Russell, Pastor Daniel and Sister Judy

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Pastor and Sister Russell

July 2011

Clip 1

David Slutzky: We are here with Pastor Russell, as well as his wife Sister Russell, at the New Life Deliverance Temple in St. Helena. We are very honored to have you give up your time so we can give you questions about your background and the culture and just the effect of your…house of worship on the island here. So welcome and thank you for joining us.

Pastor Russell: Thank you. Thank you to all for considering us.

DS: Could you just give us a brief of…a bio sketch of what brought you here?

PR: Well, in 19…89 I was considering returning back to the military, I was currently living in Maryland. And I did, I returned back to the Marine Corps. After finishing school, I was stationed here. My wife and I, we arrived January 1st, 1990, and we did not know anyone. Not one soul. We were not from here, we were from Washington DC. However, we had been Christians for a while and in the ministry for a while up to that point as youth leaders in another ministry. We arrived here, we sought out people to fellowship with, we were invited to this ministry and we joined, thinking we would only be here for our tenure of…my military time. However, it turned out to be a lot longer than we expected. Their pastor decided to enter into another ministry and I was an ordained elder for my previous ministry and they asked me to be the pastor. In December 1990, I did think it was going to interim for two years, it turned out to be six years, almost seven, 90-97. And we returned in 2007 after pastoring somewhere else in North Carolina, so this is the second time back here.

DS: Well we talked about the…we talked on the phone the other day, you spoke about being welcomed back twice, on the island you’re a “come-here…” I know for you, you were a “come-here” twice.

PR: Twice.
DS: How is it considered now? Are you a “come-here,” “been-here”?

PR: They look at me now like, you better stay here.

Sister Judy: We will never become a “been-here” since we were not born here.

DS: Right.

SJ: So I guess we will always be a royal “come-here.”

DS: Okay.

SJ: So when we came back, people from all over, not just within our ministry but others, they welcomed us back and they said, “we’re glad that you’re back home.” So that was quite delightful to hear.

DS: Must have been a nice feeling.

PS: Yes, yes. I still get emotional because…you know, we’re northerners, I’m used to concrete and asphalt. As you turn into this road, it’s dirt. So, I can say I’m a dirt road preacher with a Northern tinge. It’s God’s favor upon Judy and I, my life, in regards to being accepted into this community, this ministry, the way God has put in our hearts to do.

DS: Yeah it’s interesting because you didn’t envision yourself staying that long and something had to bring you back here.
PS: Yes sir. Either the water...or...I don’t do the Frogmore stew so it had to be something else. Genuinely, the Gullah culture is a people that’s loyal, they’re sensitive, especially to spiritual formation, and that’s what really captivated Judy and I. Regardless of the reformation or the denomination, when you come across persons here in this area, they’re serious about their commitment to God.

DS: It seems that way. I would like to ask you about your time (?) growing up and your religious training as a child—any certain rituals you can recall.

PR: Sure, my grandfathers on both sides were preachers, they’re deceased. My dad, he’s a preacher currently, in Washington DC. Um, so my upbringing was strictly church. That’s all I knew in my former years, is church. Bible school, vacation, all sorts of youth activities, church camp, and both Judy and I have very identical backgrounds. Her dad’s a preacher. Both moms in ministry with regards to choir and things of that nature. So it was instilled in us, whether we wanted it or not. You will go to church, as long as you’re under this roof, you will follow what we have set here, as guidelines and rules. So we didn’t have a choice. But at 17, I embraced Christ for myself. I accepted Christ into my life. From then on, in my former years, began...my wife and I, I’d like to say she was 15 and wayward, 16 and wayward. (Laughs) So the Lord had to send me to her in my teen years. Little did I know, the Lord was using me...I’m being a little facetious. (Laughs) She’s getting ready to wreck me, I know. She got saved, and the Lord brought us together in matrimony when we were 20 years old. We’re both 50 now, so it’ll be 30 years...next September. I went into Marine Corps when I was 20, in Okinawa, Japan, I was in the Marine Corps. And we got married September...1981. October 10, 1981 I was in Okinawa, Japan without my bride. There I was, a saved young man overseas without his wife, and I needed the experience for two weeks. I said God, you gon’ need to fix this. And he did. She flew over December, 1981. I went into ministry in December, preached my initial sermon February, 1982. We’ve been together...ever since.

SJ: When you talk about, asking about our upbringing, in our church, we are a family. We had uncles and aunts who were not our uncles and aunts. So it was like a community within our family, within our church family. We were coming and going all the time, it was not our family, it was a community of people. I think that prepared us for where we are now because you can’t come to this area stuck up. They will know that, and they will not embrace you. If you have that type of attitude, that type of spirit. So I think our coming up in the church, trained in the community, not just our families but the whole church, and we were just used to being around people. We didn’t see it as church, we just saw it as a part of our lives, part of everything we did. We were always around people in church, whether inside or outside.
DS: I see that a lot around here and I see how you’re a perfect fit for this area. Some of the studies we’ve done say that some of the practices from here during the Great Migration have transferred up north. I wonder what kind of background, going back to the ancestors, of your aunts and uncles from the congregation up north, have really transferred from here, going back to Africa. So maybe the Gullah roots we see, I mean that’s what we’re looking at in our studies, what are the connections we can make, the Carolina connections, how can we connect this to…frankly, what you’ll see around the country. So many of your roots coming up are a result of that.

PR: And, and...these who migrated north have to be very careful not to dilute...and make it so that it becomes history and doesn’t maintain reality. Before it was pinned, the phrase, “it takes a village to raise a child,” we were doing that long before. And I think that’s what we desire to foster, you know, in our church. Regardless of what your name is, we are family. And that’s what Judy was saying about our church in Washington DC, that we grew up in. My mother passed in 1993 and my mother had an opportunity to come here before her passing, and they fell in love with her. So when she passed, we took car loads, bus loads to her funeral. And they meshed with the Northerners. With the dialect…the dialect here always makes you feel like you’re in Jamaica. So when we went to Washington DC, they heard the dialect and it just blew their minds. What happened was, the same God that they worshiped in the north, when we brought the people from the south, they were like, wow. It was so pure. You know, the vibrancy—

JS: The energy.

PR: The energy! Yes, yes. Here we are on the dirt road, we’re not in the bright lights, there’s not a whole lot of distractions even though we have our issues in our city and in our country. But we’re not on the main drag. Primarily we can concentrate on what God...you know, and he can get the purity out of us, you know.

DS: I’ve noticed that you do a lot of outreach for the youth and an acknowledgment of, what you said, that there are some issues in the community—you don’t turn your head and ignore them, you do outreach. From what I saw, you’re doing a pretty good job with youth outreach. You talk about keeping it a reality and keeping it going.
DS: I see it going on for several generations, just from what I witnessed this Sunday morning.

PR: See my wife and I, we started a youth ministry, an organization we came from in DC, we started at 12 and ended up with over 150 youth, back in the 80s. We’re older, but we had a reunion because it made such an impact. Some of the adults are saying now that if we had not started this ministry, they don’t know where they would have ended up. My secular career outside of the ministry has been law enforcement. I was a state trooper in Maryland, I lived in North Carolina, I was a city officer, and for the state of South Carolina I was a law enforcement officer, an arson investigator. So, my career puts me out on the street, so I see a lot of things up front, I did see a lot of things, especially when I worked the street, that your normal pastor—they hear after the fact. They see them in the office, all prettied up—it’s like going to court. When you deal with somebody in the heat of battle and a month later they come into court, and I’m like, eh, they didn’t look like that when I was dealing with them (laughs). So that afforded me the opportunity to see people in the fullest of the issue that they were dealing with. And it gave me the opportunity to relate my spirituality with their issue, to try to find a way to help…to intervention.

DS: So pretty much you found ways to wear hats at the same time—

PR: Yes sir. Not changing faces, you know, because a lot of people, because a lot of people change faces. One thing that God has allowed me to do is maintain my character, my integrity, even in tough situations.

DS: Can you tell us a story about a time when your two worlds did kind of meet, when there was a time when you had to wear your law enforcement hat, who was out in the streets doing something he/she shouldn’t have been doing, and off the record, off the law enforcement so to speak, you were able to work with that?
PR. Yeah...yeah (Pauses, smiling, looking at his wife). There’s a lot to stand out. I was a resource officer, where a young lady had acted out, and it was an alternative school and my wife, she’s so much a part of my career, in everything I do, so she can tell the stories...just as I can. I thank you for reminding me—this young lady, she stepped to the principal as if she was going to harm her, so I stepped in between and shoveled the, uh, young lady...out of the school, and I used some force. So of course, she went out in the community, “the preacher...he put his hands on me, he hurt me...” And so, I weathered that and eventually she came to the church—about sixteen years old—came to the church, sat down and talked to me, and about a couple weeks later, she gave her life to the Lord. And when she gave her life to the Lord—we saw her when we went back—she had totally turned around, going to school. Saw another one at a gas station, we had been traveling from Greensboro, coming up on your way to DC, and the young lady was standing at the cash register. She looked at me, I looked at her. And I said, “I know you.” And she said, “Yes, you do.” And this was seven years later. She was about to graduate from North Carolina A&T. And she was such a bougie troublemaker, it was unbelievable. She was just...she thought she was so...she was a diva, a 14 year old diva that I had to deal with. And she stood there and she said, Revered Russell, I appreciate what you did for me. And this last one, it’s kind of emotional because you never see the compassion side of police officers, they don’t really highlight that. I was in the city office and one night, I had just been sitting in the community, what I often to, I just wasn’t all about locking people up, my job as a police officer is a minister. I was very heavy in the community, even while I was working. So, this car came flying down the road, I threw on my lights, the car stops, the guy leans over and says, “I’ve just been shot.” I thought he was kidding until a young lady jumps out with this baby and said, “He’s just been shot!” I get out of my car, walk over to his car, the whole side of his car is shot up. I open up his car door, put his car in park, I lifted up his shirt, and I see the damage. And I got on the radio and called, he had his jacket on, wet, his eyes rolling to the back to his head so...I...I...the first thing I could think of when his eyes starting rolling to the back to his head, I popped him, I slapped him, and I said, “Don’t you die on me.” And he looked at me, eyeball to eyeball, and said, “Am I going to die?” I said, “I can’t answer that, but if you don’t know Christ as your personal savior, it’s time now (voice starts cracking) to ask him to come into my life. Repeat after me, Jesus save me, Jesus save me,” and that’s what he did, he said “Jesus save me, Jesus save me.” The ambulance comes and they take him out, I follow him to the hospital, they strip him, they take him to the emergency room...and two hours later, he died- he’s dead. You know, 23 years old, doing what he’s not supposed to be doing, and it caught up with him. Here I was, happening to be working at night, happening to be on the street he was going down, and here I was, not knowing I would be responsible for his last words. His mother and his grandmother got my number and they called. They said, “Officer Russell, what were my grandson’s last words.” And I said, “His last words were ‘Jesus save me’.” And they hung up the phone. They said, “That’s all we needed to know.” That was a Saturday night. That Sunday, I was pastoring and policing. Where I was pastoring was (unintelligible) 930 East 14th street, in the heart of the hood, church I took over for my bishop. I went over to help him and I ended up taking over his church for 5
years. Bishop Herald Williams (?)—he released the church to me in 2000. So I was a police officer, I was a pastor, and also at Wake Forest getting my masters in divinity so I did all three of those. So I (raising voice) went to the funeral, and um...to see these young kids hear that story from a preacher that was preaching, ‘cause I was preaching, they came up and gave their lives to the Lord. So a lot of the times, you don’t see the dichotomy of police officer-preacher, police officer-pastor, but it works. I’ve had countless...even law enforcement officers give their life to the Lord because there’s sort of a...a gulf between certain careers where certain people can’t tell the other people...so God put me in there. I’ve got troopers get saved, they’re preachers now, I’ve married police officers, my wife and I have done counseling sessions to police officers, military. Even being here, you know, drill instructors who have such a tough job, sometimes it’s hard for them to make that...that transition when they come off the street, my wife and I had been there with them, so, it’s amazing how God has placed the both of us and all of our learning has been able to help others, so.

SJ: He has been very...active in the community, not just as a police officer, they know him as not just as a police officer friend but as a pastor. And they respect him. One day he told me, “I’m going to take you down to meet some people,” and I said “Oh, Okay!” Never...it doesn’t surprise me who I’m going to meet, in any kind of condition there is, it doesn’t really matter. Because we’re people...we love people. And I said, “Where are you taking me?” and he said, “I’m taking you down to the strip,” and I said, “Which strip?” And he said, “You’re going to meet some prostitutes today, you’re going to meet a little bit of everybody today.” And I said, “Oh, okay.” So when I met everybody they were not...they were real respectful, so happy to meet me, and I was happy to meet them. And I met them exactly how they were. And it didn’t matter, and they didn’t treat me any different, and I didn’t treat them any different. Because he had brought me into their lives and he had brought them into my life. So we came together. And it’s amazing to see different lifestyles come together and say, “I’m coming to church, I’m coming to church.” And I’m like, “Okay!” But if they never came to church, what is the church’s responsibility? To go to the community. And that’s how God has used him in many areas, to go to the community.

DS: And I’m sure there’s a lot of Gullah in that as well, the philosophy in how you approach it.

PR: Yes.

DS: Um, one thing I’m curious about...is, I wanna hear your side of the story, how did you two meet?
SJ: Um, we met in church. He was a …striving to be preacher, he was the janitor of the church. And being the janitor of the church, it was a huge church on Georgia Avenue, Georgia Avenue Northwest, DC (smiling, nodding). I would never forget it. And he would be cleaning the church, acting like he was the pastor. He would be preaching and nobody was there.

PR: (Chuckling).

SJ: And one day somebody heard him in the speaker preaching, and I had never heard…I knew he was going to be a preacher but I never knew about the extent of his pastoring. So I think that…I feel in love with him at 14. And falling in love with him at 14, I feel in love with his character. And I fell in love with him as a person. We talked about everything, and we never talked about our dreams and what we wanted to do, we just cared about each other. And I think that’s something that has held us together. What we have or what we don’t have, we still have each other. And that’s what we have. And I knew after 5 years, after marrying him, that he wasn’t going to go and leave me. I knew he was a man of integrity, I knew he was a loyal person, and I knew my mama would beat him if he ever left me—

Everyone: (Laughing).

SJ: And I loved his mother. Falling in love with his mother as well, and she fell in love with me. So we had a couple rough spots, where he wasn’t sure which girl he was after. So I’m glad he realized that I was the one for him. I told him—I was always quiet and kind of reserved—but he brought out some tough…toughness in me that would be needed for my journey. I didn’t know that. Now he says, “Nooo…you a tough girl.”

PR: I think I did that job too well now.

Clip 2

SJ: So that’s how I met him, I met him in church, and we were always going to church functions together, and he took an interest in talking to me, I think he was trying to take me from somebody else, he took an interest in talking to me and we became friends. And he asked me the famous question, “Can I have a chance?” You don’t hear that anymore, you don’t hear that anymore. So that’s how we met, and that’s how we always meet people, in the same way. And even the family down here, in Beaufort, South Carolina, um, because we cherish family so much,
we can cherish their families. We can go in…of course your mom and dad always taught you to respect your elders. If you did not, you would either get slapped in the mouth, or you would have to learn very quickly: “Yes ma’am, no ma’am.” So when I came down here it was very easy for me to respect my elders. You know I think that’s something—you know, we weren’t coming in as a pastor and his wife. We were just coming in as people who were taught how to respect our elders, and appreciate things. When you go to someone’s house, down here when you go to someone’s house, you don’t accept their food, that is considered rude. So if you don’t like it, taste it. Or put it somewhere later. Even if you don’t like it, that’s very rude because that’s how they express their hospitality and their friendship and their love.

PR: One story when we first arrived here. We were visiting one night and when I walked in, people said, “Oh, that’s the preacher! That’s the preacher preaching on base~” They had a gospel service on base where I was preaching at. They invited us here and they said there was a church on the dirt road and we should come visit. We were straight out of DC and when they said dirt road I was like there’s no way I’m crossing the bridge coming over here, I’m not gonna do that. We met some people, they invited us to the service, we found this church and we walked in and they recognized Judy and I. And they said, “Well, we want the Elder Russell to come and say a few words.” There was this oldie sitting in the corner there with some crutches. As soon as they said I was from Washington D.C. he stood up and said, “Mm. Can anything good come from Washington DC?” That was the time that Marion Barry had been splashed all over the television. So I came up, I said a few words, and he stood back up and said, “Well, I guess some good CAN come out of DC.” He was the father of this church and his wife was the mother of the church. And—they called him Candy Land, Deacon Candy Land and Sister Pink Johnson was his wife. They embraced Judy and I like we were son and daughter when we became pastor of this church. They embraced us until both of them died and I buried both of them. Funny story about Sister Pink—when I first arrived here, the church gave me a Ford Explorer in 1981. So uh, I did a lot of visitation and we visited Sister Pink and she said, “Son, daughter, I’m gonna give you guys some greens for yall to eat and take home.” And she goes behind a curtain and pulls out this jar of greens. We’re from DC, we ain’t never seen greens in no jar. So she pulls them out and gives them to us. This was a Sunday so we were like, “Oh man, we’re gonna go to KFC, we’re gonna heat these greens up, and uh—we gon’ have ourselves a Sunday dinner.” So we get KFC, go home, thro’ the greens in the pot, and they get hot, we sit down to eat and we were like (scrunches up face) “Oh! Seems like Mother has had these greens behind the curtain for just a little bit too long!” So we didn’t say anything but the next Sunday I used the greens as an illustration and she yells out, “Son, those greens were blanch(d?)(??)! You didn’t finish cooking them!” We northerners, we didn’t know—

SJ: We threw them away. I’m not used to canning, I didn’t grow up—we didn’t grow up with the masons jars or anything, the canning, so I didn’t know anything about “blanch.” When we’re at somebody’s home and they say, “wait one moment, I’m going to go to the field and get you some greens so you can take them home,” and I’m like, “okay…?” So there’s a lot of things and
a lot of terms that we didn’t know and they just think that’s funny. But that older couple, they embraced us. So it was almost like, “they’re okay. You now can embrace them.” Because it seemed like when they embraced us, everyone embraced us. They were almost like the chiefs of the New Life Deliverance Temple. They said it was okay, it was okay.

PR: And I don’t want to paint a picture full of roses and not realize we had some thorns because there were some cultural differences. And the cultural differences became strong, not between members of the church from ‘90-97 but it was the older members, the patriarchs. And me with my ford, I was very progressive. And they’re more calculated, methodical in how they do certain things. I was in my 20s and I was like okay, this church was full from front to back, and I was like okay, we gon’ move off the town, we gon’ leave the island, you know, it scared me. And it got to the point where we had some major differences which caused me to leave. I turned the keys in and left in April of 1997. When I left, it tore a whole lot of people apart. A whole congregation did not know why I left and the board members did not share all of the reasons why I left. So I stayed another year, starting another church, people saw and were like, “well, he’s not that bad,” but it wasn’t the same. So that’s when Judy and I had the opportunity to move to Winston-Salem, and we did, and we became pastor of that church. God allowed my wife and I to turn it around. We have another couple that travels with us, my youth preacher, and ugh, when we move, they move. We don’t ask them to move, but they move with us. They step out on faith. When we moved her in ’97, they went with us to our church in Beaufort then they left the family up, went to Winston-Salem, then they stayed there, moved to Jacksonville, when I moved back here, they came here…’cause their family’s from here. You have some people who will stick with you through thick and thin and my youth minister and his wife, they do that. So when we left here, we said we are never coming back. And I vowed. And you have to be careful about what you say you not gon’ do. Especially when you belong to God (laughs). So I’ve been to Winston-Salem, pastoring, church growing, renovated, wife and I doing outreach, got accepted to uh, Wake Forest University, got accepted to UNCG, so we go well. I stopped pastoring up there and some church called me when I had decided to stop pastoring there. After nine years they said, “you need to come back.” And the pastor was already here in this church but they were having some issues, so I was going to come back to the area, start something else, and you know…you have to know how God has placed you. And the bible says your steps are ordered by the Lord and a lot of times we sometimes deviate and divert but God is long suffering and patient and lets you bump your head, get a few knots, once you realize, “Ow, I’m tired of the swelling, get back in line.” When I got back in line you know, I can say I have the best wife in the world because she’s so flexible…because my wife says, “If you had married the other ones they would have left you by now.” (Both laugh).

SJ: They would have never understood.
PR: So when God says, “Okay, we gotta move,” she has no problem. She’s the best package. If you ever need a package just call us because we’re the best package.

SJ: I think the journey now is more precious to us because this is a great place to pastor. I’ve learned to love the people, to accept the culture, and now the culture is a part of my life in many areas. But now, the community, they come up to me—I don’t even know who they are, some of them—and they say, “we’re so glad that you’re back, we missed you…there were some feet, no one can replace your feet, no one can replace the steps that God has for you in our lives,” and these are people from other churches. So I think the Gullah community has meant to much to me, not just church-wise but in my education as well, because I had a chance to go back to school and work on my Masters with other teachers and I got to use some of my Gullah culture coming up, and embracing…and sharing…just a lot. Just a lot. I think it means something more when you get older, you’ve learned a couple things. When you were younger you didn’t appreciate things as much. But now, it’s a different level of appreciation and it’s a different level of love. Um, and now I really understand what they’re saying. Before I didn’t. I used to have to have someone to stand beside me to say, “What she say? What she say? Can you interpret that for me?” But now, I kind of understand it. I understand not only what they’re saying, but sometimes what they don’t say. A lot of people will watch you and they will look at you and they won’t say anything! So you may think they don’t like you! But that’s not the case, that’s not the case at all. Knowing their heart, knowing you appreciate them—not only individuals but also their culture. And now when I go to different places and I tell them where I live and they say, “Oh you’re down there with them Gullah people!” And I say, “Yes! And the Geechee people!” And I take pride in that.

PR: And we’re hoping to add a component of Gullah culture to our school. We’re hoping to do that in the next school year because we want the children to understand that the first freed slave school was at the Penn center, 1800s, two women from the North, Philadelphia, you know. So, how ironic for another Northerner to continue that legacy that started in the 1800s. I heard from the crowd from some of our parents that the public schools—not knocking the public schools—they are missing the Christian component. The prayer, the bible reading, is not so stringent in totality as if we could do it at our school. We don’t want the kids to be so meshed with the cultures from other areas and not from where we are, in the Gullah culture.

DS: So these are things that me and my colleagues are trying to bring up north as well, we teach American history to our kids there and a lot of these children do not know their history and I know a lot of adults don’t know the history of this country or know the history as fully as they should, from history books they had to read as students.
PR: That’s correct.

DS: Growing up into D.C., I’m trying to think of the timeline when your father was pastoring—there’s a LOT going on in this country.

PR: Yeah, yeah it was.

SJ: You always tell me the history of what was going on. You’re the archives man of dates.

PR: Well in the ’60s, my father was a preacher. And I remember Martin Luther King and I remember the funeral. I was always injury-prone, and believe it or not we were living in the projects. I fell and I messed my knee up. My father was sitting there watching the funeral on that little 12-inch, with the little antenna and the plyers that changed the knob (laughing) and he said, “Boy, I don’t believe you!” But he took me to the hospital and I remember thinking the streets of DC, 7th St, the streets where the fire had ravaged the community, I remember being stopped by the National Guard on our way to where we lived…and I always saw the fervency in regard to ministry. My dad started as a janitor for the National Bank of Washington, worked his way up to Assistant Vice President—um, without a degree and a high school diploma. He always instilled work ethic in me, ugh, regardless of race, color, creed, or religion, so you know, trust God, and God will carry you to where you need to go, to be a productive person. So ugh, 60s and 70s coming up, the drug craze, especially in DC, I’ve been there now—U St’s cleaned up, 14th St’s cleaned up. I came up in an area that was inundated with a lot of drug abuse, loose living, the whole nine yards. You know, when everything was vibrant—in the wrong way—so to be able to have my dad, you know, hold onto me church-wise, was a marvelous feat. Not saying in my entire lifetime I crossed every T and dotted every I, but I knew how far to go parameter-wise, because sometimes you could cross over and it’s difficult returning back. So the 60s and 70s, it was a tough time. A lot of distractions, a lot of difficult magnetisms that could have drew me out there. I could have missed what God had in store for me so, my dad still livin’, still workin’, still going strong and I appreciate what he instilled in me to be the man that I am today.

DS: How much of his side of preaching, do you see yourself as a model—
PR: No. Well, my dad comes here periodically to preach and he’s a preacher that’s…very creative in his delivery. He rhymes at times. Just like I did, “rhymes at times.” (Everyone laughs). So there’s some similarities even right there. I think the older I get, some of the people who know my dad—you know the older you get, the more you get like your father, because I am a junior—but, I watched him preach, my wife and I were members of his church when I came back from overseas in ’82, and I picked up a lot of who he is and what he was in ministry. Because his ministry was in Southeast DC, so he would go to people’s apartments, would pick people up, would preach out on the playground, knock on doors—

JS: Missions.

PR: Would go to missions…So I was seven years at the Gospel Mission in Washington D.C. so I know what it’s like to preach in Lexington Market in Baltimore with a bull horn, I know what it is to preach on 7th and Florida on the corner, I’ve done all that. Wherein sometimes I miss that being here, I still get the opportunity now and then to still go out, but those grassroots that my dad gave me, to not be fearful of what God controls. ‘Cause the earth is the Lord’s and they that dwell therein. So I don’t have any issue going into a crack house with people doing drugs or…prostitution…or gangs, I don’t have any issue with that, I don’t have any fear with that, ‘cause God protects me. You know, even though I carry a side on, I carry a badge, except the Lord keeps the house and watches it.

JS: And we see a lot of his father in him a lot of times, his father’s always rhyming—but there’s always revelation in his rhyming—his latest one was, “In order to understand the mystery, you have to understand your history.” And everybody we share that with, it has such an impact. He always says something—(to Pastor Russell) what’d be say about your wife?

PR: Yeah, he said “you gotta have a wife, and make sure she has no knife.” I’m sure some men today would wish their wives had heard that. (Laughter) “If you’re humble you won’t crumble, or stumble.” Yeah, my dad has a lot of metaphors that he uses. So yeah, the older I get, some of those things I do hang onto.

JS: I see the fervency in him when he’s preaching. I see not only see the fervency, but I see the love. And people can actually feel that. The bible says through loving kindness I have drawn you. When they’re out in the community and they’re out to see people, people actually see the
love they have. So I can see the love that his father instilled in him as a man of God, not only as far as preaching the word, this is his assignment to preach the word—not only to preach the gospel but to live the gospel. That’s very important.

DS: Most mediation (medication?) is non-verbal, and the feeling we get from being here with the Gullah people, from being here, you know, it’s an inner sense that you see, you know, just walking around talking to people that you don’t even know, see things in you. We’ve seen that on the island, going to praise houses and talking to people…smiles and religion and community are like, they go hand and glove. If there’s a message you can bring out or we can help you bring out as teachers, we are also trying to instill (?) behavior, an awareness of where we came from, an appreciation of who you are, you know. I always see a partnership between anybody who’s trying to help a community out, educators and preachers are definitely in that same partnership. What can we do together, inside, outside?

JS: Um, I think the main thing is to respect the culture and don’t cross the line to the point that it’s not part of someone’s heart…because sometimes people feel that you’re taking a part of them and you’re taking it somewhere else and you’re not appreciating the culture and you’re not appreciating the heart. Because whatever is given is heartfelt, because I feel like a part of this culture now and I’m here now, I feel a love and a protectiveness as well where you have some people that are very ashamed for their children to speak Gullah, where there is someone else that is appreciating you being bilingual, that you speak Gullah AND you speak English. So it’s amazing, I don’t know how many people that you’ve talked to, that have changed right before your eyes. They speak Gullah and then they speak proper English. And when they get around people who are, they’re the homies, they pull it out of each other (laughing). So I think the main thing is appreciating the culture with your heart and affection and understanding, and knowing that everyone can learn from someone in all areas. And sometimes when people go away and then they become educated, and the older people here will always tell you, “don’t forget where you came from.” And even my mother up North said, “girl, don’t be too sassy.” You gotta always remember where you cam from.

PM: As a pastor of the church, you been… questioned, to do anything at a wedding or a funeral, in Gullah?..?

JS: Some parts in the ceremony, maybe “jumping the broom,” and it all depends on if it’s maybe a more traditional African wedding and they want to put African traditions in it, it all depends on
the requests of the bride and groom. If they want to do more traditional, if they want to do a tying of the knot, if they want to do meshing of the sand, two people becoming—

Clip 3

JS: It’s up to the couple—

PR: And you find that most weddings and funerals are traditional, the ones that I have done have been pretty traditional. And little do they know that in the past if there were any real, you know, unorthodox ways of marrying... Now, the one thing that I did I learn when I did my first funeral, was when we went up to the graveyards, they’re not normal up North. They’re down a dirt road, someone’s got a plot of land, where, this is the family’s land—I’m used to you know, the committal—

Clip 4

PR:— You sit there until the last dirt is poured on that grave. And that was something I wasn’t accustomed to. You know, you did it, the casket was there, we walked away and they rolled it down. But we were there until—and that was a tradition, and they had music, which was something I wasn’t accustomed to as well, they had music out of a box, and I said, this is a little different.

JS: And up North, when we do funerals, a lot of the time the family comes in and views the body. After they view the body, the casket is closed. And the casket is not open anymore. And down here it’s open at the end of the service for everybody to view the body and then they bring the family up, so those feelings come up again, and then, like I said we weren’t used to seeing the body in the chancellor (?) in the foyer, we weren’t used to that as well. So different things we weren’t used to up North that we had to get used to here. Not saying they were doing it wrong, it was just different. As a pastor, and as part of the ministerial staff even if you aren’t initiating, when you go and you’re with that particular pastor of that particular church and you’re taking care of a loved one, that’s just, you just go with the flow, whatever’s asked of you. And after whatever’s asked of you, you’re usually accommodated and everything’s fine. When we find out a person has died, that week, normally just the intimate, just the family comes. Here, everybody
comes. They come for the whole week, they bring food, and they say, “we’re gonna sit awhile.” Sit awhile and do what? Just go sit a while.

PR: Just to be there. So, you see that family aura that extends to the extended family. You just have people who will come by, sit, get a plate—

JS: And it means a lot to them when the pastor comes. Or the pastor couple comes. And they’ll ask, “Has He come today? Is He coming tomorrow?” And I didn’t know we were expected to come so much, you know, when a person expires.

PR: -- Especially the pastor because this was my first pastor in 1990. So a lot of things I did out of ignorance. I chalked it up as experience. So, they would come a second time to make sure I didn’t repeat the same mistakes that I did the first time. That’s God. Because normally you don’t have an opportunity to come back and redo your first works over again. God allowed me to come back to the same church with some of the same people who knew me the first time. It’s amazing, some of these people the first time, 18 or 19, now have children, husbands or wives, and they tell the young people, “y’all just get away with so much. If we had the pastor we had here the first time, he’d be chopping y’all” (laughs). I got old, I’m old pastor now in some areas. I told them look, it’s still there, just don’t rile it up. It’s a good thing because we came back and there wasn’t a lot of people there, like you saw Sunday, was not here when I arrived four years ago. I thank God that I kicked the ground running and we’re expecting greater things. This is just the beginning. My goal is to build a complex because on this island, one thing about this island is that it’s very rustic, very traditional, but I will say this because I am a very outspoken preacher, is that this island fought hard against urbanization. However there’s a Family Dollar over there. How many Family Dollars up North can you go in and buy meals? They fought against a Publix. So that means that everybody who lives on this island has got to go to Lady’s Island or Beaufort to shop, even to work out. So my goal here, I thought God wanted me to move into the city, we have seven acres in the city that we want to do something with, the goal of the ministry is—I wanna build a complex, with a family life center, we need a workout, we need so many things for our youth because there’s nothing on the island for our youth. There’s no recreational facility, there’s nothing to culturize them, there’s no art center here, you know, primarily on the island, so my goal here is, drug and alcohol, we have an HIV and AIDS ministry here, and there are things we need to build as a church to help our community. So we’re out there, we know what they need. So my goal is to buy fourteen acres. You know, when I did my master’s, my thesis was on a church in Washington DC and the title of it was, “From Meager to Mega.” Because you see a lot of mega churches but you don’t see their meager beginnings. What I did, Bishop Owens is about 10,00 members but he started in ’67 with 7 members. And now, you know, years later,
prominent pastor in Washington DC. But I like to talk about the meager because we think God only operates in the mega. When you look at TV, they always bring in these huge pastors with these thousands of members and show what they’re doing. Well, I want to be able to show what we’re doing with the meager. Take for instance that school right there. We don’t have, you know, 5,000 members, we have 2-300 at best, I want to do that with the meager. And when we become mega, if God allows us to do that, at least we’re charting the steps on how God has called you in a major ministry like that. Praise God in the meager. If you can’t praise him with your pinto…you can’t learn how to praise him when the Cadillac comes. So this is what we’re teaching, learn how to worship from where you are. It won’t be no surprise when you do receive that humungous blessing. You already know what to do.

DS: Tell us about the future generation, are your children in your lives at well?

JS: We don’t have any biological children.

PR: I don’t have none on the outside. (Laughter)

JS: We have a lot of God children that we have helped raise with the church. As far as, because of the callings on our lives we have been able to travel, anytime, anywhere, is because we don’t have any children yet. We still believe in God and believe that God is going to bless us with some children. I believe that, it’s one thing when you see someone mothering their child and it’s a wonderful thing to have the opportunity to mother your own children whether they come through you or you even adopt.

PR: She’ll make a good mother because she raised me these past 30 years (laughter). So she’ll make a good mother. We just had a three year old come down from Winston-Salem that uh, we had a young lady that came and worked for us that got pregnant and she went to grad school and I had an issue with it because she had been in our lives, we met her in tenth grade and then she got her in college and got pregnant at the last minute and I said I don’t like her children, that’s just the realness of me, but the child embrace us as an infant. We moved here in 2007 and the child was born in 2007. And you figure out of sight out of mind, but when this child met us, embraced us, and she’ll say, “I wanna talk to Pastor JuJu! I wanna see Pastor JuJu!”
JS: “I wanna go to the beach!”

PR: We had to go pick her up, meet her in Rock Hill, and she stayed with us for a week. So we had God children from 3 to 30. I have children that are on my bank account and all I have to do is transfer money. I was like, well well, what do I need children for, I’m already experiencing all of that!

JS: The church would love to see us have children.

PR: Yeah. And I pray, at 50 we’re kind of old and that’s what people will tell us, “You’re never gonna have children at 50,” well, if you’ve never had children, you can’t sympathize with us. Yes, we want to have children at 50 because we’re gonna need someone to push us around when we retire.

DS: No time soon, it seems.

PR: Hope not! One thing, when we show this to our students back in Cleveland, so sincerely, you want children to see what true love looks like, and it’s been a pleasure talking to you both because I think for this time, when they view this, this is what love looks like.

PR: Amen.

JS: Thank God.

DS: I really appreciate your time.

JS: Thank you so much! Thank you so much!
PR: Thank you.

DS: Alright, thank you so much.