



**All the Best Podcast**  
**Episode 35: “Faith and Service”**

*Featuring NFL Pro-Bowler Jonathan Stewart and his wife Natalie Stewart*

Natalie: "August 18th, 2001. I wrote this letter for Carl Canon's book, 'The Pursuit of Happiness in Times of War.' I have pursued life itself over many years now and with varying degrees of happiness. But now at 77, I find that I am perfectly content to let history be the judge of those things I got right and of my mistakes in life as well. For those not quite there yet, I can say, "Pursue happiness until you find it." The pursuit must include helping others, giving of yourself to a cause bigger than yourself, and it must surely include love of family." - George Bush.

George: In the first place, I believe that character is a part of being President.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All the Best." The official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All the Best."

George W.: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, write your mother, serve your country, and he said, tell the truth. And I tried to do that in public life. All through it.

Barbara: You are a human being first and those human connections with children, with friends are the most important investments you will ever make.

George: We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children. A world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush foundation. This is "All the Best."

Jonathan Stewart was selected by the Carolina Panthers, 13th overall in the 2008 NFL draft and was ranked among the top three running-backs entering the draft that year. Jonathan played 10 seasons with the Carolina Panthers and one season with the New York Giants, appearing in Super Bowl LI and the 2016 Pro Bowl. He married his wife, Natalie in 2017 and together own and manage the local Charlotte media company, "Charlotte Lately." Previously, Natalie served as an executive board member of The Professional Club, the oldest networking group in LA and was the youngest female member of the board of directors of the Commercial Finance Conference of California. Together, Jonathan and Natalie are active members of their community, working with Inspire the Fire, "Least of These" Carolinas and "Convoy of Hope." Jonathan and Natalie, welcome to "All the Best."

Natalie: Thank you for having us.

Sam: Well, guys, our podcast is rooted in the legacy of service that was left behind by my grandparents who you guys both have had a chance to meet up in Kennebunkport, Maine. Do you have any stories you could share about them?

Jonathan: Yeah, it was an honor to be up there for my first time and country music star, Jack Ingram had an opportunity to play some music for 41 in his living room. It was just really surreal and beautiful and very unexpected. And it was just a really good time to just kind of see his personality. I remember he looked at me and he gave me a double take. He smiled, he was drinking ginger ale and he asked for a beer and obviously there was no beer to be given to him but he made a really sly joke about, "Oh man, I really wish I had that beer." It was a pretty cool moment. Just really grateful that I had that experience with him.

Natalie: I remember just, like, when Jack was performing, just crying and, like, I just had chills. I grew up in D.C. My dad actually worked for Reagan and 41 and so my dad's boss, when I was growing up, was Fred Zeder. He was a fighter pilot in World War II and ended up becoming a U.S. Ambassador and was the head of OPIC and my dad worked for ambassador Zeder. And my mom was from Micronesia and so she moved to the U.S., like, it was a complete culture shock moving to D.C and my dad took her to Georgetown, bought her, like, her first dress outfit. And they were going to go to dinner at Fred Zeder and his wife's house. And I know that it was the Reagan's and Barbara and George Bush and so my dad was trying to explain to my mom the situation she was walking into and her English wasn't very good then and so he was kind of just saying, "If anyone asks, your husband's Howard and he works for Fred and that's all you really need to know." And at one point my mom met all the other women and started talking with them and basically said something to the effect

of like, "My husband's Howard , he works for Fred. What does your husband do?" And Barbara Bush at the time was just like, "Oh, well they all work together," and was just really kind to my mom. And they were such humble people and knowing that as a child and then obviously knowing Marshall and getting the opportunity to spend intimate time with you guys in Maine and just seeing all the work that they've done over the years and in so many ways was just a really powerful moment to know this is this great man, and we're sitting in his living room watching "Golden Hour" and listening to Jack Ingram with his grandkids. Like we all just kind of left so grateful, but then also just, this was a moment in history that we got to share with the President of the United States and it was just a really powerful experience, I think, for all of us.

Sam: Well, thank you for sharing those stories. You know, serving your community in Charlotte is not only a part of your business, but seems to be a way of life for both of you. Can you tell us a little bit about Charlotte Lately, the media company that you both own and manage in Charlotte, North Carolina. It's more than just a media company, isn't it?

Natalie: So, it started as really an Instagram account. Another girl that we knew who I had met, because I had done a takeover for it and I just liked the content she was producing and it was just very much about showing a more authentic version of Charlotte. And so when Jonathan first was about to retire, we started talking to her about taking it over because she was going to be moving. She had approached us and she was like, "I think you guys would be really great at this." And so Jonathan and I always have had a passion for mom and pop restaurants and while I was pregnant, we started a thing, it was like #chewwithNatandStu, but we've always loved food and art. Jonathan plays the piano by ear and is a really, really great photographer, which not everybody knows. So it was just a natural fit and we really wanted a platform in Charlotte where we could share about people and businesses and tell compelling stories, but not have it be our own platform. So now we're working on our first issue through quarantine. So that's going to be released in August but for us it's just being able to leverage the different relationships that we have to do good in the community and have a place to share it. Our magazine is going to have zero ads. So it's going to be very artistic and more a storytelling-type of publication than others that are here.

Sam: Well, Charlotte Lately, doesn't encompass all your community outreach initiatives or your giving in general. You've given your time and resources to other non-profits like Inspire the Fire, which works to provide creative outlets to kids in Charlotte. You have even lent your support to the Bush family golf tournament, which me and my cousin Marshall, your great friend, co-chair in Kennebunkport, Maine to support Gary's House and Mercy Hospital. Why is it

important for you both to give back to your community and other causes like Gary's House?

Jonathan: I think just the mindset that I didn't get to play football on the pros by myself. There's always been someone that's paid for my football entry every year in high school, middle school, elementary, because you know, my family didn't have the means to really just pay the simple sport. You're talking about getting cleats, you're talking about getting stuff that you need for protection when you play football. I've always had someone looking out for me and my family. And for the kids at Inspire the Fire, for them it's just having someone there, you know, and being consistent and being authentic and having their back. It goes a long way. Anytime that there's something going on that fits the category of kids and helping single moms or, you know, helping those that can't help themselves period. That's right in our bucket and that's right up our alley as far as being able to contribute, whether it's finding someone that can really get the job done or we'll do it ourselves. And that's pretty much what we did with COVID and getting things done.

Sam: Yeah. I was going to say, since you brought it up, I know you've recently partnered with the Steve Smith Foundation, Convoy of Hope and Elevation Outreach on a goal to raise \$35,000 to bring an 18-wheeler filled with over 40 tons of food and water and other supplies to Charlotte. Why did you both enter the front-lines to help fight COVID-19 in your community?

Natalie: When this all first started, as much as we were scared and all the uncertainty, I lost sleep when they closed the schools and I think that realization of there are kids that, because school is closing, they're not going to have a backpack that they bring home on Fridays from Second Harvest Food Bank here to feed their family and their siblings and their selves. That was kind of the first thing for me, that was a big wake up call of there were going to be people suffering. Like I think it was just a responsibility of, we can do something and we should and want to do something. And I think that one thing we have learned is being comfortable with partnerships and seeing the goodness that can come from people doing things together, we could have sent an email to friends and raised the money that it costs to just get the truck here.

But part of it also was wanting to give opportunities where everybody can give together where it's everybody donating \$5, \$20 and then all of a sudden it's doing something good. And so that idea of the truck came and everyone having a little bit of ownership in being able to do that and provide that for our community, seeing a truck be unloaded with pallets of paper towels, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, diapers, hand sanitizer, like these basic needs that people couldn't get weeks ago. And knowing that when we received all those

goods and started to give it to the most important parts of the community and people that were really being affected, for us, that was about how many of us can come together, bring this to the surface for everyone to see and be a part of.

Sam: That's gotta be amazing and then especially getting all those people together, it does more than just fill that truck. It starts kind of a revolution. People become inspired by it. And I think that's a wonderful thing you guys are doing. You know, your faith seemed to be a powerful driving force behind serving your community. Can you tell us about how Elevation Church and your personal faith has inspired you to serve others?

Jonathan: I think that's essentially what it was all about. God created us in His image and He loves us. So we are called to love each other. And there's different ways of showing that, acts of service, you name it, but Elevation Outreach and Elevation Church, you know, they do things the right way. They take their ministry and they actually apply it. They apply it to their community, within the church and out. Ministry is really using what God gave you to serve others. And for me, God gave me a platform since high school, just being a guy that people looked up to because I played football well. And so from that point on, I knew I had a responsibility to see certain things through for the benefit of others. So I think, you know, at the end of the day, you know, it's all about service. How well are you serving and what are you doing to serve? The more you serve, the more your faith builds. Your faith doesn't grow while you're sitting around writing checks. Yeah, that helps, but it's better if you get your hands dirty and that you get yourself involved in what you believe in. What drives me is seeing potential in things and understanding that I can have a role in the growth of that potential. And you know, if we're gonna talk about legacies and what you're leaving behind, those are the things that are going to be talked about when you're gone. What did Jonathan and Natalie do for others? How did they treat others? You know, we want the echo to be, they were servants of God and they served well.

Sam: Yeah, one of my grandfather's most famous quotes and one of my favorite quotes that he had was, "A definition of a successful life must include service to others." And I just think that's so true. So I really am inspired by you guys and all that you've done. So I'd like to talk a little bit about your optimism for the future. You're on the front lines in North Carolina. Are you optimistic about the future of the Charlotte community? Getting through this pandemic?

Natalie: In a lot of ways, North Carolina is leading the way to, what does it look like to move forward, to reopen things in a way that is best for our economy, but also how do we keep people safe? And, you know, we don't really have a blueprint for this and there's a lot of uncertainty moving forward, but I will say

we do live in the Bible belt as it's called and I think the overall spirit of Charlotte and North Carolina is people being strong in their faith and seeing the good of people connecting or of families having dinner together. In some ways, this has slowed us down and made everybody stop and pause and look around them and see what's important to you. Who's important to you. What are you putting your value in? I think seeing the kindness that it's bringing out of people and seeing people really rally around our businesses here and seeing that if we can go and support a small business and buy produce from a local farmer versus all the times when you just go online and don't even know where things are coming from, it's bringing out all the things that we've already known have been things that need to be improved and changed. So I personally am hopeful that we're going to move forward and pass this together.

Sam: I think we are. Well during trying times, sports has always served as return to normalcy and symbol of hope for the American people. I remember most recently after 9/11, my uncle George W. famously throwing out the first pitch at Yankee stadium and how important that was for our country. Do you think sports can do the same for us during this epidemic?

Jonathan: There's definitely something that you said about the way sports impacts the world. What sports does is it brings everyone together and you either root for one team or you root for the other. And then there's some of them that just want to watch a good game and that's what's missing right now. And that's what people are just kinda biting their fingernails, kind of like hoping that things get to normal and waiting for that ESPN ticker to come through and say, "We got word on the NFL season or the NBA season." But, you know, I think there's definitely gonna be some changes that go along with all the sports. You have to protect the people, you have to protect your fans, and most importantly you have to protect the players. But it's going to be different for sure, I think.

Sam: I want to say thank you guys so much for coming on and I want to end with this question and I want to bring it back to service. You both have committed your lives to serving others and your community in such a significant way. What advice would you give to someone who wants to do the same?

Jonathan: Start small. I think the biggest advice that I heard was from the man that started Convoy of Hope. And he had an interview with Mother Teresa, which is pretty cool, but he was able to share with us this conversation with her and he was doing all these things, traveling, experiencing all these cool things, money in the bank, he's sitting nice. And he was having a conversation with Mother Teresa and he was like, "Yo, I feel like I'm missing something, like, what can I do to give as much as you've given?" And her answer was do the

thing that's in front of you. You know, a lot of times we're looking around for the big opportunity. You looking for the big run, you're looking for the big hit, you're looking for the three pointer. And when you're talking about giving back, you know, we're always looking for, "I want to give back like that person did, or I want to give billions of dollars to this charity. I got to get my bank up." No, just do the thing that's in front of you. You see a piece of trash on the ground. Start there. If you want to be around people that are giving, then go join them and just start small. Do the thing that's in front of you.

Natalie: I mean, I'll echo that. That's exactly, kind of, the conversation we were having when COVID-19 started and Convoy was our first thought of who can we talk to and partner with to do something. And Hal actually wrote a book, called "Disruptive Compassion" and that's exactly what he's talking about in it is doing what's in front of you and starting small. And he started off literally bringing in groceries and giving them to people in his community and that simple act snowballed and turned into what Convoy is now and they're just an amazing organization and it all started from him and a simple act of kindness. I think when you do something that is personal to you and that you're passionate about, and even what you're doing with this podcast, like taking a legacy of your grandparents and turning it into how do we continue these conversations? You're choosing to do something with intention. That's what it's about. Just finding the things that in your heart you want to do and give to because that's how it's sustainable and that's how you keep doing it because the passion's there.

Sam: Well, I'm so lucky to do this podcast because I get inspired by amazing people like you. And I want to thank you guys so much for coming on All the Best. I know Charlotte and your surrounding communities are in great shape because they have you both as advocates for them so please keep doing what you're doing and hopefully we can see in Maine. Maybe not this summer, but maybe next summer.

Jonathan: I appreciate you.

Natalie: Thanks for having us.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to All the Best on Apple podcasts, Spotify and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate All the Best.

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house. Every house, all over America.

George: Preparedness, strength, decency, and honor. Courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America. The greatest country on the face of the earth.

