

[The Bill Walton Show](#)

Philanthropy and Civil Society

JP DeGance:

He's very unpredictable. He happens to be in town on Monday.

Leah Hughey:

Who is Toby?

JP DeGance:

Toby is one of our task force. Uh-

Leah Hughey:

Oh, wonderful

JP DeGance:

Business guys, private equity dude, he's done all sorts of things.

Speaker 3:

Okay. You ready guys?

JP DeGance:

Yeah.

Speaker 3:

Alright, I'll let you know when we'll be beginning. Okay, Common Ground, October 5th.

Speaker 3:

Okay. Give me just a moment here. Also confirm that you can hear me on this one.

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Speaker 3:

Okay. [inaudible 00:00:35] the shots look good. And remember you can, uh, [inaudible 00:00:37] the lights slightly as they switch back and forth.

Speaker 3:

Okay. Bill, you're looking at the camera. When you're ready and when you're on.

Bill Walton:

It's a reality that U.S. politics are likely to be a source of-

Speaker 3:

Alright.

Bill Walton:

Yeah?

Speaker 3:

Hold on.

Speaker 3:

You're on?

Leah Hughey:

Yep.

Speaker 3:

Sorry, my bad. Still getting used to running that camera as well. Okay here we go, sorry.

Bill Walton:

Okay.

Speaker 3:

Alright, here we go again. Nice good energy. And when you're ready.

Bill Walton:

It's a reality that U.S. politics are likely to be a source of frustration for years to come, but even if Washington remains impervious to change. For people who want to improve America, there's hope. It's not as if they're only two problem solving sectors in America- the public sector of government and the private sector of business. There's a third way, often a better way. Men and women pouring their energy and money into voluntary efforts to bring about positive change. This third way is about leveraging civil society efforts to bring about positive change, civil society to solve big social problems. With me today to talk about one of these initiatives is JP DeGance and Leah Hughey.

Bill Walton:

JP Degance is executive vice president of- at the Philanthropy Round Table, where he runs the organizations Philanthropy Labs and is co-founder of Culture of Freedom Initiative. Prior to this, he helped Americans' Prosperity formulate strategy for policy and issue campaigns. Before that, he helped lead several Koch Company special projects teams to protect and advance economic freedom. He lives in Virginia with his wife Christina, and they are raising ten children.

JP DeGance:

Yep.

Bill Walton:

Welcome JP

JP DeGance:

Thank you Bill.

Bill Walton:

Leah Stiles Hughey is the Jacksonville city director for Flourish Now, which works alongside churches and individuals to serve the people of Jacksonville. Flourish Now is a partner and beneficiary of the Culture of Freedom Initiative. Raised in a family of pastors and human service professionals, Leah grew up in and around churches and Christian agencies dedicated to human dignity and to the advancement of the gospel. Along with her husband, Jason, and several colleagues, Leah is co author of the recently published book, Call to Freedom, which is about the compatibility of a Christian worldview with the libertarian political philosophy.

Bill Walton:

Welcome Leah.

Leah Hughey:

Thank you, thank you for having me.

Bill Walton:

So JP, let's-let's do the personal part. Uh, ten children!

JP DeGance:

Ten children, yeah. We've, we've gotta get some cable I think.

Leah Hughey:

(Laughs)

Bill Walton:

(Laughs)

Leah Hughey:

Uh, we have seven-seven children of our own, my wife and I. And, uh, we've been fortunate to be able to be in a position to also raise three of my, uh, siblings' children. And, uh, they were- this sibling was in a position where she couldn't- couldn't take care of them. And, uh, we were just blessed to be able to come and help her out and help those kids out. So, definitely know a little bit about what happens when families-

Bill Walton:

Well that's one of the reasons you've gotten so involved in the family and the- and culture and civil societies solutions. Your first- your personal experience with it.

JP DeGance:

Yeah, that's right. You know, a lot of times when families break down. Uh, if there isn't a family there to step in and there isn't civil society solutions, then the state steps in and it- the state's a blunt instrument. And foster care is, uh, a really messy way to solve family problems and often times a necessary way to solve those problems, but when families- when families are able to step in and church institutions and civil society's able to come- come to the aid, oftentimes you have a far better outcome.

Bill Walton:

And you're a first-hand example of that working. So, Leah, you describe, um, as where you come from as coming from the family business. Um, tell me about the family business.

Leah Hughey:

Sure, sure. So, both of my parents are ordained ministers, and my brother's a licensed youth pastor. And in my whole childhood, uh, the church was just the fabric of- of the community that surrounded my brother and me. And my dad, before becoming a full time minister, worked in human services. And so he, uh, worked for an organization called New Day in Altoona, Pennsylvania and was in a brown stone downtown, and he would take my brother and me to work with us. And there was this living area that had a- a fireplace where they did the counseling, and then there was a kitchen behind that, um, and my brother and I would play in that kitchen while my dad did the work of the church. And I- I didn't realize it then, that the word for that was civil society or that it was, you know, the church fulfilling its social function, but as I grew up and started getting this vocabulary and reading authors like Tocqueville, I realized that's what my family has been doing for decades so I decided to jump in.

Bill Walton:

Wha-wha- Both of you, what do we mean by civil society? I mean and that's a- that's a five dollar word. What do- what- break it down.

JP DeGance:

It's- it- Civil society is the voluntary associations that we all belong to that, um, often times it might be a non-profit, it might be a church, it might just be me and five parents from my softball team

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

JP DeGance:

That, uh, that- that jump in and take some action.

Bill Walton:

It's people voluntarily organizing, whether it's a church, a community group, a sports team, whatever. Leah, do you have-

Leah Hughey:

Absolutely. Well, Alexi De Tocqueville calls those things secondary institutions. So it's sort of that layer between the individual actor and the government. So groups that have done things like start schools and hospitals and libraries, and have just tackled some of the biggest problems by just associating with next-door neighbors and looking and seeing a need and deciding to do something about it.

JP DeGance:

Yeah.

Bill Walton:

And civil society's a uniquely American, uh, I won't say uniquely, but it's- it's what defines America.

JP DeGance:

A level, yeah-

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

JP DeGance:

The size and- and vitality of civil society in America is- is- is definitely unique.

Bill Walton:

'Cause Paul Johnson wrote a book about American history, and he made the point that even by 1900, most Americans had no dealings with government whatsoever

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm

Bill Walton:

And that everything had gotten done- all the charitable activity, all of the, uh, ya know, helping each other, uh, it happened through civil society not through government or through business.

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

JP DeGance:

Right, right. In our history, you don't have great- great examples of famines wiping out tens of thousands of people, and, uh, a lot of- you know- We've got the world's greatest university system, and that was largely started by- almost entirely started by- by civil society.

Bill Walton:

So let's talk about- tell me about the Philanthropy Roundtable and the, uh, culture of flourishing or Culture of Freedom and also, uh, the, uh, Flourish-Now.org. What- what are your organizations, and how are we going about addressing, uh, the issues you wanna address?

JP DeGance:

Yeah, well-well the Philanthropy Round Table's really an organization of philanthropist from around the country interested in solving the country's greatest problems through charitable endeavors. And, uh, the Culture of Freedom Initiative is a specific project within Philanthropy Roundtable that's trying to find

replicable solutions to some of the most intractable social problems facing the country that are closely tied to human flourishing and, uh, and American freedom.

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm

JP DeGance:

So, that means in a way, uh, strengthening the family, strengthening faith institutions; these are the two strong pillars of both civil society and the strongest elements of what's called, uh, social capital, which is our intangible connections to our family, voluntary associations, all those sorts of relationships that research is increasingly showing- If you have more social capital in the individual, he or she is going to be far more able to become upwardly mobile. That community's going to have less multi-generational poverty and all that- all of those good things.

Leah Hughey:

Yeah. Absolutely. So Flourish Now, the non-profit that I work for, is a partner organization and, as you've said, a recipient of the Culture of Freedom Initiative, and our missional mandate is to help solve systemic poverty through empowering the local church to really get in there and- and solve difficult-to-solve societal problems at the local level.

Leah Hughey:

So the main way that we do that is by partnering with churches, coming alongside neighborhoods they're already serving, populations of people that they've already identified as those that they would like to reach out to, as well as just inviting the broader city to come and see what that church is all about. And one of the major programs that we do are job fairs in churches because we've identified that about 65 or so percent of American churches have a benevolence program. So if you go and you say, "I can't pay my light bill" or "I need some assistance with food", 65% of American churches can do something immediate-

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm

Leah Hughey:

But only 2% of American churches have an employment ministry. So the same family is coming back to the church month after month for that electric bill; a lot of churches are not equipped to then say, yes actually if you come to this job fair or if you come to this recovery style job club, we will help you through mentorship and through that social capital that JB- or JP was talking about to thicken that layer of support around that person for the tangible love of people to solve that problem.

Bill Walton:

The- What I understand is that the Culture of Freedom really is trying to develop solutions to social issues at a specific local level, in your case Jacksonville, and then be able to replicate that solution around the country. Find out what works and not have to go and reinvent it someplace else, but take what works- what works in Jacksonville, Columbus, Ohio, Kansas City, Sacramento.

JP DeGance:

Right. That's right. And it's- it's lead by a group of business leaders. Folks who've been successful entrepreneurs, franchisors, investors, and, uh, taking that sort of business approach, a metrics based approach, and applying it to some areas that seem really hairy, really intractable. Uh, so, when I talk about a social capital, really, it sounds like, uh, it's a really clean term, but really, the two strongest parts of it is- is this person in a family? In an intact family? Is this person belo- Does this person practice or belong to some sort of religious institution? If you have those two things, there's a lotta great outcomes that flow from it.

JP DeGance:

And a lot has been written about- whether it's Charles Murray in Coming Apart or Robert Putnam in Bowling Alone, uh, Raj Chetty and his research at, uh, Harvard, talking about, uh, the fragmentation of family, the disintegration of community, and its connection to human flourishing. And, uh, uh, I think what sets the Culture of Freedom initiative apart is we're not looking at trying to study those issues.

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm

JP DeGance:

We think other folks have done a great job of that. We're trying to roll up our sleeves and say, "What can be done about it?" Can- can private actors jump in and help a family become intact or- or- or not break down? Can we, can-

Bill Walton:

Well you've had some success in Jacksonville with, uh, divorce rates?

JP DeGance:

Yeah.

Bill Walton:

Let's talk about that.

JP DeGance:

Sure, sure. Well there's four big measure areas that we're looking at. We wanna see if we can increase the marriage rate, decrease the divorce rate, decrease, uh, single parenthood, and, uh, increase church attendance, religious observance. In Jacksonville, we've gotten a lot of traction. It's one of our three test markets. By the end of this year, we expect the divorce rate to be 25-29% lower than it was when the initiative started-

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm

JP DeGance:

24 months ago.

Bill Walton:

That's tremendous. Now, that's happened almost nowhere else in the country has it?

JP DeGance:

Yeah, no. It's a- It's a statistical outlier. And, uh, really, how it's been done is we know sort of a- a- a- an assumption that we've made is life changes through relationship. What we wanna do is see what we can do to help scale life changing relationships in these cities.

JP DeGance:

Uh, another big assumption is that there's enough content in the world to save the world. If content alone was the solution, uh, the world would have been saved awhile ago.

Leah Hughey:

(laughs)

JP DeGance:

So our value proposition is try to make that content catalytic in the format- in the form of life changing relationships. So, uh, in-

Bill Walton:

Good ideas doesn't do it. Changing behavior does it.

JP DeGance:

That's right. That's right. And so, uh, ideas are important- a, well a important part of the syllogism, but-

Bill Walton:

Yeah.

JP DeGance:

But they're not the final, the final part of it right. So-

Leah Hughey:

Yeah.

JP DeGance:

Uh, so we've- Before we got started in Jacksonville, we did an assessment and base lined. There was about three hundred individuals had gone through in the- in the entire city, uh, programs around marital enrichment, marriage, uh, formation, marriage and crisis sorts of ministries from para-churches and church organizations. And, uh, over the course of 2016, we increased by a factor of 35 in the- in the, uh, in the county.

JP DeGance:

And so that was significantly focused, using, uh, uh, the advances of a big data and, uh, uh, predictive science. We were able to focus a lot of that attention on the folks who were in the greatest need.

Bill Walton:

So- so I think implicit in what we're saying though is, you believe, I believe that most of the solutions occur best locally. I think there's another five dollar word for that. Subsidiarity, which is the Catholic term. There's another term you mentioned, Leah, before we got on. Is it Sphere Sovereignty?

Leah Hughey:

Yeah that was something JP and I were even talking about on the way over here. And essentially that there- there's-

Bill Walton:

(Laughing)

Leah Hughey:

-different spheres of responsibility between individuals and-

Bill Walton:

Everybody talks of that sphere sovereignty everywhere over in the car- yeah, yeah.

Leah Hughey:

Of course, everywhere, you're in the grocery store checking out, the man has spear sovereignty.

JP DeGance:

(Laughing)

Bill Walton:

(Laughing) It's- It's a common, common thing [crosstalk 00:14:40]

Leah Hughey:

It is-

Bill Walton:

(Laughing)

JP DeGance:

(Laughing)

Leah Hughey:

But it's-

Bill Walton:

So let's talk a- What is sphere sovereignty? (Laughing)

Leah Hughey:

Sure, yes. Essentially the idea that there are, uh, there's responsibility relegated to the individual, to families, to churches, to government. And it's about keeping those various actors in society within the proper place and allowing the free movement and action of the other actors, um, in the sector for which they're responsible.

Leah Hughey:

Um, do you have something to add to that? We've had quite a conversation about it so-

JP DeGance:

Yeah, no. [crosstalk 00:15:09] Ultimately, whether it's sphere sovereignty or subsidiarity, it's- it's the idea that the greatest problems and challenges that face a society should first be addressed by those closest to it, right? And they're are often times folks who have the greatest knowledge, the greatest passion for solving the problem. And, uh, instead of quickly, uh, elevating the problem to the point where there oughta be a law or we need to have government intervention. Again, government is a pretty blunt instrument to solving, uh, to solving a lotta problems.

Bill Walton:

Well Hayek had the notion of a fatal conceit. He didn't think people could sit in an office in a- let's say Brussels in the case of Europe, and solve the problems of a farmer in, uh, Normandy. And I think-

Leah Hughey:

Yeah.

Bill Walton:

-we think the people in Normandy oughta solve, although you're focused on Jacksonville, but people closest to their issue oughta be the people responsible for the solution.

Leah Hughey:

Yeah. I was looking for the quote, I talked about Tocquevi- Tocqueville already, but he, he was talking about the idea of a central power and the ability of a large central state to solve local problems. And his words were, "Such a work exceeds human strength."

Bill Walton:

Yeah.

Leah Hughey:

And so he talked about the necessity, and so did F.A. Hayek, who you were referencing, of trusting individual local actors to know those problems innately, but Tocqueville also adds this element of compassion. That when you assist someone who is a neighbor. Or when you make that personal touch and build that layer of social capital with someone that JP referenced, you develop empathy, you develop compassion.

Bill Walton:

Yeah.

Leah Hughey:

And suddenly something that goes from this statistic of "Millions of people are- are on dependency programs", it turns down to, "This woman-

Bill Walton:

Yeah.

Leah Hughey:

-who lives six blocks from me is on food stamps for a reason."

Bill Walton:

Yeah.

Leah Hughey:

"She's a single parent, she has four children, she's trying to raise them alone. How do we fix that, how do we get the local church involved. Well she's unemployed. Oh, well how do we use the local church to try to leverage networks to help her get employed. She doesn't have a car. Okay, well there's surely a non-profit in town that can give her one, or we can give her some bus passes."

Leah Hughey:

And you start suddenly seeing through that interaction that you become much more compassionate, much more compassionate and interested in helping to solve those, those problems then from the individual to the community level, and that's a beautiful thing.

JP DeGance:

What you're talking about really is, is the church is able to do- and civil institutions are better able to do two big things: discern and love.

Leah Hughey:

Yes.

JP DeGance:

And the- the state is really diffi- finds it hard to do both of those things.\

Leah Hughey:

Yeah.

JP DeGance:

Uh, love is- is something that's hard to be legislated. And, uh, and so tha- those, those are big parts in this.

Bill Walton:

One of the things that makes me excited about the Culture of Freedom is that we're not talking about just doing this in Jacksonville. You mentioned that you got people from business with franchise

backgrounds involved with it, and the idea is to take what's working in Jacksonville and replicate it. Explain how the colonel gets involved in this.

JP DeGance:

Sure, sure. One of, ya know a number of our, of- of the business folks on this have been really involved and successful-

Bill Walton:

[crosstalk 00:18:08] Holiday Inn [crosstalk 00:18:10]

JP DeGance:

-franchising experts. Holiday Inn, uh, Einstein Bagels, a variety of different, uh, program-

Bill Walton:

Yeah, very successful, yeah.

JP DeGance:

Very- And- and, uh, they said, uh, to me in a meeting, one of our, one of our business partners said, "You know, we're trying to franchise like Kentucky Fried Chicken franchised." To which I said, "Absolutely, that's exactly what we're trying to do. For the sake of everybody else in the room, can you explain how that worked."

JP DeGance:

And so I had no idea how it worked of course, and so the way KFC originally franchised was the colonel had a great recipe. And instead of trying to build storefronts in town after town after town, he knew he had a great recipe and some great ingredients, and so he sold the franchise by taking recipes to mom-and-pop diners around the country, right that, that were looking for great things to add to their menu.

JP DeGance:

And analogously, there's a lot of great organs of civil society, what Edmund Burke called little platoons, that exist out there. The church is certainly perhaps the strongest organ of civil society, but there's a lot of, of other civil associations and secular associations that exist. And so what we're working to do is develop and know the recipe that we can then take to lots of other civil institutions and scale it to that way.

Bill Walton:

Well if you can take a 30% reduction in divorce all over the country, you will accomplish something big. So let me, let me drill into it. So you're working with churches in Jacksonville, and you're counseling. In your case, you're focusing a lot on people getting back into the work force. Um, but we're also counseling people on marriage and staying married. Uh, you would then take this to other churches and other cities, and you would show them, there'd be a playbook on how to do that the way a franchisee has a playbook or franchisor-

JP DeGance:

Sure.

Bill Walton:

Is that- Is that the idea?

JP DeGance:

Sure. And there's there's really uh- uh- three different steps. The first step is we provide great advance data science to these churches. Stuff that exists in the for-profit sector right now, uh, large companies like Google and Amazon have access to a lotta data. We put a lot of that data in the hands of, of the executive director of a, of a local, uh, civil association, we put it in the hands of a pastor.

JP DeGance:

And we can help them understand, you know, 35% of your congregation is credit card dependent, uh, 24% of your congregation looks like it fits a high predictive model for divorce. Now all of a sudden, the pastor or the executive director sees what's going on in his own pews or in his own membership and takes ownership of the problem. It becomes personally owned by them. That stimulates them taking their passion and action to solving the problem. Then we curate content, and we recommend great partners like Flourish Now to come in and resolve certain issues that may be going on in their congregation. Other great partners like Alpha, USA, uh, uh there's Family Life Ministries, the Augustine Institute has great programs. Uh, so there's a variety of different off-the-shelf content that can be curated and, and live in the- in- in a particular church or non-profit setting.

JP DeGance:

And then last, is we provide what we call, uh, scaling help. And so what we do is we've been developing methods to drive an increase in attendance at a particular event, or uh, even Sunday worship.

Bill Walton:

So, so Leah, we say "we", who is "we"?

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm

Bill Walton:

I mean how many people are involved with this in Jacksonville- how many- And what do you- How do you- How do you marshal the, uh troops to solve these problems?

Leah Hughey:

Yeah. That's a great question. So we have about ten staff at Flourish Now nationally, and we're very collaborative. And each city is a little bit like an R&D shop.

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Leah Hughey:

So when we began, we were founded in 2015. So we're very new. And the objective was to keep families together and to help the church be a huge part of that. And so at first, um, in our headquarters area, we

were doing a foster prevention program Safe Families For Children, which gave volunteer families within churches the opportunity to host children for temporary periods of time while parents went through periods of crisis, but it wasn't like foster care in that the parents didn't lose custody of the children that time, it was a voluntary arrangement. So they figured that out, got that down really well, we're confident in that, and thought, "Okay great, well we're preventing families from splintering in this way, surely there's more we can do."

Leah Hughey:

So we looked at the data, saw that about 80% of the time, the reason children had to be hosted with us was because of an economic or financial need. So we decided, uh, my leadership decided to roll out employment ministry, but they weren't exactly sure what that looked like. So we, we have some curriculum when we do recovery-style job clubs in churches that can be anywhere between 6 and 16 weeks, but then we started trying job fairs, and it took off instantaneously.

Leah Hughey:

It's a concept that churches get behind. In the first six months of activity in Jacksonville, we've served 1,400 people. Our national average is about 56% of people within 6 weeks of a job fair get employed. And those people, roughly half of them that come through the job fairs are not part of a local church, so we talk about building that social capital. Think about it, if you're unemployed, and you come to a church. Maybe you've never been there before, and you have a great conversation with a volunteer, they pray for you, they encourage you, and you get a job.

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm

Leah Hughey:

Then the next time you, you have that need for community, that church is the first place you're going to go. So we've seen some wonderful one off stories of people ending up part of the social fabric of that church, continuing to be part of it.

JP DeGance:

Yeah, it's really exciting what's happening down there, because, uh, Bill, you've got programming that's happening in marriage enrichment, workforce development, evangelization.

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm

JP DeGance:

Uh, family, uh, sort of parenting skills. Uh, what I th- we were chatting earlier about a particular church in Jacksonville, is a great example of what happens when all of these things start coming together.

Leah Hughey:

Crossroad United Methodist.

JP DeGance:

Yeah.

Leah Hughey:

Yeah, we did a job fair with them in February, and you talk about how do we marshal the troops? Well when I first got to Jacksonville, I met with a lot of pastors and just talked to them about what are you doing right now to solve problems you see in the community, how could you do that differently?

Bill Walton:

How do- How do- How do the pastors react to this though, you come in and say, "Well look, you've been saving souls, now we want you to help people get jobs." What do- How do they- How do they react?

Leah Hughey:

Well most of the time they're very excited about it.

Bill Walton:

Yeah.

Leah Hughey:

Um, they're, they're invigorated, because if you think about Jesus's ministry, Jesus preaches and fed. He preached and healed.

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm

Leah Hughey:

And so there was this element that teaching and beautiful ideas and the salvation of the soul was always tied with meeting of the immediate material need.

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm

Leah Hughey:

And so I think churches inherently know that, which is why they're so good about doing things like having benevolence ministries or having a food pantry. So I think they're excited about it, because theologically, people were made to work. They were made to contribute. They were made to design, to create, um, to do wonderful, beautiful, and beneficial things for society. And so if the church gets to be part of helping people to fulfill the purpose for which they were created, then they flourish, and churches I think have been extremely excited about that so that's been very rewarding.

Bill Walton:

I think- I think you said before we came on that if we had the same percentage of people in the work force now as we had, what, 10-15 years ago, we'd have 10 million more people?

JP DeGance:

Yeah, yeah, it was, it was about, yeah, if you had the same work force partition rate-

Bill Walton:

Partici-participation rate? Yeah.

JP DeGance:

Today as we had in the year 2000, you'd have about 10 million more people in the work force. That was a, a statistic from Nicholas Eberstadt.

Leah Hughey:

That's amazing.

JP DeGance:

Uh, and when you lo ... in terms of looking at the laborer, uh, the bureau of laborers' data.

Bill Walton:

Well and, and you know I think we all believe that Arthur Brooks is onto something with his earned success idea-

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm, yes.

Bill Walton:

And that, uh, without work, there is no earned success.

JP DeGance:

Right.

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm

JP DeGance:

It's hard to feel dignity too. Right?

Leah Hughey:

It is.

Bill Walton:

And so it's, uh, I- I think the, So what we're doing is we've got, in my world, we've got business methods being applied to social problems using the third way, and we've got big data, we've got predictive modeling, we've got a franchise concept. Um, the other thing I find exciting, we- I was at one of your workshops, and the- We talk about church- church- Church attendance is highly related to human flourishing, isn't it? I mean the-

JP DeGance:

Yeah, it definitely is.

Bill Walton:

[crosstalk 00:26:36] There's something like, daily, if you go to church each week, x amount of good things happen. [crosstalk 00:26:41]

JP DeGance:

Right. There's, there's a lot of data actually coming out of Harvard now, uh Dr.-

Bill Walton:

Harvard?

JP DeGance:

Harvard of all places. Dr. Tyler VanderWeele has been doing a lot of research-

Bill Walton:

That started out as a Christian college.

JP DeGance:

Uh, he, and this is a- this is a Harvard professor who's said that uh, that uh, perhaps our country's biggest miracle drug is going to church. That all sorts of public health outcomes are just generally better, uh, for- for, uh, in- in- for folks who, uh, for folks who regularly participate in some, some level of religious worship. And what you see is, um, an individual's ability to withstand, uh, bouts of unemployment. Your time span of being unemployed is less if you're engaged in a religious community. And that should stand to reason because an individual in a church or in a, attending a synagogue, or a mosque is gonna know more people, right?

Leah Hughey:

Yep.

JP DeGance:

And when he or she is unemployed is gonna be able, uh, to more quickly find a job.

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm

JP DeGance:

And- and so there's all sorts of, of a collateral impact of- of

Bill Walton:

And as I recollect, this was a heavily peer-reviewed res- uh, piece of research. I mean it was not just somebody's opinion.

JP DeGance:

Right

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm

Bill Walton:

This actually happens.

JP DeGance:

This is a published, uh, this is a published piece of, uh, of peer-reviewed science that, that is been taking a lotta looks at the impact of religiosity on, on both looking at public health and there's a variety of other impacts as it relates to employment.

Bill Walton:

Shifting gears to a related topic, we've been talking a lot about churches and Christianity and the need to bring about things though that. But I think, your book, Leah, Call to Freedom, is why you can be a Christian and a Libertarian. What, let's talk about that, because tha- you know, Christians I don't know are what percentage of the country, but what would be appealing to this to somebody who's a libertarian, economic conservative, that doesn't think of themselves as a church person?

Leah Hughey:

Well, um, the impetus for the book was to sort of answer that question. So there were a group of us that were part of a reading group who self identified somewhere on the consecrative-libertarian spectrum, um, but who wanted to, to try to- to explore for this reconciliation question. Because we know there are a lot of Christians who are hesitant about the term libertarian, and there are a lot of libertarians who are hesitant about the word Christian.

Leah Hughey:

And, and we didn't think that that was necessary. Um, so I think that something that is appealing about the idea of a, a civil society driven solution for, let's say a libertarian who isn't a Christian, is that libertarians want the size and scope of government to shrink, um, but sometimes we disagree about the why and the how. So I think something civil society Christians, um, civil society focused Christians have to offer is a real solution that has data that backs it up-

JP DeGance:

Yep.

Leah Hughey:

-that has case after case after case of ways that it's worked to have government a little bit less involved in some of these spheres where individuals and churches should be responsible.

Bill Walton:

So even if you're not a believer, there's a utilitarian reason-

Leah Hughey:

There is.

Bill Walton:

-to show that this works. I mean it-

Leah Hughey:

Definitely. That it works, philanthropy is necessary. The idea of having religious institutions, I mean Tocquev- I keep going back to it, but Tocqueville himself was not an inherently religious man-

Bill Walton:

He was a, He was a pretty smart guy. You can- [crosstalk 00:29:55]

Leah Hughey:

And- He's great, I love him.

Bill Walton:

(Laughing)

Leah Hughey:

My husband knows. (laughing) But, um, he talked about the fact that religious is the first of America's political institutions, because religious participation makes you more ready to solve social problems. It makes you more ready to take risks, because you know that there's more than just life. There's more than just your treasure chest. There's something waiting beyond. And so when people participate in religious activities, there are great outcomes for society that are not engineered by some person in a marble palace 3000 miles away. They're engineered by the people down the street. And so libertarians are always asking, "If we get government to be small, what will we do next?" Well the next thing is, step up and take responsibility for what's left.

JP DeGance:

Right, and that's something that a lot of times, uh, a lot of libertarians get that, and unfortunately, a lot of them don't.

Bill Walton:

You worked, you worked for Charles Koch. Was [crosstalk 00:30:46]

JP DeGance:

Yeah, for a time, yeah, yeah I did.

Bill Walton:

He's a, He's a very serious libertarian.

JP DeGance:

He is.

Bill Walton:

I mean, how does, how does, how does he, um- How do you come out of that milieu into this and, uh, what's your personal, I mean, elaborate.

JP DeGance:

Sure, sure. Well you know, it's, it's funny, uh- I s- was meeting with a high net worth business leader-

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm

JP DeGance:

-uh from California and was sharing some of the data on, on the social factors, looking at family break down. Okay. And how it's closely connected to a lotta bad economic outcomes, looking, look at it, how it's closely connected to a lotta, uh, uh, different philosophical worldviews that maybe aren't consistent with a free society approach to solving problems. And the immediate response from this gentleman was, is he looked at the family break down numbers. He said, "Oh this should just be"- he flippantly said, "I guess it should just be illegal then for, for people to be born outside of, uh, outside of wedlock then, and- and we should mandate that people go to synagogue or church."

Bill Walton:

That doesn't sound very libertarian. (laughing)

JP DeGance:

That's not, that is not- That was his flippant response-

Bill Walton:

Okay.

JP DeGance:

And what he was basically speaking to is, you can point out- he was trying to say, "JP, you can point out all these problems but there's nothing that can be done about it." That's, from- in his mind, the solu- the problem solving mechanism-

Leah Hughey:

Yeah.

JP DeGance:

-is either the state or the individual. And he lacked an understanding of the mediating institutions for solving problems.

Leah Hughey:

Yeah.

JP DeGance:

And, uh, there's some great examples in our own history of the biggest and the hairiest problems being solved by civil actors. You look at, in the early 19th century, the average American consumed more than 7 gallons of pure alcohol a year.

Leah Hughey:

Good heavens.

JP DeGance:

Okay so to put that in perspective, you're talking about a 5 milliliter handle every, uh, about every 2 weeks being consumed by everyone. Uh, A historian said that, uh, "The American drinks from the crack of dawn to the crack of dawn."

Bill Walton:

(Laughing)

JP DeGance:

And, um, uh, so what happened, long, many years before there was anything like a prohibition movement, there was a temperance movement in the earl-

Bill Walton:

Right.

JP DeGance:

In the early part of the 19th century, and there were philanthropists and civil actors that started to create the, uh, the temperance societies and the anti-saloon league. There were efforts to try to help men associate-

Leah Hughey:

Yeah.

JP DeGance:

-without having to drink while they have fun and meet people. There were- There was money put behind creating plays and songs to help promote the idea of temperance. And the effect was long before the, uh, prohibition happened. In the early 1900s, you had a reduction of alcohol consumption by 70%. Uh, and that wasn't, that wasn't because of a government program, that wasn't because government actors got involved, it was because a lotta- actually a lotta believers-

Leah Hughey:

Yeah.

JP DeGance:

-got involved in working together to, to create, to create change.

Bill Walton:

You know, slavery's another one. Um, the civil society people, individuals, pastors, regular citizens, everybody was involved in bringing slavery to an end-

JP DeGance:

Yep.

Bill Walton:

And, and I think people ... The government in fact was trying to keep slavery in place.

JP DeGance:

Yeah.

Bill Walton:

And so you had the civil society, it wasn't government that brought the change it- [crosstalk 00:33:59]

JP DeGance:

Yeah, actually the first direct mail campaign was funded by an- an anti-slavery, uh, Christian activist, who- who, uh, began a mailing campaign to educate people on the problems of slavery and build a national consensus. So- it, that sort of activity, uh, created riots in, in, even in- in parts of the country that didn't have slavery. Uh, folks who were opposed to that kind of civic activism.

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm

JP DeGance:

So, uh- In many ways, you- The, uh, the broad, uh, movement, abolition movement, was an a- was a movement of, of activists, fun- uh- significantly funded by great philanthropists, uh, like the Tappans brothers, who, uh, put their money where their mouth was. Uh, these- these guys, in many ways, did, uh- We hear a lot about guys like George Soros or the Koch brothers today, but, uh, the Tappans brothers probably had a greater impact.

Bill Walton:

Who were the Tappans brothers?

JP DeGance:

The Tappans were business men from, uh- Evangelical Christians- from, uh, that operated, uh, in Manhattan. And they, uh, were devout capitalists who realized that, uh, there was all sorts of cultural rot going on around them. They actually, uh, helped kickstart, uh, the second great awakening and revivals around the northern part of the country. They, uh, fund- they actually bought a, uh, an old circus that had a lot of, uh, seedy activity in Manhattan and then turned it into a-

Bill Walton:

And the second great awakening was when many Americans believed that they had to improve themselves morally and had a responsibility to improve society at large-

JP DeGance:

Yeah, and- and- right.

Bill Walton:

And that was something that was not in the, in the, in the drinking water before that.

JP DeGance:

And sometimes I think we refer to these things, yeah- And sometimes I think we refer to these historic movements as if they were, uh, naturally existing and would have happened anyways, but there's actually real people, uh, created the second great awakening, uh, actors in civil society, churches, and, uh, and philanthropists had a huge part in stoking the flames that created that, uh, that renewal that brought- that created the Sunday school movement, uh, the United States of America became the most literate, uh, went from being one of the least literate to the most literate nation on the planet, long before public schools were universal. By the mid 1840s, the U.S. had beco- it had become, uh, the world's most literate because of Sunday schools, uh, and the explosion of Sunday schools around the country.

Bill Walton:

So, as I said at the outset, there is hope.

Leah Hughey:

[crosstalk 00:36:50]

Bill Walton:

I mean we- we're so caught up in everything being politicized now and-

Leah Hughey:

If I might share a local example too-

Bill Walton:

Yeah, yeah please.

Leah Hughey:

-that shines some light on that. So I think, you know those movements are, are fantastic examples of, of how a small, maybe one person doing Sunday school and realizing this has a direct impact on literacy then spreads to become, you know, a nation-wide phenomenon- And, in Jacksonville, um, I've had the pleasure of working with, um, a couple of churches and non-profit organizations in a neighborhood called Brentwood. And if you're driving around Jacksonville, Florida, um, and you drive through Brentwood, you immediately see need. The first thought is need, and then the second thought often is hopelessness- of thinking, "The only possible way that this neighborhood could be saved or improved is by some kind of government blight program- you know or by some state level, or even federal level law or piece of legislation that will dramatically change this neighborhood.

Leah Hughey:

Um, for instance, the crime rate in Brentwood is 120% higher than the national average. The unemployment rate in Brentwood is 99% higher than the national average. So it's one of those neighborhoods that it's just- the need-

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm

Leah Hughey:

-is overwhelming. So we partnered with a local non-profit there, a ministry called Second Mile that does after-school programs, and we partnered with Cru Inner City, which does adult development and helps adults with a vast variety of needs and then two churches that are just very interested in helping people in that community live better lives because they love them. And they love them authentically. And they found out about our job fairs and said, "We have to bring one of these to Brentwood, because unemployment is such a problem here."

Leah Hughey:

You know, single moms that just have no way to care for their children. And men that wanna be involved in their children's lives, but to JP's point- you know, Men aren't marriageable in many instances until they have work, and so they're ashamed. And they don't want to be around their sons, because they don't want their sons to end up like them. So how do you break that cycle? By bringing employment.

Leah Hughey:

So long story short, we had a job fair in July. 284 people came. 40 got jobs on the spot. 80 people went through workshops, and that neighborhood about 3 months later got really hard hit by Hurricane Irma. And so churches and non-profits have been helping that neighborhood to rebuild after Hurricane Irma, and I was down there and had a moment with the pastor of The Ville Church, one of our primary partners.

Bill Walton:

Mm-hmm

Leah Hughey:

And he was cleaning up dry wall and was wet from head to toe and was thinking about his own home, which had been flooded. And his first question to me whenever we had a moment alone was, "When can we do the next job fair in this community, because employment is such a necessary need."

Leah Hughey:

And so you talk about scale. You know there are Brentwoods in every city in America. You can drive down the street in Philadelphia and see a Brentwood. You can drive down the streets of LA and see a Brentwood. And so I have hope, because I saw, that day, people's lives changing. I saw women crying, ringing our opportunity bell because they had got jobs, saying, "My children, my children are going to have a better life because I came to this event."

Leah Hughey:

And so if we can get philanthropists and individuals and business people and volunteers rallied around the point- or rallied around the idea that we can bring hope and beauty and human flourishing to the Brentwoods in every city in America, just think of the transformation. It could be a beautiful thing. And it will be! It will be a beautiful thing.

JP DeGance:

Would- Tell us a little bit, Leah, the- the way you guys run- do the job fairs is pretty neat-

Leah Hughey:

Mm-hmm

JP DeGance:

-because, here you've got a church that wants to do something but maybe doesn't yet know how.

Leah Hughey:

Sure.

JP DeGance:

And, and you guys provide a key, uh, catalytic aid to those churches to help, help get these churches off the ground.

Leah Hughey:

Yeah. Absolutely. So we've partnered nationally with hundreds of business in Jacksonville, almost a hundred different companies. And we have relationships with people from owners to folks on the HR team. And so a lot of churches don't know where to begin to get 30 businesses in the door to set up at a job fair, or they don't know the logistics of how to do that. So we say, "Don't worry about it, we'll handle the marketing, we'll handle the business development, we'll handle the event planning. You worry about loving the dickens out of the people that come through the door and loving the people in your community so well that they want to come.

Leah Hughey:

And so we get there the day of, we set up. And church volunteers, as many as 25-30 church volunteers come and they talk to every person that comes through the door. They have personal relationships that develop on the spot that sometimes last for months and months afterward. Um, and, and what we do is basically pull the strings like a, like a curtain operator at a play and let the church do their thing. But I think the most unique element is- I mentioned we have an opportunity bell and so, when someone gets a job, they and their- their new hiring manager, their new boss come and ring this bell together. And sometimes you'll have 200 people in the room at once, and everyone stands still. And for about 15 seconds, claps, cheers, looks at the person that just got a job. And often you know, the person will come in like this, and they'll maybe have their resume, and their shy. "My name is Leah, and I am looking for a job."

Leah Hughey:

When they ring that bell, they explode.

JP DeGance:

Yeah.

Leah Hughey:

And you can see on their face and their body language that they just got a new lease on life because of the opportunity they had, because they get to ring that bell. And then volunteers from the church mob the person, "Oh congratulations! That's so wonderful! What's your job going to be? Do you need clothes? Do you need a ride to get there? Well what's next?"

Leah Hughey:

And so you see those catalytic relationships happen-

Bill Walton:

Yeah, yeah.

Leah Hughey:

And they happen in a church. It's a really beautiful thing.

Bill Walton:

This is exciting, exciting, exciting. Thank you. Um, We've run out of time, but how would we reach you?
Um, Flourish-Now.org

Leah Hughey:

That's right. Absolutely.