



How to call on your village to help inspire you when your child has cancer. My Interview with Rev Kevin Ross - Episode #10 Hope, Strength & Courage Podcast– Full Transcript

[Music fades and continues in back ground]

Thank you for tuning into the Hope Strength Courage Podcast. Love and support for parents whose kids are fighting for their lives! A weekly podcast created to support parents and caregivers of children diagnosed with cancer, where you will find resources collected to help you face each day with Hope, Strength and Courage. From interviews with the top experts in their fields: doctors, psychologists, chaplains and inspiring frontline workers in paediatric oncology as they share their best advice, as well as day to day advice collected from other cancer moms and leaders in personal growth and development . From individuals who understand how hard it can be, I hope you will feel better prepared to cope with the day-to-day challenges of caring for your child.

Hi, I am Laura Lane, and I am your host. My own daughter Celeste was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 12. In 2015 I wrote about our experiences in the book “Two Mothers One Prayer: Facing your child’s cancer with Hope Strength and Courage”. Since that time, I have dedicated thousands of hours to share with other parents and caregivers the resources, tools, tips, skills and strategies I learned that helped our family to stay happier, healthier and more hopeful. My goal is to share with you my interviews with experts to support you as you care for a child with cancer.

[Music fades to end]

Today’s Episode features my interview with Reverend Kevin Kitrell Ross, senior minister of Unity of Sacramento an inter-cultural, international, interfaith spiritual community of love committed to inspiring and empowering people to co-create a world that works for all.

In our last episode with Dr Geoff McCowage we talked about the importance of accepting help from your child’s medical team, today we will hear Reverend Kevin talk about the importance of surrounding ourselves with a community and allowing them the opportunity to serve us.

I am pleased to introduce you to Reverend Kevin Kitrell Ross. He is a Morehouse college graduate, a senior fellow of the American Leadership Forum and a three-time delegate to the Parliament of the World’s Religions. He has received two humanitarian awards, has appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show, and he is committed to widening the margin of inclusion, silencing reckless hate speech and building diverse coalitions for peace in our lifetime.

Laura: Thank you Kevin for joining us.



Rev. Kevin Ross: Thank you so much for inviting me to be a part of this. I'm so happy that you're doing this.

Laura: Thank you. So, I would love it if you could start off by sharing with us how you started out as a minister and a motivational speaker.

Rev. Kevin Ross: Well, my mother told me that I've always had something to say as young as three years of age. She said I would be standing on a crate in my backyard after church on Sundays preaching to my friends. And using fabric that she would use to create clothing for herself, I would take scraps of fabric and put it over myself like it was a robe, and she says I've been doing this since I was three years old, and so somewhere in me there always been some positive message to bring to people as long as I can remember. And along the way I really caught fire when I came into a realization of Martin Luther King Jr. As a kid Superman and spider-man were not necessarily my heroes but Dr. King was, and people like him were, and I was inspired by him and so, in elementary school and high school I would involve myself in speech competitions and essay contests, trying to build on what I thought was King's dream, and as a child I felt it was important to inspire, use my gifts as a child to inspire my peers.

I would eventually become a mentee and personal protégé of Dr. Johnny Coleman, who was my minister at the time, and Les Brown who is one of the top five speakers in the world according to Toastmasters International and the National Speakers Association. And so, he took me under his wing and Dr. Coleman, of course, took me under her wing and I begin to learn how to present myself in a more professional way.

During that time Nancy Reagan was the First Lady, I think that was in the eighties, late eighties, right in there, 84 somewhere in there. She had a call-out, a "Say no to drugs" campaign, and she was she was asking for, she kind of called out the youth. Where are our young people? Where are the young voices? She said something to that effect, and it inspired me to connect with my colleague and at that time I wouldn't have called him my colleague, I would call my best buddy, Dr. David Montgomery. And as teenagers we formed a tag team motivational speaking duo known as the *Brothers of Thunder*. And the *Brothers of Thunder* came together for the purpose of inspiring and empowering our peers and people that worked on behalf of youth to do the right - to stay off of drugs, to pursue your dreams, to go to college, to get an education. We had these messages that we presented in a really unique way.

Well, as a result of this, we got some incredible invitations to speak all over the country, and in Canada, in Toronto. In fact, the first time I went to Toronto, I was there speaking with the *Brothers of Thunder* and it just took off, and it gave us a platform to continue to share messages. We spoke at places like UCLA. We were kids teaching teachers how to inspire youth in inner cities and in rural areas. We knew how to motivate ourselves, and so we taught teachers as a part of *Teach for America*, the faculty there. So, we really had some great highlights in that. But that's how it began for me, and it eventually took me to Morehouse College where I would then study school, that's how we got started.



Laura: Very, very good. So what are the challenges that you overcame in life and what did you do to remain hopeful throughout those challenges?

Rev. Kevin Ross: Well, I would say I was very blessed, very blessed to have a very supportive village, and you've heard the statement it takes a village to raise a child. I think, I think the village was central to me being able to always have a positive outlook about my life. My village included my immediate family, the neighbors on my block, the people at my school, my church, my spiritual community, even the people at the grocery store. I grew up in a charmed time when communities really had a texture, and they were incubators for the dreams and the potential of young people growing up, so that was that was the environment. I'm very blessed to say I grew up in an environment that was absolutely affirming of me.

One of the great challenges that I had really happened for me at Morehouse College when I arrived there. It was my dream to go to that college because Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. went to that college and because he was no longer a contemporary of mine, I said the next best thing is to attend school and learn what he learned. Well, this is one of the most prestigious schools in our country, but it's also one of the most expensive schools in the country. I had the option of going to other schools that were willing to provide more scholarship and assistance, but I was very bent on going to Morehouse College and there were some times while at Morehouse, that I ran out of scholarship money. I ran out of money to pay tuition and my parents at the time were not in position to do that. And I remember having to sit out of school for a time and I felt helpless for a bit. And let me tell you what I did.

I reconnected to everything and everyone who were rooting for me to fulfill that dream. So, I reconnected to what that would mean, what dropping out of college would mean to my younger brothers behind me, what it would mean to my grandparents, what it would mean to the people in my community, in my high school, who have cheered me on when I crossed the stage. And so, I dug down deep and got creative. And what I began to do was to form a little encouragement team while I was at Morehouse. I remember a particular friend of mine who is kind of like a godmother to me. Her name is Doshinaba King, and Doshinaba King and I linked up. We formed what we literally called the *Kevin Ross Encouragement Committee* and the goal was to get Kevin Ross graduated. Kevin, we're going to stay focused we're going to find the resources and you're going to walk across that stage. And so, I think in great part it was in surrounding myself with people who believed in me and who could speak life into my situation. I'm very fortunate to ... I actually have many options for that.

Laura: So, when you did that, did those people miraculously appear without you asking or did you have to seek after them?

Rev. Kevin Ross: Probably a little bit of both. You know, obviously it was unusual for me to be out of school since I left Chicago to go to Atlanta to be in school and now, I'm sitting out, so people, some of the people in my circles kind of got wind about what's going on. But then there were those like Ms King who I talked to a more regular basis and who I was able to be vulnerable with, and just let her know my story and share with her, and in the sharing, and in



the opening up she resolved to be the captain of the team, the *Kevin Ross Encouragement Team*, and she took a stand for me. So that kind of, that kind of engagement, that kind of support happened because I was willing to reach out, and it happened because I was also being ... my village never took its eyes off of me. My village never took its eyes off of me. So grateful for that.

Laura: I think that that's something that parents of children who have cancer can really - that's such an important concept, that making that sense of community for the family, for the child who's sick, for the whole family having that sense of community but also remembering that sometimes you also have to reach out and ask for additional help.

Rev. Kevin Ross: Yes, Yes.

Laura: If you're community can't do it for you then you need to ask for additional help.

Rev. Kevin Ross: Yes, and we get very excited at the announcement that a new child is coming into the world. We get extremely excited. In fact, we go all out. We host parties, we host showers, we buy gifts. There's a whole build-up to the arrival. People in our communities come in close, and we get fully engaged all the way through delivery, after the delivery, there's so much attention that's coming to the parents. Our entire lives change. We who were once merely friends become godparents and maybe a brother becomes an uncle now, an auntie now, our whole lives changes because one new life entered into our village. I mean, we have whole new roles to play.

At its peak when the new life, when the child of promise comes to us, the excitement and the enthusiasm is at an all-time high. And the village is on high alert. But what happens is that four-letter word that is for many people a dirty four-letter word, interferes with all this enthusiasm, called work. We have to work. We have lives. We have that other dirty word that people don't like to engage with bills, B-I-L-L-S, you know. We've got to deal with bills and work and then life happens and suddenly we push back a little bit. And we go back into our individualize life silos. And what felt like a warm blanket of community can often feel suddenly cold. And then the one who was receiving all of the support, the parents that were receiving the support, sometimes find themselves feeling uncomfortable, feeling awkward about reaching out, especially since I got all of this help to begin with.

The village still has the responsibility to play its role, to check in, to be mindful, so that the promise of the child can reach its fullest potential, I especially when it's hard, when it's hard. And I want to encourage parents right now to summon your village. They still love you. They still want to support you. They may not know how necessarily, but they want to be there, and if they know that you have opened the door and the window of opportunity for them, they will show up, and the ones you need especially, will show up.

Laura: Thank you. What advice would you give to a member of your own congregation who is diagnosed with cancer, or who had a child diagnosed with cancer, what would be the advice? Have you had that responsibility in the past?



Rev. Kevin Ross: You know, I have I have walked through the journey with individuals who have been diagnosed. I don't even like to use the word, personally, because I don't want to give it too much power, so in my mind I automatically say have been diagnosed with cancel, C-A-N-C-E-R, cancel, because I want to help people to not wrap so much meaning around it.

Laura: Right, I understand completely.

Rev. Kevin Ross: Because once we make it mean something, I believe we then energize its growth and its expression in our bodies, in our lives, in our soul. From a mindset perspective when someone has been diagnosed, I want them to see an 'X' being formed in their minds - that you have canceled that you've been diagnosed with cancer because the whole journey now is to dispel it from your mind, your body, your spirit.

But nevertheless, I'm sensitive to the fact that it is a trying journey, it is a sensitive journey. It's one that requires us to lean in and so when I've had the opportunity to serve people who have been diagnosed, the one thing I remind them of is that there is a part of your being that is not being affected by this at all, that can't be affected by this at all. That there is an indestructible part of your soul that I want you to summon so that it can give you that additional strength, that additional fortitude and courage that you need in order to evict this dis-ease from the body, because many people who are diagnosed have a good chance of living after, you know, after having a diagnosis. So that's one of the things I do.

The other thing is I check in with them on a regular basis. They know that they can come to me confidentially and share with me just as a space of listening about what it is like. You know, my cousin, she works at a hospital where she works with children who live with cancer, and I have observed - her name is Shandela Watson - I've observed her be most compassionate, most gentle. She takes those babies on as if they are her own, and she invites us to participate. Will you send us stuffed animals? Will you send us ... she gives us a list of ways that we can participate. She calls on the village and so as a leader, I'm often calling on my extended village to help. Will you help us raise funds for this and that? So there's so many ways that we get involved, but we never lose sight of the promise of that child because if that child is even with us for a window of time, there's a purpose that that child's life was gifted to us for, and so, if it did nothing more than bring the community together to have a greater awareness of how we can be engaged in developing more research, how we can be engaged in adopting a family, how we can be engaged in raising funds, there's a purpose for that child's life and we don't want to lose sight of that.

So, there's so much that I get to do related to this, and I just feel privileged to have worked with it firsthand and also support my cousin, who as a nurse, is on the front lines of this every day. This is what she does every day.

Laura: The pediatric oncology nurses are... they're saints. They're angels. They are incredible men and women who do that day in and day out. We had fabulous, fabulous teams around us that we've drawn so close to because we ... they served us. They loved my daughter. They're incredible people.



Rev. Kevin Ross: Yes, yes. And that's the piece. That the love, love is a healing agency in and of itself. Love has the power to heal and sometimes healing, just for everyone's information, sometimes healing does not end in life on this earth plane. Sometimes healing happens through the releasing of that outer shell because it no longer serves, and the soul gets to expand back out into its infinity, into the ether and then return, as life in some other form, you know what I mean? Or return to us as inspiration to keep the fight going you know.

Laura: Either way it's beautiful, right? No matter what we take love and do with it, it's beautiful.

Rev. Kevin Ross: That's right, that's right.

Laura: So. I know our time here is just precious with you Kevin, and I appreciate everything that you've been sharing with us. The last question that I have for you is what website can we direct our audience to learn more about you, and the work you do?

Rev. Kevin Ross: I would say there are two. One, unityofsacramento.com. Unity of Sacramento dot-com which is my spiritual community here in Sacramento, California, where we are committed to co-create in a world of peace, prosperity, and unconditional love for all. We consider ourselves to be the most loving place on earth, and we strive to work toward that.

Laura: Sounds like you have.

Rev. Kevin Ross: Lots of space on earth so. And then my own work, I do quite a bit. I work with people one-on-one to support them from getting from where they are to where they want to be, empowering and inspiring people, everyday people live extraordinary dreams. And there's information about how I do that whether its one-on-one coaching, whether it's coming to speak for organizations and training. That website is KevinRossInspires.com, Kevin Ross Inspires-dot-com, and really, that website will connect you to all of the other stuff that I have going whether that'd be my Facebook fan page, or videos, or my calendar, it's all there.

Laura: Awesome, terrific. Well, thank you so much Kevin.

Rev. Kevin Ross: Thank you for having me, and God bless you and what you're doing. I think the legacy that you're creating is one that I know your daughter's smiling on you in your work, and I just affirm you and your healing, and everyone, everyone who is joining you in this journey.

Laura: Thank you. Have a terrific day Kevin. thanks.

Rev. Kevin Ross: Thanks for having me.

Kevin is such an amazing soul. I love his humble generous nature and his wisdom and insights about how we can look for and receive support from the community around us, be it family, friends, our church or spiritual community.



To learn more about Kevin Ross and all of the motivational and inspirational work he does, please visit his website at unityofsacramento.com or KevinRossInspires.com.

Please join me next week for Part 1 of my interview with international Speaker and Transformational workshop leader Dr Sue Morter as we discuss how to support your child without being stuck in your own fear and grief

Before we end our show today, we have one last segment. Over the last few years, I have asked other cancer moms what advice they wish they had known when their child was first diagnosed. I have compiled that information and will be sharing their advice each week. You can download the top 101 pieces of advice that I put together as a mini E-book at www.twomothersoneprayer.com

Today's advice comes from Julie.

Julie says: Always keep siblings involved in all happenings and findings. If I could go back and do it differently, realizing all the folks at home with normal "lives" don't get it. It's never normal with a child with cancer, either diagnosed at birth right after or years later. It changes your world but you, as a parent, are your child's number one advocate.

Thanks, Julie, for sharing that.

If you have advice you have learned along the way that you wish someone had told you weeks, months or years earlier, I invite you to fill out the contact form on our website www.twomothersoneprayer.com and I will be sharing your advice with our listeners on future shows.

[Music begins lightly in the background]

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule today to listen to the Hope Strength Courage Podcast. I look forward to sharing more experts and advice with you again next Wednesday. Please remember to take a minute to subscribe to the show. Thanks also need to go out to our Hope Strength Courage Production Team which consists of my wonderful assistant Tracey Olgivie-McDonald, Andrew Braun at Braun Audio and Audio Geek, music by Fiz Anthony, social media support by Marife Constantino and graphic design by Amy Hosmer. To learn more about myself Laura Lane and to order my book please visit www.lauralane.ca

[Music fades to end]