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Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. We've been over the past several years, a lot of incidents in the news that involve police and to say it lightly, questionable either shootings or arrests, those type of things that we're getting quite a few questions about this. And they usually they're along the lines of can I trust the police? Especially those who've lived their whole lives where the police are looked upon negatively. Do I have to submit to police officers? Those sorts of questions. So today I have a special guest, Ryan Tillman. He is the founder of Breaking Barriers United. And I'm actually not going to go into the intro anymore than that because that's what Ryan to share a little bit about his background, his story, because it's a amazing story. So Ryan, take it away. Tell our listeners who you are and what God's calling your life is.

Ryan Tillman

Shea, man, thanks for having me, man. It's a true honor and pleasure to be here. It's a privilege, actually. And honestly, the reason I'm on this podcast today is just another affirmation that I'm walking in the footsteps of what the Lord has called me to do in my life. A little bit of background about about me, I've I'm from Southern California, grew up in a city named Rialto. And I went to high school there and had two phenomenal parents who raised me, raised me pretty well. After I graduated from high school I went on to college and played football at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, so I'm a a running rebel. And once I got done playing football and graduating, I thought I was going to come home and become a successful CEO and businessman like everybody else. And so I graduated, moved back home. I met my wife while I was actually in school. And she's from Southern California. And so we got married. And then after, you know, about a year being married, she got pregnant. And so once she got pregnant, it was kind of like a turning point for me because I wasn't really working, didn't really. I was working like, I think I was working at Abercrombie and Fitch as a assistant manager, which I hated, was one of the worst jobs ever. And then uh. I was selling in life insurance as well, which was another terrible job. But you know, when my wife got pregnant, I was like, I gotta do something more with my life. And so I prayed about it. And, well, actually, before that, I had my dad's best friend was a a police captain at a local police agency from where I'm from. And so he, he approached me many, many times, saying Ryan you should be a police officer. And I was like man, I don't want to do that. I said I'm not working for the man. I don't want to be a pig. Like that was my mentality. Sadly, just because I grew up not really liking police officers. Having some bad interactions with them. My family members having bad interactions with them. So when he approached me about that opportunity. You know, there's no way I'm gonna be doing that. I thought I was gonna be a sellout. And all this other stuff. And so it's amazing what happens when when the fire is underneath your butt and and you got to provide and you got to be the sole provider and not the sole provider, but you gotta be the provider for your your family.

Ryan Tillman

And so I prayed about us, say, God, if this is what you want me to do, open the door. If not, close the door and the door just kind of flew open. So I was hired shortly thereafter by the Chino Police Department. Went to the Academy, where I graduated #2 overall in my class. And the interesting part about it is, even when I was in the Academy and even when I graduated, I still didn't feel like this is what

I wanted to do with my life. And so shortly after that I got off a training and that's when Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson. And I really felt that was the first time in my my career that I had felt like, ashamed to be a police officer because I was like, man, like, I don't want to be a part of what everybody's calling me, us bullies and, you know, abusers and stuff. And so that's when one day I literally remember waking up and God like literally implanted this blueprint on my heart about how he wanted me to change the profession. And one of the things that he said is he said I want you to change the face of modern day policing. And so he he had put this whole plan on my heart about going out there, educating people on what we do, why we do it and how we do it. And he said, I'll take care of the rest. And so that was in 2015 ish. And man, let me tell you, when you answer the call of God on your life, it's crazy what doors open. And so I've been, I've been running my organization Breaking Barriers United for the last, you know, almost 8 to 9 years. And the whole sole purpose is bridging the gap between law enforcement and the community. And so it's been a phenomenal ride and journey.

Shea Houdmann

For me, a a white male whom I only negative interaction with police have been when they're giving me a traffic ticket for something I desperately deserved. I I don't have the same experience that a lot of other people do. What do you say to people who similar to you who either through reputation or through the reality of things they've experienced, they have a very negative view of the Police Department? And when I look at Scripture, say Romans 13 and some other passages, but tell us to, we are just submit to the governing authorities and that includes the Police Department. What do you tell to people, both Christians and to the extent non Christians, how do you bridge that gap, so to speak and learning to trust the police, recognizing they are performing very difficult and a very important role. I know it's extremely difficult for those who have had negative experiences.

Ryan Tillman

Absolutely. So if we look at this subject through a biblical lens, then it should be easy. And the reason I say it should be easy is because we are to act Christ like and part of being Christlike is to being accountable to our actions, acting with grace, acting with mercy, all these different things. And so if we look at this through a spiritual lens then race should even be a factor. And that's one of the things as I've grown in my my walk of Christ, I've realized when I talk to other believers, I'm like, look, hey, you know, if you're looking through a spiritual end, race shouldn't even be a factor. Even if you feel like the officer was racist towards you, are we still? Does that authorize us to react in a way that's not godly? And so from a spiritual lens, we have to be able to hold ourselves accountable. Be able to not be quickly to anger. We are asked to be slow to anger, you know, and be wise in our speech.

Ryan Tillman

But if I'm talking to somebody who's not necessarily walking with the Lord, I have to I have to make sure that I I'm empathetic to what they're experiencing or what they're feeling. And I also look at that as my opportunity to show Christ to them, you know, I mean. So it is there racism in law enforcement? That's always been a huge question. Well, you have to realize or what people have to realize is that we live in a in a in a fallen state, you know, that's the reason why Christ came is because there's men, men by nature have a sinful nature, and if you're not following Christ, then we live in a broken world and law enforcement is not exempt from that, you know. But you can go to any other profession, whether it's, I mean, broken pastors, you can go to school, teachers, doctors, you name it. We live because, we live in

a broken world you're going to find sin with that. And because of that, there is racist people in law enforcement, but it's not to the extent of what people think.

Ryan Tillman

And sadly, what's also been happening is that this racial agenda has been overtaken as if that's the norm when it's not the norm. You know, anytime police officers utilize force, there's usually usually a reason that's associated to that force. And so for them to automatically associate to race, I think is wrong. We have to come back to the reality of that person that was stopped, did they do something to put themselves in a situation that caused officers to utilize force? And if they put themselves in a situation that caused officers to utilize force, then that's what we should be, you know, arguing about as opposed to whether or not an officer stopped them because of the color of their skin. Now the the reality of whether or not it was excessive force or reasonable force, that's that's a different argument.

Shea Houdmann

So obviously the most recent incident has been the the Tyree Nichols tragedy, and I I've heard some of the things you've said. What are your observations in what happened there? And when something like that happens, what's the appropriate degree that we can protest like that we have to do everything we can to prevent stuff like that from happening. But while not, I hate this phrase, throwing the baby out with the bathwater in terms of rejecting the entirety entire value of the police because of some extremely bad apples, so to speak.

Ryan Tillman

So first and foremost, we have to start with the reality. And the reality of that situation is that it was wrong on all levels. Those officers had no justification to utilize the level of force that they did against Tyree Nichols, and so we have to start with that. Now as far as the bigger the layers to it. And this was a very layered case because and what's interesting about this case is that it went completely against the cultural norm, released the agenda that the media had out with, you know, usually typically it's a white officer you, you know, quote on quote abusing a black man or something like that. And so there this was different. And so the scarier part about this one is that it make people make the question well, is this, does this justify systematic issues and law enforcement in and of itself? And I always tell people first and foremost, we have to we have to separate all this stuff as far as it being a systematic issue. And we have to focus, focus on this isolated situation.

Ryan Tillman

Now there are other there's other information that has come out about the situation that shows that this was probably a more personal attack on Tyree Nichols as opposed to just some officers that just went rogue and decided to beat the guy. It doesn't justify their actions by any means, but it definitely explains why we see the behavior that we saw. These officers were completely out of control. They're in their emotions and this was not in my approach, a systematic issue in the sense that that department is all corrupt. And so can we make improvements to the overall system of law enforcement comes a question? Yes. I always tell people like the moment we stop trying to improve their professional law enforcement, is the moment we start to go backwards. The question becomes is where do we make those improvements? Well, you know, we had a movement a few years ago, defund the police. That's

the last thing you want to do. So you want to add more funding, add more training and also add more you you got to go out and find the right people to patrol the streets.

Shea Houdmann

So tell us our listeners a little bit more about Breaking Barriers United and what is it that you guys do and what's what are some of the impacts that you're seeing? And what what are, give me a couple of examples of how you know to change some people's thinking on whether it's defund the police or what sort of issues the police need to be focusing on and maybe a different way?

Ryan Tillman

So Breaking Barriers United, like I said earlier, was a organization that was started to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community. So initially when we started, I was out in churches educating, especially particularly black churches at the time, educating people about their professional law enforcement. And in that discussion we touched on why we do we do? How we do, we do. And what we do. I I recognize early on that a lot of that, that large part of that gap that we all talk about, you know we all say bridging the gap. Well, what is that gap? Typically what I recognize is that gap tends to be a lack of education about our profession, and the only one to really blame it on that is law enforcement itself. I mean, we've done a terrible job educating the public on what we do, why we do it and how we do it.

Ryan Tillman

When I got into this, when I got into this job, I will never forget you know, going on calls for service, and you know, let's just say, you know, we, we we stop somebody for driving a stolen vehicle. And so we do a higher risk traffic style where all the guns are out. And so you have all these people looking at us that, you know, got guns pointed at, you know, people coming out of cars. Sometimes there might be kids involved. And so we would handle our business. And then once we handle it, we would typically wrap things up and we would just leave. Well, what's the problem with that is like you have a whole community that's just got done watching you take people out with guns and there's no explanation. And so what I start learning early on is I would always you know once the situation was what we like to say code four, which means that the situation was OK. I was gonna talk to the people. Hey, look, you know, we had this guy that was driving the stolen vehicle, possibly armed and stuff, which is why we had a, you know, take them out the way we had to take them out. And I noticed that any time you gave the community closure, it was like, oh, wow, like that totally makes sense. You guys did an awesome job. So usually the the the lapses and the gap is because people don't know what we do and why we do it. And so when they see us do quote on quote in their mind, these barbaric actions. It really when you provide reason behind it, it's not that barbaric as as it may seem.

Ryan Tillman

And so what Breaking Barriers United has done is, we go out there, we tell people about what we do and then I also immerse them in scenarios that law enforcement officers face on a day-to-day basis. And what initially started as scenarios in in front of like a live audience a live crowd, we've since expanded. We've since expanded to creating this YouTube series called Switch, where we actually put office or put civilians through real life scenarios that officers have faced. And the the caveat to it is we utilize simunition rounds, which are it's like a round that comes out to you and it hurts if you get hit with it, it

hurts. And so there's a level of pain that happens if you get shot by the suspect. And so by what we've been able to accomplish, and that is people, their eyes have been opened, the mask has been removed. And they're like, wow, like, I I understand what you guys do now. We've had people from convicted felons go through it to people that are anti police that have gone through it and their whole mentality about policing has extremely changed. So that's one aspect.

Ryan Tillman

And then we also educate a lot of students. So we have we're in, we have, we're in schools all across the country doing workshops about different topics, whether it's law enforcement, whether it's anti bullying, whether it's substance abuse, mental health abuse, you know or mental health disorders, you name it. And then we also have after school programs where I have officers that go into these schools and mentor a lot of these kids that are just served or underserved, I should say, and and try to help them develop some resiliency to their life. So it's it's a BBU has become a huge conglomerate of community services that we offer to the community.

Shea Houdmann

It's awesome, and when this episode goes live, we'll include some links to where you can learn more about Breaking Barriers United and also the video series. I'd love for people to watch some of those. I'm going to ask you this because you mentioned it earlier, for a black police officer, how often do you still have to deal with the essentially, you're you're a traitor sort of attitude from the people you're trying to serve.

Ryan Tillman

So now not too much. So I you know, God is good. Like I talked about earlier. When you walk in faith and when you answer the call of God in your life amazing things happen. Because my organization was growing so quickly, I had to make a decision last year to either stay on full board with the Police Department or go all in on my organization. And so I prayed about it. We fasted, and the Lord revealed to me he wanted me to continue to expand my organization. And so my chief created a part-time position for me last April, which allowed me to be a part-time police officer. So I'm still have my credentials, still sworn, but I I focus more on my organization now. But I bring that up because now that I'm a part-time officer I'm not on the streets as much as I used to be. So I don't necessarily get hit with the I'm a trader too much anymore or Uncle Tom, but I do still get what hit with it, you know, on social media platforms and channels. I've had a I've developed a reputation to kind of go against the grain in the sense that I will call out bad police work when I see it. But I'm also going to defend great police work when I see it. And because of that, I always get people on both sides of the spectrum that don't necessarily always agree with me. Sometimes it may be police officers that don't like what I have to say because I'm calling some bad police work out. But a lot of times it's also people in the African American community because when I say that a situation that involved use of force against a black man or black female was justified, they don't like that either. Just because they're reacting solely from their emotional, from their emotions as opposed to facts.

Shea Houdmann

That's like, like you said, often when we will publish an article on a controversial topic, we will get criticism from both sides and it's not always a sign that you have the right balance. Sometimes it is but

no, I I can, I can relate to an extent to the struggle of trying to do what's right and then getting hit from both sides, it's not not a fun place to be, but it's often like I said a sign that you're at least striving and you think right. So let me one question, I don't think I can do justice to this conversation without asking you, because even just recently a friend of mine was visiting from Brazil. She asked me about George Floyd, the whole George Floyd incident. Of all of the ones that have happened in United States in the last several years, seems to be the most famous, the most known around the world and still on a lot of people's minds. So from your perspective and from the research you've done, from what you've heard, what you know, what, what happened with that incident? What maybe this will be a good example, what should the officers have done differently? And how would your organization seek to take something a tragedy like that and turn it into an opportunity for people to learn and to not make the same mistakes in the future.

Ryan Tillman

So again, like I said with the Tyree Nichols, we have to 1st acknowledge that, that that situation was wrong. I mean the officers failed. They they failed, and unfortunately George Floyd lost his life that day. Now the thing that the reservations that I had with the whole situation is that the moment this George Floyd incident happened, it was immediately painted as a racist situation or racist, it was driven by race. Now, whether or not that's true or not, I don't know. Will we ever know? We won't know. And the reason I say it bothered me is because I think a lot of times we're so you know, quick to jump on race. This has gotta be because race. This has gotta be because race. But we don't know that. I mean, we didn't know Derek Chauvin at the time. We don't know if this dude had a a track record for, you know, racial propaganda. We don't know if he had a, you know, Nazi flags in his garage. We don't we don't know. Could he? Yes, he could have. And so I always tell people before we look through the lens of of race, let's just see if this was bad police work. And so it again it could have been racial. We don't know yet. Or we at least we don't know. We we may not ever know just because I don't know if we really know the extent of who Derek Chauvin is. This could have been no doubt about it, fueled by race, but we just don't know. But if we look at the little lens or just police work in and of itself, and could this situation have been averted, I think it could.

Ryan Tillman

Now toxicology reports came out after the fact, and it showed that George Floyd had a large amount of, substantial amount of narcotics in the system. Which I believe was a contributing factors to his death. But that doesn't mean that he should have died the way he died. I think that the reason the officers failed is because they failed to reassess the situation the moment he started saying he couldn't breathe. I always like to say that I believe the situation was a contempt of cop situation, meaning that, as Derrick Chauvin was had his knee on George Floyd's neck and all the people around him were telling him what to do, I felt that he was in a mind state or mindset that I'm not going to allow these other people to be right. I'm going to do this the way I want to do it. And so what he should have done is the moment George Floyd said he couldn't breathe, he should have reassessed the situation, turned him over, see if he can breathe. If he's not breathing, give him the appropriate medical needed or medical aid that he needed. What he didn't do it or he didn't do that at all. And I know he could have done that just because I've done it before. Unfortunately, my job there, there have been times where we've had to put people on their stomach. Lay them out on their chest because they were acting out. They're acting recklessly, fighting, biting, spitting, you name it, and then they try to tell us they can't breathe and the moment

they tell me they can't breathe, we turn them on their side. And if they continue to fight, bite, whatever they do, we put them back on their stomach. But if they, if you assess and recognize, like, hey, he's legitimately having a medical emergency you render aid. And so I think that it was completely reckless, reckless upon Derek Chauvin and those who were also on the scene for not reassessing that situation and providing him the appropriate medical aid that he needed.

Shea Houdmann

It's very helpful and each of these cases that have been in the news each time I mean I have an appropriate level of distrust of the media, not to the sense that I don't believe anything they say. But anytime I hear a report I'm like I'm going to wait a little bit before I make a judgement, because often a few days later, even a few weeks later, stuff comes out that really either changes how you view it or at least informs. Like oh, I may still not agree with what happened and still view it as the wrong outcome, but I at least can understand how it got to that point. It's always helpful to not like you said, don't instantly go to this was a racial issue when it very well might not have been. Very well, may have been, as you said, terrible policing. Thing still doesn't change the fact that a man lost his life and for that we should all mourn. But things helpful too, as a reminder to all of us to not jump to a conclusion that's not warranted.

Ryan Tillman

Well, it's almost like that. It's almost like if you go, if you look at it through the spiritual lens and it's not the same, same idea, but same concept as you know, being slow to speak. There's a reason why we have to use wisdom and being slow to speak sometimes. And sometimes you should be slow to speak because in being slow to speak, you're garnering and you're gaining wisdom, you're getting context and it's allowing you to formulate a better response as opposed to reacting at a pure emotion. When you're not slow to speak it, it you're you, you're going to have a natural inclination to run, to respond emotionally, and so that's why the Bible tells you to be slow to speak. So it's almost very similar when it comes to these situations as opposed to being so quickly fired up and charged up. Be slow to react to it before, so that way you can gain all the context and then react from a place of wisdom.

Shea Houdmann

Great point. Very wise counsel for so many areas of life, not just this one. So Ryan, I understand you have a book that'll be coming out later this year and what's that? What's the focus of that book going to be when, when can we expect it?

Ryan Tillman

So we are, we are in the process of working on a book. It's going to be called Happy Eyes. And it's called Happy Eyes, because that's the the that my wife called me happy eyes when we first met cause she said I always smile with my eyes. But the subtitle is becoming all things to all people. And I believe it's a biblical principle. The apostle Paul talked about it all the time about becoming all things so that way he might win one. And so I kind of like adapted similar principles in my own life is, you know, how do you collect with the extreme left, how do you connect with this extreme right? How do you become that middle man? How do you have empathy? How do you lead with love? That you have respect? And so Becoming All Things To All People is essentially going to be a leadership book and a development book. So that way you can start developing some of these traits in your own life in order to win over a

few. Not to not to say you're gonna win over all people, but you can win over a few if you just learn how to have those 3 characteristics which is love, empathy and respect.

Shea Houdmann

And the book will be coming out when?

Ryan Tillman

So we're looking at a June or July drop date. So we haven't, you know, solidified it yet. We've been working hard in the background to get it done, but we're looking at it June or July publishing date. So I'm I'm, I'm definitely excited for that man. This is this is a legacy work for me. Man, you know I want to you know when, when I when its all said and done, I want to, I want to enter into the Heavenly Kingdom and and God said well done so.

Shea Houdmann

All right, me too, man. So, so, Ryan, thank you for joining me. We'll include some links to where you can learn more about Ryan Tillman and Breaking Barriers United. I've learned a lot through watching your videos and it's been eye opening to me, and even the words of wisdom and the insight that you've shared today has been helpful for me to help me to continue to think through and pray through what's gone on and how what my reaction should be. So Ryan, thank you for joining me today. I truly, truly appreciate your time.

Ryan Tillman

Thank you so much Shea, appreciate it. God bless everybody that's listening to this.

Shea Houdmann

So this has been the Got Questions podcast with Ryan Tillman, the founder of Breaking Barriers United on sort of a, how should Christians view the police, especially those who had a bad experience and those who are concerned based on the experience we've been watching in the news? So Ryan, again, thank you for your insights. So this has been the Got Questions Podcast. Got questions? The Bible has answers. And we'll help you find them.