if these people gave this much'—not individuals, but—'if twenty college students gave twenty bucks a month' or you know, all these things. And we lay out this thing, and we're trying to share, and it's, it's well-received, but I, I, I get up to kind of do this conclusion and this guy in the front row is raising his hand.

And this is one of these awkward, like, I mean this could be really bad, I mean you've talked about money, there's someone who raises their hand, are they going to say you're horrible? Are they going to be kind of a fre—who knows, but I kinda had this moment of 'okay, I can't just... kinda say shut up' I mean, do not... so I said... he raises his hand and asks, 'hey, can I talk?' and I'm like, 'go ahead and talk!' And as this guy, Kevin, one of the guys who I mentioned, who came to faith, and he said 'hey, I'm, I'm a college student. This church has really changed my life. God's done amazing things and I just feel like, you know, I can't do a whole lot and, and, and you college students, we can't do a whole lot. But we can eat one less Chipotle burrito. And so I'm going to stop eating one Chipotle burrito a week. I'm going to give up, I'm going to give twenty dollars every month. And I challenge you to do the same thing.' You know it was just, it was just kind of an amazing, I mean just the spirit in the room went from this tension of 'wow, all this could be like what the heck is going on' to, I mean, he couldn't have explained the thing we were hoping to do any better, in such an honest, authentic sort of way.

Um, and by God's grace that time, there was enough to be able to hire someone which will hopefully help take the vision and make it a reality.

There's a guy, again, with this South Africa project, who had a heart for, to make a difference in the world, but the world is a big place. So, there were some folks who kinda had Africa on their heart, and I've been to South Africa, so through that, kinda South Africa came on our heart and so we took a vision trip there and find out how can we serve in ways that really help them? And visited some different ministries and while we were there two cool things happened. One is we got connected with Oceans of Mercy, which does these soup clubs that really is a way to invest in a community for the long term, meet tangible needs, then the educational needs, and at some point, we can build a community center, which then can become a church, kind of a... so... just a neat deal, and that's who we support now.

But while we were over there, one of the guys who went kinda had this time to, just knew that people needed clean water in the world, and what could we do about that? So he came back with this idea for River to Well, he called it. And it was just a photo competition to raise money to build a well in a community in Africa that, that needed it. And, you know, there are other things that are out there, but this was, I mean we talk about a missional, grassroots idea, Ken had that vision. And Ken build a team, um, and they put together River to Well. And we supported it, but it wasn't a Vintage thing, because we wanted it to be community-wide. And even worldwide, meaning they had photographs submitted from at least, three or four continents, ten countries, and then a lot locally, both in our church and outside. But to see someone kind of get a heart for this and God place it on their heart, and them feel freedom to do that, and then see that be successful, and then see a well being built in Africa in one of the villages we visited. And this was their second year and they did, they've done it again. It's reproducible. It's just neat seeing people kinda catch the vision and run with it, and really make a difference.

And I, I love, you know that... I love that it doesn't have the name Vintage. I love that it's some sort of assist, if you will. I'm not taking credit for it. I don't, I mean... I have no credit in it. I don't care if it's... but being a part of something like that, that empowers people, I think the true

effectiveness of our church hopefully will see it in decades when college students come to faith and be discipled and get a vision to be sent out and the Kens and the Joes and the Kevins and the Maggies and all of those folks go out and do it. Maybe they won't be in our little congregation, and that's okay. But I think we can make a difference in the world, and in our generation, one life at a time.

And those are the things that kind of get me. That get me excited and, I guess I gave a lot of answers from younger folks. The same things have happened with families and, you know, a number of people that had never found a church and have gotten connected. And we've been a place that has been a place of recovery, not just for non-Christians, but for, for Christians and so there, there are a number of stories, but that's, that'll be a, those are a few for you.

Great, thanks so much! Well, I, I will leave it at there, that way you can get to your phone call. But thanks again for taking the time, and sharing all those stories, it was great.

Sure, sure.

Well good to meet you, Emily.

Yeah, you as well.