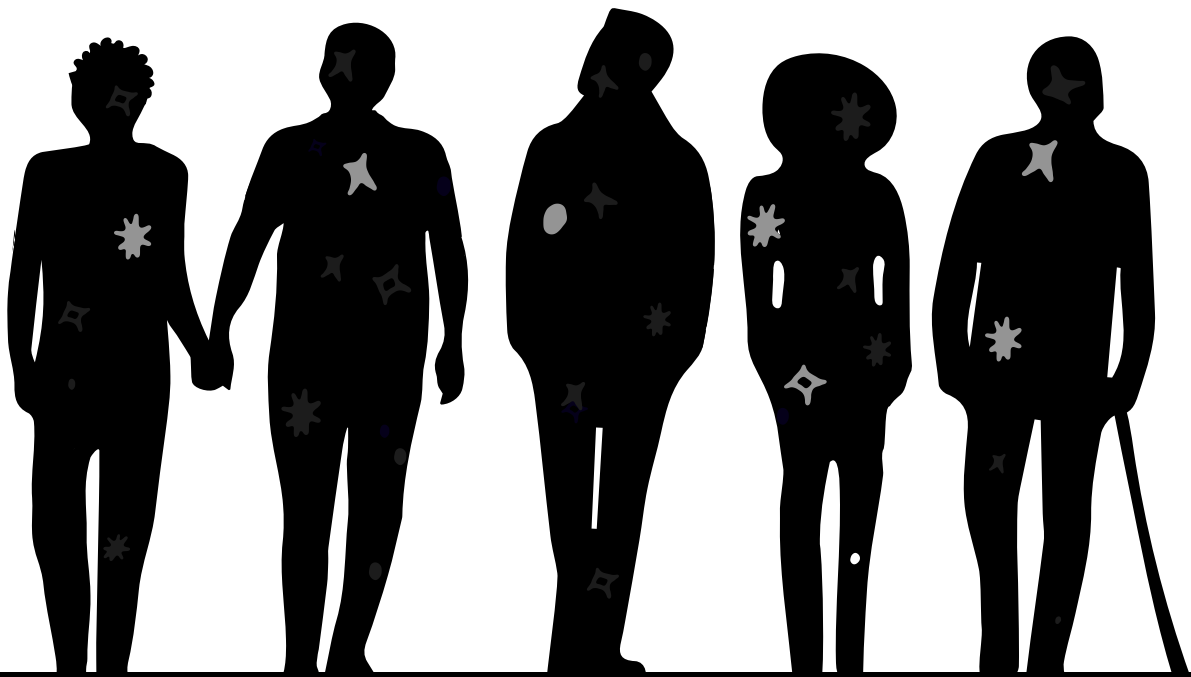


THE COSMIC WE

Episode 2:
Getting to know our co-host,

Dr. Donald Bryant



from the CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

Donny Bryant: This podcast explores the mystery of relatedness as an organizing principle of the universe and of our lives.

Barbara Holmes: We're trying to catch a glimpse of connections beyond color, continent, country, or kinship, and we're going to do this through science, mysticism, spirituality and the creative arts.

Donny Bryant: I'm Donny Bryant.

Barbara Holmes: I'm Barbara Holmes, and this is The Cosmic We.

This is going to be a particularly delightful interview. The guest today is Dr. Donny Bryant, the co-host of The Cosmic We. And it occurred to Donny and I that when we started this podcast, my circle of friends and readers of my publications knew me and Dr. Bryant's congregational friends and business colleagues and family knew him. But we had not taken the time to introduce one another in depth to our audience. So today we're going to right that wrong and we're going to get a glimpse of the life and times of Dr. Donny Bryant. Let me just tell you a little bit and then I'll let him fill in the gaps. Dr. Bryant is a founder and pastor of One Community Church, and let me tell you this, it's a very Thurmanesque church plant in Detroit. And by that I mean it is growing in the tradition of the mystic scholar and educator, Howard Thurman's groundbreaking church, the Church for the Fellowship of all people in San Francisco, California.

When Thurman co-founded Fellowship Church, the intent was to worship across the boundaries of race, religion, denomination, sect and tradition. Dr. Bryant has a similar congregation. His teaching and preaching style is contemplative, but also dynamic. But there's more. Donny's not just a pastor with a doctor of ministry from Luther Seminary, he holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering from Michigan State University and an MBA from the Broad School of Management, Donny is a proud father of Kennedy, Isaiah and Payton. But there's more. Donny's a founder and president of the Alden Group, Inc., and that's a company formed in 2007 to provide healthy cooking oils to the world. The company has grown to be a major supplier domestically and internationally of organic and non-GMO refined food grade cooking oils like sunflower, canola, corn, soybean and avocado. And I'll let him tell you a little bit more about that later.

I met Pastor Donny when I was a president of a seminary in Minnesota. He was on the ministerial staff of a church that I was attending in Minneapolis. His well-researched preaching and powerful oratory made my husband and I instant fans. Today I hope we get to learn more about Pastor Donny, how he finds spiritual sustenance, what he sees for the renewal of contemplative movements all over the nation. Now, if you're a regular listener, you know that during our usual interviews we ask questions to open up areas of interest to our listeners, but today it's going to be more of a conversation between us, a time of sharing and deep listening. Welcome, Donny to the other side of the table. Is there anything that I left out or that you'd like the audience to know about you?

Donny Bryant: No. No. Thank you. Thank you. I think what they should know is that our relationship has so many different dynamics and you have been a very present friend, partner, mentor and inspirer throughout the years of our relationship. And so I am so grateful to just be able to work with you as a colleague on The Cosmic We. So I'm excited to be the guest this time.

Barbara Holmes: We have fun together.

Donny Bryant: Yeah, we do. We do.

Barbara Holmes: Donny, pastoring is not what it used to be in the old days.

Donny Bryant: Very true.

Barbara Holmes: You've been in one church or another for many years as I have. I mean, what are the differences that you see now in the way that church works for people?

Donny Bryant: Yeah. I remember in seminary, one of my professors, he made an observation that I thought was very keen, he said, "Years ago, maybe 50 years ago, people attended church out of obligation." He said to the class, "When you guys begin pastoring, you will be pastoring in a season, in a time where people will attend out of discretion or based on their decision or their choice." And I found that to be very true, that out of the traditions that I came out of, church was something that we did multiple times a week. You let some people testify, they were at church almost every day, it would feel.

But one of the primary things that I share with my colleagues is that you cannot expect that. You cannot even expect every Sunday attendance to be the norm. People will feel committed to your church, they feel like this is their church or the church they are members of, but the frequency of attendance has dropped to maybe once a month or maybe every other week. And I share with my colleagues that you have to accept that that is the norm today. Great commitment is not every Sunday, great commitment may be every other week. And so just from an attendance and from a community standpoint, so we've had to reimagine what it means to be a member or to be part of the community. That's one of the primary differences. And I think too-

Barbara Holmes: And why do you think that is? Why do you think that commitment...

Donny Bryant: Yeah, some of it's generational. I think when I look within our context, we have... there's this language that the researchers use churched and unchurched, and I'm not a big fan of that language, but people who tend to come from an upbringing of attending church, there's an understanding of the value and the importance of maybe being a part of a community and attending regularly, and motivations may change, but there's a general understanding. But today, at least within our community, we have many people who do not come from a background of regular attendance. That's just not the norm. So if you come from a background of not attending every Sunday and now you're attending once or every other week, that is great commitment to you as an individual. So I accept that, I agree with that. And so I appreciate, I value, I encourage that. And obviously as people mature and they see value in attending every week, then that's obviously great for the fellowship.

To me, my only value... for me, I love to see people there, but I tend to say that there has to be something that you get out of it, there has to be a motivation, and it should not just be the liturgy, it shouldn't just be the sermon, it shouldn't just be the worship. But I want people to understand that there is a value in your presence, that there is, in my language, an incarnation of the divine. People need you there. It's not just what you get from the service, but it's also what you bring. And so your absence is missed. And so there's a beauty in kind of the connectedness, the union, the gathering, and there's something genius that comes out of that. And I believe there's a beauty in that. And so it's not just the liturgy, it's not just the sermon, it's not just the worship. It may not just be the practices, the spiritual disciplines that we do, but I just think it's the family, it's the community, it's the communion that we bring from that that's beautiful.

Barbara Holmes: Did you intend to have a multicultural church or did it just happen?

Donny Bryant: No. Yeah, that's a great question. No, not at all. I think what's interesting, I received my Dmin at Luther Seminary in St. Paul and as you know, you actually provided some great advice when I was working on my thesis. I remember you and I meeting in St. Paul down the street from the seminary for lunch in great conversation. And while I was in class, and my class was a very ecumenical class, I happened to be the only person who came from my tradition, but also who was African American, and I really... that experience was great because I began to see and imagine what heaven could be like, but also what a faith community could be like. I wasn't really that knowledgeable of Dr. Howard Thurman's community. I didn't really understand the motivation behind that at that time. But I was inspired.

I was the only student that was not actively pastoring. I was running my company at the time. As you know I made the decision because I was considering your university and Luther Seminary as the two to receive my doctorate. And I chose Luther at the time and as I was going, I started really thinking, "Wow, what would it look like to have a multi or interfaith or intergenerational or intercultural community? What would that look like?" And I didn't know how to make that happen. The next question was, "Well, how do you make that happen?" Well, I don't know. When we started One Community, there was no intention to build it to have a church. My inspiration was just to share this message of love and message of hope and to help people live out a life that may be more consistent with their values.

However, when we started, I realized that there were a lot of people from different backgrounds coming and had nothing to do with me. We did not say, "Well, we're going to have a Black church or white church or this church or that church." It was just a community. That's why we called it One Community. And I did not have a certain preaching style, I just taught. And we tried to honor the different cultures. There were so many people from different backgrounds, from different even countries that were coming. But I realized that the gospel, if presented in a certain way, is universal, that this message is universal, that it wasn't... that you did not have to have a denominational spin

to it. It did not have to have a cultural spin to it or ethnic spin. And I was very amazed to see the receptivity. It was unintentional, it was not on purpose, but I'm grateful to have been a part of it.

Barbara Holmes: Well, I have to ask you how it's working? And the reason I'm asking you that is to be honest, Thurman's Church was before it's time. I mean, it was a great and optimistic idea long before we were holding hands and swaying and saying, "We shall overcome," across racial barriers. But it never took off, it never was the seed he wanted it to be, to plant this kind of multicultural worshipping community across the nation. It didn't take off. It did not. It is still a tiny little church with a tiny little congregation, a very meaningful congregation doing amazing work, but it wasn't the seed that fostered a movement. And so then the question becomes, it's mighty brave to try it again.

Donny Bryant: Well, I got to tell you, you're tapping into something that's really... it's very important to me because how we define success is which are really tapping into. And I think a lot of times when we speak of churches, we tend to define success based upon numbers and growth and attendance and things like that, which I think it's fair from one perspective. But there's a... in history, there's John the Baptist is documented of saying that, when Jesus came on the scene, "I must decrease so that he may increase." And I started reimagining what that really could mean. And a couple weeks ago I started saying, "Well, what if that looks... from a church perspective, what if that looks like we do our jobs so well, that people become the true church, the true body of Christ, in a sense?" Where the reign and rule of God is truly through them and they're out in their jobs, they're out in culture, they're out in their communities.

And the requirement to actually gather every Sunday becomes less and less and less important because people are actually getting it now, they're out there living out this life of love and there's no codependency anymore, in a sense. And so I started really realizing, "Well, maybe they're doing a great job. Maybe what he started out for the objective is actually taking place?" And so I don't look at numbers, I don't look at attendance no longer as a measurement of success, I look at quality over quantity in a sense, emotional, spiritual healthiness. Are you still on this journey of healing? Do you seek to bring people together? Do you seek to be a participant in restoration, healing, renewal, connectivity? Or are you the type of person or are you the type of church or are you the type of community or institution that's all about, as we talk about, is it dualism? Is it us versus them? Is it good versus bad? Are you all about separation and division and creating gaps? Or are you about bridging the gap or restoring the brokenness?

And so for me, that's kind of the essence of what I feel I define success about, and so when I look at Dr. Howard Thurman's work that was started many years ago, I see it as success story. So I don't look at numbers. You can have 20 people and those 20 people could be truly reflecting love and making a difference in the world and bridging the gaps and bringing people together and they get it and it's not about this denomination or this belief, this religion versus that, it is

seeing the universal connectedness in all people, seeing the divine image in all people. And you live from that place. You don't see what separates us, but you see what's common in us. And I feel that that is really the essence of what life should be and to really interpret, we were talking about interpretation or hermeneutic the other day, to interpret the sacred text from that perspective and not from the perspective of morality or who is good and who is bad and who is going to make it into heaven and who's going to make it... I think that is all flawed to some degree and I think there is a way of interpreting this that makes more sense for the greater good and for all people.

Barbara Holmes: I love that. And also... see, I think Howard Thurman would be very happy with what the church became and what the church now is. But looking at it from the viewpoint of megachurches, those churches, big spire churches, it looks as if it didn't replicate itself. And so then one begins to wonder, can we really worship together across cultures and traditions? You just mentioned something about the church working itself out of a job, and there's a model for that with the Church of the Savior in Washington dc and they did all of this amazing outreach work, but they would always... it ended up being given to the community. So the church didn't hold onto it and get bigger and bigger and more powerful and richer, it eventually pulled itself out of it, gave it to the people and moved on to do the next work. So it was creating obsolescence for itself in the name of the savior who said the way up is down. Exactly what you were talking about. Yeah.

Donny Bryant: Yeah. I love that. I may have to research that a little bit more. I love that. I've tried to be intentional to protect myself from falling into some of the traps. So one of the ways I've done this, Dr. B, is that I've chosen not to take a salary. So in the last five or six years, I don't take a salary, and the reason why I don't do that, well, number one, I have a secondary source, another source, a primary source to be able to take care of myself and my family, but I didn't want it to be a barrier, a barrier for people who have been hurt by their church experience in other institutions. I didn't also want it to be a financial burden.

When you're starting something that is small, and I know this as an entrepreneur, I mean many, many years when I started the company, I could not pay myself the salary that I used to make in corporate America. So I had to make a sacrifice. And so when you're starting a church, oftentimes the pastoral salary is a primary budget item in the budget. And so to eliminate that allows more funds and resources to be available to do good in the community and to do missional work, to make a difference in the lives of the people who are there and to make the lives in the greater community that you serve. So those were some of the ways that I tried to intentionally drive out some of the mistakes that people fall into and to not have... and for me not to make this something that was manipulating my messages or my motives. But I love that example and I'm definitely going to try to see if we can learn from their best practices.

Barbara Holmes: Are you saying Pastor Donny, that you don't have \$100 tide lights and \$1000 tide light in the evangelical?

Donny Bryant: I'm really bad at the... Yeah, I'm really bad... Personally, I don't even take an offering. So we do receive, I do not ask personally for offerings. There is a leader at the church

who does, but it's done in a spirit where we make it available for people to partner in the work that they feel important, but it's not something that we make a requirement. There's not a theology that you're cursed if you don't give. There's not a belief... Actually, I teach the exact opposite, and actually we teach a teaching on that that's totally contrary to some of the examples that you just mentioned, but yeah.

Barbara Holmes: But now you didn't see that growing up. You didn't see what you're doing growing up.

Donny Bryant: No. No. No.

Barbara Holmes: The church that we were in was borderline evangelical leaning toward.

Donny Bryant: Yes, correct.

Barbara Holmes: Moving toward a more progressive way. So what was your journey like? You were a little more evangelical when you started.

Donny Bryant: Sure, absolutely.

Barbara Holmes: And you have moved along the way so that now your theology has changed. Could you just briefly tell us about the path to where you are now?

Donny Bryant: It's really interesting. I've tried to evaluate this to say, "How did this happen? How did you get to where you are today? You're very different." I would say what I observed in many communities, in some communities that particularly where I came from, and how can I say this without being too judgemental or harsh, but in one shape or form, I came up in an environment that was very performance based. When I say performance based, it was your righteousness or your acceptance before God was a function of your self righteousness, your performance.

And so when you come up in an environment like that, the idea is to do good and to be good, to be this holy person, and I'm not saying that's wrong and there's some good in that you can extrapolate, but it's easily manipulated. And so what I started seeing was a way of teaching the gospel, in a way, and money was used also as kind of the way to, in a sense, earn your position. So I started seeing things like that and I started seeing people hurt, I started seeing people being abused, and in a sense, that's where... I have a justice bent, I think, something in me kind of rolls up like, "This is not right." I was very fortunate that I had success outside of the church. I didn't need position, I didn't need title, so it didn't matter if I didn't get elevated or didn't get ordained. None of that stuff mattered to me because I had a great upbringing, I had a great family and I was fortunate enough to have a pretty good career at that time.

So I started seeing a lot of manipulation of people, a lot of manipulation of power, manipulation of resources, and I was concerned about that. And I made a choice to not participate. And I said, "If there is any way that I can make a difference, I wanted to do it through inspiring others to be liberated also in their thinking." And so I just used teaching as my tool, that became my way of inspiring people. I'm not an activist, but I use my teaching as my way of opening up and unlocking people's insight.

Barbara Holmes: I think you're touching on something very important because you're talking about power dynamics, and this will be probably the last thing I want to talk to you about, about multicultural leadership of a church, and I have been reading Eric H. Law, he's an Episcopal priest known for his work in the area of multicultural leadership. And what he says is that the difficulty of holding a diverse congregation together is that there are so many sliding scales to power and that people do not understand how that power shifts as they change context. So let me give you an example. A white woman may assert that she's oppressed by men, and many may agree with her, but she may not understand that her perception of oppression in that situation doesn't apply when she's with a group of BIPOC people because the BIPOC people don't see her as oppressed. And so what Eric says is a leader in multicultural communities must learn to do power analysis on a given situation, and then based on that, they have to determine their leadership style, their theological emphasis and their spirituality.

Donny Bryant: He's right on. I can truly identify with that. And let me explain this, we have so many people who have PhDs in our church, we have many people who PhDs and I have individuals who are white men who have PhDs and have people who come from outside... Nigerian, and these individuals what I learned, particularly just with the educational piece, and I have people who have no degrees, obviously, all over the spectrum, to his point, I realized depending on, from an educational standpoint, there are some power dynamics. There are people when they're extremely educated, sometimes there's a certain way of handling them, or I'll give you example, I know someone who's a psychologist, but when this person goes to the hospital, they have a lot of struggles with doctors because of their PhD. They feel they're at the same level of this cardiologist who's trying to help them, but there's this power struggle, right?

Barbara Holmes: Right. Right.

Donny Bryant: So that's an example. So I started to be more sensitive, but I realized the reason why these individuals are there because they respect the level of research and the level of commitment that I've applied in my area of expertise. But at the same time, they require a level of respect. And so I've learned how to manage that power dynamic in a certain way. At the same way, there's a person who may have a felony, who didn't get an opportunity to go to college, their education is from the school of hard knocks, and at the same time, I'm sensitive to that and I do not leverage my "education dynamic" to overpower them or to influence them. I kind of operate where we are in that particular place. So you're right, it's interesting.

And for those who don't know BIPOC, Black, Indigenous, people of color, you're right, there are certain things contextually that I'm conscious of that when I'm teaching and I have individuals who are not... we do not have a Black church. I had a guy who, he was a white male, he was interested in attending and he called me up, he said, "I just need to ask you a question. Is this a Black church?" And I said, "No." I said, "Well, you were there Sunday. What do you think?" He said, "Well, no, I don't think it is, but I just needed to ask that question." I said, "Well, no, everyone's welcome, everyone is there."

But it was just interesting to have these conversations about... and I have to be

conscious that there are certain contextual things that I may be... there may be certain language that I'm familiar with that everyone's not familiar with so I oftentimes might say it in one way, but then I'm going to say it in this way, then I'm going to say it in this way. I may use Paul Lawrence Dunbar as a reference, but I may use African Bambaataa or I may use Jay-Z as a citation, but I'm also going to use other individuals and I'm going to make sure that across the spectrum people get the point. I may be painting a picture, I'm painting a picture, but I'm using references that everybody in the congregation or everybody in our community can get, not just some people.

Barbara Holmes: Well, I kind of wish I lived in Detroit now so I could go to your church. You mentioned in a YouTube video that contemplative practices ground you and help you to see as you are created to see. How are we created to see?

Donny Bryant: So some of my inspiration in this thought practice does come from some of your colleagues, Father Richard Rohr, yourself, even Dr. McLaren, Brian McLaren. There is a perspective that I have that when I say created to see, I believe there's an original goodness and I'm going to use language that may be familiar to some and not familiar to others, but there's original goodness and creation. So if you believe in the creation narrative, that when there's an original way, an intended way, that all creation, not just human creation, but material and the ecological creation was intended to be, and there's this Hebrew word called teshuvah, which literally means to return back to your original state. It's a foundational principle in Judaism, literally the word repent is a derivative of the word teshuvah. It literally means to return, but not a return, just in return, but it's a return back to that original state of goodness and creation.

And so depending on how you view the world, we all can agree that there's something that's not right, there's brokenness, whatever language you want to apply to it, there is division, there is something that is not the way we know, and we're all yearning to try to recover that. That's why we strive to be happy, we strive to be satisfied, we strive for success. We're all striving for something better. But often time throughout life, we realize that the things that we are using to cope with this void, or this brokenness or this lack, or whatever we want to call it, it's not sustainable. I mean, the Reese cups that I use to eat when I'm feeling down, I realize that's not a sustainable model.

Oh my God, I was at... my kids used to see me when I would come home sometime and pick them up from practice, and they'll look in the car and they'll see, they'll look over me and they'll see in the side pocket of my driver's side door, they would see all these open, empty Reese cup packages, and they would just look at me like, "You're having a bad day, Dad? Your stress eating again?" I'm like my Reese cups alone. But that was how it was... And I realized there is a better way. As we become more emotionally, spiritually healthy, as we're on this journey of life, and there's no blueprint other than union, becoming one again with the Creator and one with each other.

So to me, the way of seeing is when you get to the point where you see that oneness with each other, oneness with the divine, and oneness with the ecological, the world around us. And so this cosmic perspective of oneness, that we're all connected in some way, I believe that that is the ultimate arc of all religion, in a sense. And even the word religion in the Latin means to rejoin or reconnect. It literally means to

[foreign language 00:32:18], to reconnect. And so if it's reconnecting that which has been disconnected, I think the more we see that, that is the reign and rule of God. I really believe that's the essence of the Gospel. That is the reign, that is the kingdom of Heaven on Earth, in my opinion.

Barbara Holmes: If that's the... Yeah, and if that's the case, then that means you don't have to believe in any particular religion to come together on that cosmic arc.

Donny Bryant: I agree. People struggle with that. They struggle with that statement that you just stated. And I do agree that that's not the point. That was never the objective. That was never the objective, to make you believe a certain way. There are these pathways to reconnecting and I honor them all.

Barbara Holmes: One of your mottos of the church is, "It's a place discipleship comes alive." What does discipleship look like today?

Donny Bryant: Growing up, discipleship was about dressing a certain way, what you could and could not do, behavior modification. That was discipleship in one respect. To me, real, true ultimate discipleship is about spiritual and emotional transformation. It is that becoming whole. And to me, the coming alive is really that journey. It's that journey of recognition. It is that journey. And it's recognizing that I'm doing this, not alone, but I'm doing this with people. I'm not on a journey by myself, but I'm journeying with people. And there's an activeness in it. I was just sharing with a friend just a minute ago before we started, and we made this... and I was referring to Jesus when he said, "I came," in John chapter 10, verse 10, "I came that you might have life and life more abundantly." And what I was sharing with him, I said, "This idea of abundant life is not really about you being happy all the time, you getting what you want all the time."

And I said, "I think the embodiment of life more abundantly is when you can get to a point in your life when you can self empty, where there is a surrendering, there's a complete surrendering." And oftentimes that comes through the process of grief, the process of pain, the process of loss, the process of divorce, the process of losing, the process of getting lied on and being rejected. And it's through all of that where you get to a point where you say, "You know what? I surrender. I give up. I stop trying to be right. It's not about winning, it's not about getting my way, but it's..." You get to a point where you, the Greek word is kenosis, the kenotic, it is a self emptying. And so to me that is where real life is experienced.

Barbara Holmes: I want to shift a little bit just to talk a bit about your company. You make organic, non-GMO oils. And I just want to see, how does a health focus in your business align with your spiritual path? Do they?

Donny Bryant: it does in a very interesting way. I actually, I personally feel what we do in our profession, what we do for living, what our gifts are and how we share those gifts is an act of worship. It's an act of worship. Whatever your unique shine is, your unique contribution to humanity, it's an act of worship. Because when you operate in that, you are literally mirroring the image of the divine. You're reflecting that goodness into the world. And so what I do as an entrepreneur, I do it from that same perspective, that

same heart. So how I treat my team and the level of integrity I engage in with doing business, but even the product.

So when we started, kind of interesting, when I started the company in 2007, I was leaving corporate America, I was working at a medical device company in Minnesota at the time, and it was going through a transition. And I came up... this idea came, one of my colleagues, he's Turkish, and we were having a conversation about importing from Turkey, and I was like, "Man, I'm going to start this company. What can I bring in from Turkey to sell in the US?" And he said, "What about olive oil?" And at the time I was thinking, "Olive oil, that's not good. It's too competitive. And you know what? Most people love Italian olive oil or Spanish olive oil. Ain't nobody going to buy Turkish olive oil." He's like, "Well, Donny, you a good marketer."

Barbara Holmes: I do.

Donny Bryant: Right, yeah. It's some good... It's actually some really good olive oil. Yeah, Turkish olive oil's really good.

Barbara Holmes: I know, I do.

Donny Bryant: And he said, "You're a good marketer, figure it out." So what was interesting, Dr. B, at the time, I did some research and my experience in medical device, I was a pacemaker and implantable defibrillator sales rep and also marketer, so I did a lot of research in marketing about how to grow the market and one of the ways that I think in my research, I really realized within the African American community, there was a lot of disparities when it came to cardiovascular care, access to care and access to therapy. And there was huge gaps, huge disparities, that it was astronomical.

I remember at the time, I was a member of the Association of Black Cardiologists as an industry member and so some of the things, the research that I was seeing was astonishing to me. So when I started the company, there was this trend happening back in 2007 called the Mediterranean Diet. And so olive oil is a staple and a Mediterranean diet. And so what I was trying to figure out was, "Well, how do I get, possibly, African Americans to consume more olive oil?" And I don't know if you remember at the time, there was a young... well, there was a woman by the name of B. Smith, Barbara Smith.

Barbara Holmes: Oh, yes, Yes.

Donny Bryant: Remember B? And B passed a couple years ago, but B had restaurants in Manhattan, she had restaurants in Union Station in DC, a restaurant in Long Island, in Sag Harbor. She was a lifestyle television personality in the eighties and nineties. And I actually reached out to B and her husband and said, "Listen, I would love to form a license agreement with you, put your name and face on olive oil and to sell it in the stores, and ultimately targeting a particular demographic, trying to increase the consumption of healthy oils, in this case, olive oil." And that was my first product that we commercialized. And I think at the height of it, we were probably in four or 5,000 stores. We were in Walmart, Sam's Club, Meyers in the Midwest, Albertsons, Hy-Vee in the Iowa area. We had a pretty good... pretty broad distribution, and we were really

proud of that at the time. And so that's how we got started and that's kind of how my motivation to make the world a better place to kind of start it with this concept.

Barbara Holmes: You said you noticed disparities that were shocking to you. What were the disparities you're talking about?

Donny Bryant: Yeah, so obviously I mentioned access to care, number one, and access to therapy. So access to care, and some of this is we're going back 20 years now, so you got to... I've been out the business, but one of the things I saw, number one, when it comes to access to therapy, meaning at that time we were looking at implantable defibrillators and pacemaker, some of the issues were healthcare, the disparities in who has healthcare and who doesn't have healthcare or insurance.

And some of it was the issues within the physician community because primary care physicians sometimes made decisions on who got certain types of care and who got certain types of therapy based upon their interpretation of their patients, or based upon their misinterpretation, or based upon their biases. And so we saw that. And so when you start looking at the numbers, you're like, "Well, why is this particular subgroup here not getting referred for... Why are you referred them for this type of therapy and not that type of therapy?" And so obviously there's a lot more nuances there. And so that was one of the things we saw. And so what I said, "Well, is there something we can do on the preventive health side? Is there something we can do before you have a heart attack or before you have high blood pressure?" And that's where the olive oil concept came into play.

Barbara Holmes: That's wonderful. What is your most troubling post-pandemic concern?

Donny Bryant: Wow, that's a great question. I do have a concern that the world is becoming a more divided place, a more divided place. At one point in my early journey, I felt like things were getting better and there was a level of diversity that's taken place. But it seems like we're now heading in an opposite direction where the value of differences is no longer value, where an appreciation for otherness is no longer appreciated. And so it just seems to me that there is a movement, if you will, that is moving in the opposite direction since the pandemic. So that's some of my concerns... that's one of my major concerns right now.

Barbara Holmes: Sure. Okay, then what gives you hope for the future?

Donny Bryant: I am a glass half full person and I think there is a sense in this younger generation of appreciation for others. I think what also gives me hope is that even some of the scholarship, even the community, the CAC, some of the work that CAC is doing to encourage and inspire and to participate in people's individual internal spiritual healing and emotional healing, but also at a collective level, a lot of the work that's being produced and published and being presented, it's actually helping people to rethink, to re-imagine, to reconsider. And I feel that a lot of that is really starting to... I'm starting to see the influence of that, the impact of that. And just the distribution of this type of content, you're seeing that wow, good always overcomes evil in some shape, and we may not know how it's going to happen, but we can be confident that it

will happen eventually.

Barbara Holmes: Wonderful. You're a dad, three times over. If you could teach your children one thing about life and how to survive it, what would that one thing be?

Donny Bryant: One of my primary themes now is this love, and particularly with my children, I'm even revealing a sense of vulnerability within myself, which is an act of love with my children, to show them that you don't have to be... It's not about being perfect, it's not about making a lot of money, it's not about how much material things you gain, it's not about how many pairs of Jordans you have in your closet like some of these kids think, but it's about living a life that brings healing and wholeness into the world. I have this really... I have a clear definition of what I believe relationships should be about, particularly with two or more people. And that definition is when two people choose to intentionally participate in one another's healing. That is what authentic living and relationships look like.

And so I want my children, I think the most important thing, whether it's in a marriage, whether it's in a friendship, whether it's in a tribe or a family, that this is not about being right or wrong, it's not about who's the prettiest, who has the longest hair, whose eyes are the bluest, it's really about can you be aware of the journey that we're on? Are you conscious enough that I don't have it all together and you don't have it... But can we participate? Can we be partners in each other's teshuvah, in each other's return back to our original state of goodness? And to me, if we can get that, that is again, and I hate to use religious language, that is the reign and rule of the Creator. That is the reign and rule of God. And I think our relationships, this world, our communities, our churches, our businesses, our nonprofits, they will be better places if we had an awareness that maybe this is what life is about.

Barbara Holmes: One of the ways that ministry really works is when the pastor lives out of an authenticity that I'm hearing from you. It's an odd thing. If you are ever studying performance, they'll tell you, if you are on stage, whatever you think the audience can see. And a lot of pastors forget that if they're living double, triple lives, they're living as if the marketplace is their God. And yet on Sunday they become holier than thou, that the people can really see that. They may not leave, they may stay in the church, they may continue to tie, they may honor the person, but they can see you. And it looks like, I don't know where you learned it from, probably your parents or the pastors or the mentors you've had, but there is an authenticity where you present yourself in an honest way wherever you are. And so when that happens, the Holy Spirit can use you.

Donny Bryant: Thank you. No, I appreciate. Where does that come from? I don't know, but I would say... your colleague, Rohr, says this a lot, he says, "Transformation, authentic or true transformation, comes through two sources, either great love or great suffering." And he says, "Even the pathway of great love is ultimately the pathway of great suffering."

Barbara Holmes: Oh, yes.

Donny Bryant: Sacrificial love. And I was... our guests, our listeners don't know this, but I went through a divorce a couple years ago, and Dr. B you know because I reached out

to you in several ways as a support and to maybe just be a wise counsel during that season and during the process or even prior to it, I continued to have to show up to the community. I remember having to preach every Sunday, having to teach while I was being divorced, being separated, and even post the divorce. And that was truly a painful but transforming process. And I can truly say that the Donny version 2.0 post the divorce is a better version of Donny prior to the divorce. It caused me to be more honest with myself. I'm probably less judgmental than I ever was before. I am more welcoming, more accepting, more understanding of all people. But some people don't change, even through a difficult season like that, some people maintain, they actually dig deeper, they become more firm in the craziness of their own internal thoughts.

I love Dr. Thurman, one of his famous quotes, he says, "Listen to the..." He says, "The transcendent that you seek, the divine, the God that you're seeking is within you." He said, "So listen to the voice that is within and that voice that you hear, that voice is at the same time your voice and the voice of God." And I got to tell you this, the contemplative practice that you learn from that teaching really does help you through seasons like that, and you do become authentic because you realize the union between you and God. You understand that now that voice and there's a level of... the fear goes away, the fear and anxiety that controls us, oftentimes you realize there was nothing to fear on the other side of that fear. And so you begin to live life in a much more loving and caring way, not out of the lower self, or the shadow self as we say, but out of your true self. There's a better understanding of who you really are.

Barbara Holmes: So many of us don't know how broken we are, and the ways in which we come to understand that and can grow is in community. You've been talking about the ways in which this community, almost cosmic in its contours, provides the safety, the companionship, the spiritual net that allows us to be safe enough to see, to really see, who we really are. Because we don't grow from the experiences that give us so much joy, we grow from the breaking times, and it's then when you need community the most.

Donny Bryant: Yeah, absolutely. And I realize in that, that is where truly this concept of the reign of God takes place because we become the incarnation of the divine to one another. We become Christ, if you will. This is not a Christian thing, this is a human thing. This is regardless of whether your faith belief is, it's happening all over. You don't have to call it Christianity, but in community like this, when you extend love and compassion and you're sacrificing your agenda for the benefit of the whole, the common good, the greater good, you are literally incarnating. That is the reign and rule of the Divine, I believe, in that moment, in that situation.

And what happens is that there is a restoration, there's a healing, and to use the word we used before, there's a teshuvah and you are participating in each other's wholeness. You're participating in that return. And it's a beautiful thing when you begin to realize that you can be the pastor... Like when I was going through the divorce, the church was participating in my teshuvah, my healing, the love, the kindness, the support. And they supported both of us. I mean, there was love on both side, they didn't hate on one and hate the other, but that came because there was a community they were already part of that did not have an agenda that taught love, that didn't judge, that

was willing to accept, that was all about, “Hey, let’s figure out how do we get through this thing called life together?” And hopefully we end up mirroring the image of the Creator in such a way that He’s glorified. And that’s ultimately what it’s about.

Barbara Holmes: That’s wonderful. Well, if you live in the Detroit area, One Community Church. Pastor Donny, you’re a very busy man. What keeps your peace? How do you unwind?

Donny Bryant: Yeah, I do work a lot. With our company, we supply a lot of the oil to these big brand companies like Unilever, Kellogg and Frito Lay, and that does take up a lot of my time and I get a lot of satisfaction from being able to do what I do well in that area. But I like to read. My spare time... My son was asking me one day, “Dad, what you like to do for fun?” We were having dinner one day just he and I, father, son time. He said, “Man, Dad I never see you do... What do you like to do for fun?” I said, “Well, actually, son, I like to read and work out.”

He said, “Read? Don’t nobody read for fun.” He’s like, “Dad, you are weird. You don’t go hang out with your friends?” I’m like, “Well, you know.” So actually I like reading. I like working out. Honestly, during the basketball season, this is interesting, I don’t watch a lot of TV, but man, during basketball season, I am locked and loaded. This is pre-season right now. I mean, this is my soap opera. I’m listening, I’m watching who the trades are. So I’m a big basketball fan, I enjoy that. I just enjoy being with people, family and that kind of energizes me. And I enjoy working with you. I really do. This journey has been really rewarding for me.

Barbara Holmes: Well, this has been an amazing hour. So much fun getting to know a little more about my friend, Pastor Donny. Thank you for taking the time to do this.

Donny Bryant: Thank you. Thank you, Barbara. Thank you for the time.

Barbara Holmes: We appreciate you and the work that you’re doing.

Donny Bryant: Love you. Thank you Dr. B.

Barbara Holmes: Love you back.