THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST
Episode 108 | Faithful Presence, Part 4: Technology
Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Hunter Beaumont, and Tim Buttrill

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Autumn: Welcome to the Vision for Life Podcast, an ongoing conversation between the pastors of Fellowship Denver and the church at large. Each week we talk about life, faith, the Bible, and how to follow Jesus as we go about our daily lives. I'm Autumn, host of the podcast, and Hunter is joining me today, as well as another special guest, Tim Buttrill. Tim, Hunter, welcome. Thanks for being here.

Tim: Thanks for having me.

Hunter: Thanks for having me, Autumn. I didn't know if I was ever going to be asked back on the podcast.

Autumn: Hunter likes to say this repeatedly. It's never been true yet, he just likes to say it.

Hunter: It's been a few weeks since I brought it up.

Tim: Well, I appreciate having you here Hunter

Hunter: Thanks Tim.

Autumn: Tim really was pulling for it. He said, if I'm gonna be on podcast, then Hunter has to be asked to be on too. So, yeah, really, you can thank Tim for you being here today. Tim is a friend and a member of Fellowship Denver, and Tim is joining us today in one of our continuing conversations about the area of work and faith and this idea of vocation that our work is a part of a greater calling that God invites us into as a part of our story and being a part of His larger story. And we're looking at different areas of work, different sectors of the marketplace. And so, we've asked Tim to join us today to talk about his work in the tech industry. And as we've already talked about in our pre-episode discussion, that's really broad. So, we'll get into exactly what Tim's work is and what it means to work in the tech industry from your vantage point.

Tim: Absolutely.

Autumn: But if you would first, before we jump into that part of our discussion, share a little bit about you, your life? Go ahead and introduce yourself.

Tim: Perfect. Thanks, Autumn–thanks for inviting me on. I think we're going to talk a lot about identity today, so it's good to have the first question be, who are you? And the answer is follower of Jesus; I'm a follower of Jesus. I've been in Denver for about 14 years. I showed up on Fellowship Denver's door the first Sunday that I was in Denver.

Hunter: I think I met you that Saturday night, that first time, right?

Tim: We went to a concert, and I don't know if Adam was actually playing or had just recommended it, but 14 years ago, 22-year-old Tim landed in Colorado. I had a car packed full. I didn't have anywhere to sleep that first day, actually, and just bummed a couch off a friend and ended up staying on that couch for a month, enrolling in Denver Seminary, and kind of figuring out life in Denver post College. But, by the grace of God, I found Fellowship. And a few months later, I sat next to Crystal, who a few years later became my wife. And we won't go into that story today, but just through the blessings of community and fellowship within this church, I found Crystal. And now we have two kids, Levi and Evie, who are five and three, live here in the neighborhood, and love to still get to call Fellowship home. Hunter married us and

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Michael Goldstein shot our wedding. So, we've been a part of this community for a long time.

Autumn: It's so fun hearing all of that pulled together in one conversation and remembering really how faithful God has been to us through these years.

Hunter: And it really is true, I met him at a house party, which was when you first landed, and that even speaks to a different era because I was a young pastor who would still go to house parties before church on Sunday, and now I'm like, Saturday night, I mean, I got to go to bed. And I remember talking to you, you had moved here, you weren't sure what you were going to do work-wise, and I remember thinking, man, this guy's not going to make it.

Tim: Well, that's the story of so many people in Denver, right? You come out, you ski for a season or two, and then you go back home. I did a little of that, but I also, in those early years, was able to find some direction, some early direction and work. The first job was truly California Pizza Kitchen, slinging pies at CPK. And I enrolled at Denver Seminary. And when I enrolled at Denver Seminary, I did have a vision for what I wanted to do with my life. And it was around entrepreneurship and business and combining that with my faith. And so, I enrolled in just a Masters of Christian Leadership program. And what I found out was that it was the most expensive hobby that I've ever had.

Autumn: School was an expensive hobby?

Tim: Postgrad school, not related to a true career that requires that postgrad education, is a very expensive hobby.

Autumn: Tim, what is your faith heritage or your background?

Tim: Yeah, so I grew up in a great, loving, middle-class family in suburban Ohio. And originally I went to church because my parents thought it would be good for their kids to go to church. It'd be a good environment to grow up in, and so they should do it. I didn't know this as a three year old when we were starting that, but really that was actually how my parents started to reconnect with their own relationship with Christ. And so, I grew up with a Christian family, but one that was also kind of in that early stages of following Jesus and just so blessed for that. Thankful to have a dad who worked constantly as the maintenance guy at church and showed kind of just servant leadership through that and that alone. And then a mom who did quiet times upstairs every day when I would come up and get to see that. So, I grew up in the faith. I grew up in kind of the youth group environment, and would say that I kind of formed my faith through that environment.

Autumn: And how about your story of work? So, after California Pizza Kitchen, what did your work trajectory look like?

Tim: Yeah, so stepping back just a little bit, because I think it's important to my story and how I view work in between Ohio and Denver, was just four years at Virginia Tech. But those four years included April 16, 2007, which was one of the largest mass shootings in our history. And I was there for that day. And I wasn't in the classroom, but my faith at that point was being formed through Campus Crusade. And I just got to see, I think, the reality of the sinful nature of our world and the brevity of life in maybe a more clear and obvious way than most young people do. And so, living through that experience at Virginia Tech, I came out of Virginia Tech not really worrying about finding a job with prestige and money or finding a job that would impress parents. None of that was on my RADAR at all. What I actually cared about was doing something that I felt like gave me purpose. I know we'll talk a lot about that. I know a lot of people feel that

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and are trying to find that in their work. And that was definitely me coming straight out of school is, what can I do that will put food on the table but that I'll have fun with, that I'll connect with, that will give me that feeling of purpose? Because I've seen that life is short and I'm not willing to do anything else. So, after the California Pizza Kitchen and going to Denver Seminary and realizing that DenSem was kind of an expensive hobby for me, at least because I wasn't getting an MDiv–I wasn't trying to work in a church–I fell into sales and I fell into software sales. And just, by God's grace, it was a company that was already owned by a large private equity firm. I'll talk a little bit more, I think about tech funding and finance, and this was my first intro to it. I worked for a company that was owned by Vista. Vista Equity Management is still a very large, very successful private equity company. And they had what they called 'VSOPs,' which are Vista Standard Operating Procedures. And one of those VSOPs was to hire young people without a care of their background, but using a personality test. And so, they looked specifically for these kind of list of character traits that say, this person is trainable, and I can throw them into weird, hard situations and they can accept rejection and hopefully do a few other things. But that was the Vista strategy, was to hire young people like me that didn't know what they were doing and to put them through their own kind of career training process and turn them into software salespeople. So, that's how I ended up in tech.

Hunter: There's actually a similar trend in investment banking, and I don't know if it's still holding true today or not, but years ago, the large investment banks in New York were hiring people based on some profile, not based on their finance training, and then giving them finance training once they hire these right kind of people. There's a fascinating book called *Young Money,* by Kevin Ruse, that talks about that dynamic. But there's something about your personality profile that I want to flag for people as a character trait, actually, that I think is commendable. And it is this: there's a pattern in your life of trying things, taking some risks. Some might look at you and say, that's foolish risk, or some might say that's just normal risk, but either way, taking risk, trying things, being willing to adapt and change. There's been a lot of trial and error in your career journey.

Tim: Yes.

Hunter: Coming all the way back to when I met you, when you just moved to Denver, it was kind of a trial, right?

Tim: Yes, absolutely.

Hunter: But it's a theme. It's the way God actually gifted you, and it's a theme. And I actually find for many people, it's a key part of their development. I would say the same thing for me; I'm much more risk averse than you are, and I'm much more conventional in how I tend to assess what to do. And yet, there have been key moments in my own vocational journey that I can say the thing I had to do there was put myself in an uncomfortable situation, try something and see what happened, and then navigate from there. And you've done that really well, and I think it's commendable for our folks.

Tim: Yeah, I appreciate that. I will say risk profile changes drastically with marriage and with kids, but the tendency is still there. I've just had to learn how to be a bit more pragmatic with that tendency.

Autumn: It's interesting to note, too, that approach that you described that Vista took of recruiting young people and putting them through this particular sort of test was asking if they could be molded and shaped by the company into the sort of person that would do well there or they hoped would do well.

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Tim: Yeah, that's very true, and I don't think many people realize that going in, but that is absolutely part of their process. And similar to what you said for investment bankers, I think the investment banker prototype is often athlete, and that athlete is the athlete that would get up and that would put in that hard work and would stay until midnight when the firm said stay until midnight, because if that's what coach says, that's what you're going to do. It's a super interesting kind of archetype of personalities that they recruited into that world, one that I would fail at horribly. And I'm glad that I've learned that.

Hunter: One of my best friends has been very successful, not in investment banking, but investment advising. So, he's a money manager and his training is seminary counseling. I met him in seminary. He was in counseling school. He knew nothing about finance, and he got recruited into this company. It's a large company, well known, and he got recruited into it, and he's done really well, and he's learned to finance. They trained him and everything. I actually talk to him now for money management and investment advice, kind of to check what my financial planner says. And I'm amazed at how much he knows.

Tim: So, your lives have kind of flipped because you started in finance, right? And now you're a pastoral counselor in many ways, right?

Hunter: I'm like, yeah, 15 years ago I would not have asked you this question.

Autumn: Tim, since your time at Vista, then, what has your career path been?

Tim: Yeah, so Hunter alluded to it. The thing that I've always wanted to do has been to be an entrepreneur. And so, how do I get to build something? I think that's kind of the core desire in me that really is a God-given desire to build it. I relate it to kind of, 'thy will be done, thy kingdom come.' Kingdom building is just innately ingrained in all of us. And in me, it really expresses itself through the desire to build community and to build organizations. And so, I've always wanted to be a business owner. But business owners, I've learned over time, get there through a variety of different paths, one of which is just having the money to go start one. That wasn't me. So, I had to look at one of those alternatives fast. The other one is through investment banking. That wasn't me either. And so, what I realized was that small business ownership as a manager was a possibility, and that I later realized that sales leadership is actually also a good way into executive management and a good way into business ownership. And so, that's been kind of the rest of the career arc over the past twelve years or so has been sales into a startup. My first time really kind of with a startup was about eight years ago. I joined as the first employee of a company called Well Data Labs. So, I was not a founder. I didn't, and this is really critical to the risk part where it seems really risky to a lot of people to join a company that's a totally unproven company as the first employee, but it was very safe for me at the time to take a job that had a salary rather than to just try and start my own thing with no money, right? So, I took that job as kind of 'employee one' and had the joy of just building a business with people who I like to work with. I had a great boss who was a kind of multi-time founder himself and was working on this new idea. He knew that I had worked in specifically energy technology and oil and gas software. That was the niche that I had been in with that Vista-owned company. And so, I got to help build a company, and I loved it–I loved everything about it. We went from about three or four or five people at the beginning when I joined, to about 45. We grew revenue significantly. I'll always say that the thing that I was most proud about at Well Data Labs was we got onto the *Denver Business Journal* 'Best Places to Work' list multiple times, and a lot of those lists are pay to play. So, you got to kind of do some research to see what those lists mean, but this one in particular was generated 100% by

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employee interviews. And so, they had to actually say, 'I like working here.' And it was a great company. We built that, and I left about a year and a half ago for the opportunity to lead a business. So, I'm currently leading a small tech company called Eagle Field Tech. We work in the energy space, but more specifically we actually work in water recycling and transportation. So, we put sensors on these big oil tankers and water tankers, and we measure the level of water inside that tanker. And then we apply some software to the other side of it so that we can send data to customers and give them insight into where this resource is moving, how much of it is moving, when is it moving. And that kind of helps power payment automation and audit backup. And, yeah, it's a very niche industrial software and hardware business.

Hunter: Now, help us understand what's happening in the real world that your software is measuring.

Tim: Yeah, so specifically in energy production, in oil and gas production, when an oil well comes online, it produces oil, but it also produces water. And in many older fields, the ratio of oil to water starts to shift from there's a lot of oil to there's a lot of water. And so, this is water that's coming from four, five-thousand feet underground, far below a water table that you would think of as kind of water that you're used to. But it comes out with the production of that oil, and then it has to be responsibly recycled, reused, disposed of. And so, in the real world, there's a very, very pertinent kind of ongoing discussion about what are we doing with this water and how are we using it? And it's super interesting because at the same time we're having discussions about drought and lack of freshwater resources that we need not only for drinking, but for irrigation, farming, etcetera.

Hunter: And the tankers you refer to are ships or they are trucks-?

Tim: They are trucks. They are big rigs. And they drive and pick up water from one place, and then they drive and they take it to another place. But exactly how much water in that truck is important. And currently, the way that they measure how much water is in that truck is with a little float valve and a piece of chalk on their truck. So, a little arrow goes up as the level goes up. And then they say, this thing is full. But as technology becomes more and more used and easy to adapt, then there're opportunities to improve processes, to increase visibility into this resource. And so, really the simple thing that we do is make it easy to see exactly how much water is in one of those trailers and where it went.

Hunter: And what kind of places did they take this water to? Do they dump it in people's yards? Do they use it to fill up swimming pools?

Tim: Yeah, see, now you're just trying to sell my product for me because we could show people if that were to happen, and we can show them when that doesn't happen, which is the majority of the time. You laid that one up for me. So, the water is either reused or disposed. And disposed water has its own issues, but actually what happens is it will be injected back into those really low reservoirs three, four, five-thousand feet underground. There's a big push in the industry to reuse the water rather than dispose. Just like our own family house has to decide what are we throwing away and what are we recycling, there's a stewardship element for businesses that are creating energy to responsibly create that energy and to really manage the entire lifecycle of it. They are finding ways to reuse that water.

Hunter: So, we invited you on to talk about the tech industry, not the energy industry. And I thought we were going to talk about Facebook and Google and Twitter and whether Twitter was going to continue to exist or not, but you're sitting here-

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Autumn: I mean, you can give us your opinion on that.

Tim: Okay, sure. My unqualified opinion.

Hunter: But you're talking about excess wastewater from oil production and whether or not it can be used to fill up my swimming pool.

Tim: That's right.

Autumn: Hunter doesn't have a swimming pool.

Hunter: Help us understand, and I'm asking this for our listeners benefit, there's a real tech benefit here, or real tech application. And this kind of gets to the idea that when we say tech, it's actually broader than our iPhones and our iPads and that kind of the internet.

Tim: Yes. I think the really easy way to distinguish a few sides of the tech industry, big tech as a quote, as a media byline, is whether it's consumer technology or business technology. Consumer technology is the technology that we use and experience daily. Whether it's social media or our iPhone or any other piece of new technology that you use. That would be consumer technology, right? But working in the industry, you can either work in consumer technology–you could work at Facebook or Twitter–or you could work in business technology, "B-to-B" technology, which just means business-to-business, a business selling technology to another business.

Hunter: To help them manage their business better.

Tim: Better manage their business, yeah.

Hunter: Which is what you do.

Tim: Which is what I do. That's right, that's right. And the common kind of thread between those two, if you work in the industry, is really more about how that company is built, the business model behind it, and how the skill sets of software engineers can be employed to build these new things. So, if you're a software engineer, you could work at Facebook or you could work at Eagle Field Tech. When we were building oil and gas software at Well Data Labs, there were a lot of people that were really interested in solving industrial problems because they got to be steeped in the world of physics and physical science rather than the world of advertising.

Autumn: Yeah, that's a question that I wanted to ask you, Tim. You just alluded to it, but, so in this area of the tech industry–now we have the insider language; we can say the B to B side–

Tim: Yeah, there you go.

Hunter: I already had that language, but it's good to have you in a club, Autumn.

Autumn: I'm glad to be caught up to speed. This is what I like to remind Hunter, that sarcasm doesn't always read well on the podcast. So, you have mentioned a few things in your personal story that drew you to this area of work. And now, if

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we're speaking in some generalities, looking at the people you work with, your work history in this area of the industry, what do you see as some things that compel people towards this type of work? What's attractive?

Tim: Yeah, I think the tech industry is often viewed as this kind of boon of opportunity, this amazing place where new things get created, millionaires are made, and there's just endless, endless opportunity. But, yeah, I alluded to it early on, I think one of the core traits is that people like to build new things. They like to make things. If you ask someone what they want to work on, oftentimes they will say, I want to make something new rather than I want to really perfect that thousandth iteration of the thing. And so, a lot of people in tech, I believe, are drawn to the idea of creativity and creation. And as a believer, this is natural, I think, because of the imago Dei. Because of our Creator who created us to be creative and to go out and fill the earth. So, I do believe in tech a lot of people are drawn to it by the idea of we want to get to build something and this is a way to build it. I also think there's a lot of people that are drawn to it by the stories they've seen about people, you know, becoming millionaires overnight. I worked at Facebook as employee 48, and now I can go do whatever I want with my life. And so, when people kind of tell that story over and over again, you think, if I get to be employee two or three at a company, we could be the next Facebook, and they can play that whole thing out in their mind. So, I think a lot of people work in tech for that reason. And then the last reason that's kind of the more perceptive and wise reason is that when you work in a rapidly changing, quickly growing business, you have the opportunity to rapidly change and quickly grow as an employee yourself. So, if you go work at Coca-Cola right out of school, maybe you go back and you get an MBA, and then you go and work at Coca-Cola, you're going to be on kind of a tried-and-true path of leadership, development programs, and increasing team size and responsibility. If you join a startup as employee one, you could be a 25-year-old manager with 50 employees reporting to you two years later. And so, there're a lot of people that are actually really drawn to what I would call rapid career acceleration that's only available in a rapidly growing company.

Hunter: And I find that there's temptation and wisdom in all these different approaches. There can be a temptation in the tried-and-true path to sluggishness or just kind of set it and forget it and not really having to reflect on your life very intentionally because the path is built for you. There can be temptation in the rapid growth to want more responsibility than your development and wisdom can handle, right?–almost an idolatry of success. And yet, sanctified in Christ, both approaches can have a lot of value and wisdom in them. And so, I just see this as another example of where being shaped and formed by the Kingdom of God helps us to do life better and in a more life giving way, which is kind of what our podcast is about.

Autumn: Tim, you mentioned some things that personally compelled you toward this area of work. We talked about some qualities that you have that are inherent to your personality and your makeup and your gifting, that aspect of being willing to take on some risk, your desire to build something, including you mentioned building into something that has kingdom value–so, in a way that has kingdom value. And these are things that compelled you into this line of work. Now that you're this far into building your own business, what do you find as far as your motivations in it and then how are you looking forward at this point?

Tim: Yeah, so to clarify, the business that I'm leading now is not one that I started. It was one that I was hired to run. And that actually gives me a kind of unique opportunity to be a steward of another person's business more so than just expressing my own creativity through business. So, I'll start with that. And I say, I think one thing that I like to try and do that might be helpful for people who are trying to figure out, hey, what is my purpose at work? Why am I working in this

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company that I really don't agree with? Or often, why am I not enjoying my work at this company who I think is amazing? I like to try and split personal gifting off in one axis and then corporate mission alignment on a separate axis. And this is kind of a business way of looking at things. We put everything on two by twos and XY axis to try and understand our business and our opportunities in front of us. But if you look at gifting on one axis and then you look at mission alignment on the other axis, I think what you'd start to see is that there are places that you can't operate. You can't operate in a business with which you fundamentally disagree with the mission of that organization. You will get fired if you operate without any of your gifting, right? Those are just realities. You can't operate in certain areas, but there's a lot of space that you can ebb and flow between where you are working really within your gifting and you are aligned enough with the mission, right? Or vice versa, maybe. I was always drawn right out of college to IJM. I thought International Justice Mission was just the coolest organization in the world. They were living their faith through kind of this pursuit of justice. But there's not much work that I could do that would be beneficial to that organization. Maybe I could help fundraising, maybe I could help with development. But you know who could do amazing work with them is Alex Harris, right? His gifting would align better. So, if you start to think about your work that way, then I think you can really start to say, okay, what type of work? And I recognize that it is a gift just to be able to choose your work. Many people do not have the gift of being able to choose their work. But if you have that ability, there's a lot of value in understanding kind of how you might move through those different spaces. And that's what I've tried to look at in my own work is, okay, today I'm primarily operating out of something that's really kind of within my gifting and is stretching me and challenging me personally and how I grow teams and how I manage resources. But if I were to start my own business, it probably would not be in wastewater management, it may be an industrial technology. I'm also fascinated by business-to-business. industrial tech. Working in these physical sciences is very fun for me. But I've got an organization that I still need to think about. How am I a follower of Jesus first as I'm building this mission, this business that is waste water recycling measurement, right? There's a niche little business in this place.

Autumn: I think there's an application in what you said, though, to any area of work, even if it's not one that you've chosen or not one that you see yourself best suited for. And that is what you just said, Tim, about being a follower of Jesus first and then that influences how it is that you go about whatever job you're doing.

Tim: Yes. Yeah, for me, I've been learning this like a lot of other people, with varied levels of success and varied levels of anxiety and frustration personally as I've tried to develop my career. And I think that what's helped me more than anything has been the daily rhythm of going to the Word. And I got to participate in a study led by Hunter over a period of about a year, and it kind of reinvented the quiet time in my life and gave me this kind of new way of interacting with the Bible and the Word on a daily basis that it just starts to inform every little decision and every little kind of thought pattern that you have if you let the gospel into your life, if you actually go to the Word and ask for that. And so, in my work right now, what that looks like to be transparent is I have a lot of loneliness in kind of the early stages. I'm not building this with a cofounder. It's not our idea. And so, I have to kind of go to the Word and say, hey, I'm lonely and frustrated right now. And how do I then go from that point to, well, I'm just going to let that play out through my day at work, and I'm going to yell at some contractors and try and get some things done faster and make it happen. Or am I going to sit back and say, this loneliness is because I was designed to be in relationship with others. I have a relationship with God, and I'm blessed with a work-from-home environment right now where I have a ton of time with my family and my kids, and I should probably just get up from the computer for a minute and go read a book with my daughter. That would be the best thing for my job right now, would be for me not to get on a call with a contractor, but to go inside and talk to you.

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Hunter: What you're really explaining to us, how the inner world and the outer world are always connected and what's going on inside of us, be it joy, loneliness, whatever is going on inside of us, it always has effects in what we sometimes call the real world, the outer world that people see.

Tim: Yes, absolutely.

Autumn: This is broad. Tim, we've discussed how your area of the tech industry, I'm using air quotes, the "tech industry" is niche and specific, but you do have some insight into this world because of your past and present experience that many of us, Hunter and I, and many of us listening, don't have. So, I am curious about a couple of things, and we'd love to hear your thoughts on any technological advancement. And we live in an age, as you mentioned, of rapid technological advancement. Any technological advancement does have an impact in the real world and in the lived experience of the people who interact with it. And so, there is a very real consideration for anyone working in the tech industry if you're approaching it from a biblical perspective about this question of stewardship. So, in your personal line of work now and then to anyone working in any sector of what is a very broad tech industry, how do you encourage them to think through that aspect of their work in this stewardship question?

Tim: Yeah, so I think what's really helpful for people and a lot of people who work in the tech industry came into it for one of the reasons that we discussed before, but they don't always understand what drives the tech industry forward. And really that is the investment strategy and the business model of early stage technology, which basically means that if you want to build something crazy, you need a bunch of money to go and try and execute on a vision before you actually start to make a profit. So, classic business would say you make a small profit, you reinvest that into your business, and then you keep growing and grow out of that profit. What has happened in the tech industry is that such kind of crazy advancements have happened because people have been willing to make a bet to say, here's millions of dollars to try and go and execute on this crazy vision that you have. And that's what fuels tech growth. So, if you work at an Uber, and people have seen this play out in all sorts of dramatized versions on TV now, and I've gotten a little bit of insight into it, but they made a bet that they could overthrow the taxi industry. And it took a very long time. And a lot of drama, we'll save it for the TV people to go through that drama, and a ton of money to try and execute on that vision, and one of the things that people have read about is, okay, they had to pay drivers to get them to show up and start driving more than what that driver would maybe make in a mature business where they've been doing it for a long time. There's kind of known economics about how much to pay a driver versus how much a rider will pay. What happens in tech is that venture capitalists will make bets on these early-stage companies, and then those early-stage companies will spend more than they make for a long period of time in order to try and execute on a vision and to prove that it's a real thing and also just to capture market share early on. And so, if you don't really have an understanding of what's driving the business that you work for, there're a lot of opportunities to get disenfranchised, to get frustrated, to become anxious, because you don't understand necessarily that your leader has chosen to follow this kind of playbook that says, throw a bunch of money at something and see what happens.

So, I think there's tension in our industry now and actually it's just becoming apparent and you're reading about it online right now when you are reading about layoffs, the market used to reward growth at all costs, capture the market, prove the idea, win. And now, because the way investments work is it's not just venture capitalists that have invested money in Facebook, but now that it's a large public company, you know, pension funds have invested in Facebook and other major investors, and what they're starting to say is, hold on, we would like to see a return on that investment someday. And so,

understanding kind of the greater macroeconomics of the tech industry really allows you, I think, to work in it more effectively because it allows you to understand, am I following this playbook or do I disagree with it? Do I want to build new technology but I want to build it a little bit differently? Or, as an employee, do I want to work for a company that's not profitable yet? Do I want to go down that route or not? Those are really good questions to ask and good questions to wrestle with. And I think that getting all the way back to your question of stewardship. As a steward of a business, you have to understand really what your strategy is. And as a steward you might look at that strategy differently than you would as a pure capitalist. A capitalist—I live in a capitalist country; I'm not not a capitalist—but if you look at it from the world's view, if you look at it from a venture capital perspective, you would say it is totally worth it to take this bet to hire a bunch of people because the impact that we make could be huge. And the market share that we win could make us undefeatable. And all of the earnings will flow back to our investors because we took that bet. But to look at it as a steward means to also take the counterpoint at times and say, I want to build a business where I don't have to get to a point where I'm going to lay off half of the staff, and I want to elect to grow slower in order to protect the culture of this business. So, there're a lot of decisions that leaders will make but also that employees have to be aware of as stewards inside this weird little industry that we work in. That was long winded.

Autumn: No, that was great.

Tim: Okay, well, I hope that's helpful and instructive for people.

Hunter: One of the ways it was helpful for me was just to reflect on why tech is disruptive. And I mean disruptive not in a negative or a positive sense, but just in a statement of fact. It tends to disrupt what's normal or what's established. One of the reasons it can be disruptive is the Uber example you gave is fantastic. It would take a large investment of capital in order to disrupt something as massive as the taxi industry, right? And this approach has made that happen. One of the outcomes of that is also our society. Some of the institutions of our society, including that affect how people work and how they get paid and how they make a living, are more easily disrupted today with this approach to investing than they were even 50 years ago. And so, for example, there are people who make good living driving taxis. And for years and years and years, if you had a license to drive a taxi, that was a pretty safe and predictable way to make a living. And you can begin to build a life and predict your life. Uber comes along, disrupts that radically, and that has real effects on real people. So, it's interesting to think, as Christians, how do we live in a world, how do we steward our work in a world, that is just more disruptive, that the environment we live in has more change, and nothing is kind of as stable and fixed even as the world 40 or 50 years ago. What does it look like for us as Christians to live in that? And we have you here to answer that question.

Tim: Well, I'd be interested in hearing your summary. I've heard it on some of the previous podcasts just about this kind of concept of a non-anxious presence. I'd like to actually hear that from you, Autumn, how you've seen that playing out generally, because I think there is really something to be understood here in light of disruptive big technology companies and kind of our faithfulness and our work around how we manage just our own anxiety. But give me a primer, kind of help me with what you've learned from previous guests and the reading that you've done.

Autumn: Yeah, one of the central themes we've been discussing in the series of episodes this is what you're mentioning, Tim, is this idea that a faithful, grounded, or non-anxious presence, as you mentioned, has a steadying effect not only for that person, but also people around them. So that when you're attached to whatever sphere of influence it is that you

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have or wields, that really your greatest tool of leverage in an anxious age or potentially anxious environment, in any system in which people are interacting and affected by a greater culture, the greatest tool that you have is that sort of non-anxious presence.

And so, some other guests you mentioned, Alex Harris, he's been here in this series, he shared things that he personally has integrated or found helpful for him to maintain that kind of presence. I think before we jump into that, I want to go back to one thing you said about thinking deeply about your business approach and this aspect of stewardship. And that might be that if you're in an influential position in a business, regardless of how small or large it is, that the way you think about the success of that business and your presence in it is just quantifiably different. If you are looking at it through this kind of lens and developing that insight based on a biblical understanding of leadership and a biblical understanding of influence and of common good and thriving–this vocational aspect of our work. Because maybe the success then of the business in the examples that you gave would be creating an environment that you can invite someone into as an employee or even as a client in which their interactions with you or with the business are going to be encouraging. If it's an employee creating an environment in which there's predictability for them and their income or their stability or their relationship with the leadership, all of those things will be elevated in importance through that sort of mindset that you shared. So, I think that that's the perspective that we carry into this conversation that we want to grow in and encourage and think deeply about. But as we step into this aspect of our conversation, that of a faithful, non-anxious presence and the way that that actually is a meaningful leadership tool, one that brings about stability to an organization or can have an impact on the people around you, you mentioned earlier, Tim, some causes of anxiety in work, and that was a really helpful identification. So, I would love to hear you share that with our listeners.

Tim: Yeah, and I think a framework that's been helpful for me as a believer when I look at kind of creating this environment is one of kind of stakeholder value versus shareholder value. So, the classic way of looking at a business is to maximize shareholder value. But I believe there's a lot of biblical wisdom in looking not just at shareholder but at stakeholder value. And so, what I mean by that is it's not just what drops to the bottom line or what could potentially drop to the bottom line someday based on your big bet, but it's really how does the business that you're creating create value for all stakeholders. And so, stakeholders would be your employees, it would be your customers, it would be your vendors and suppliers. And if you think about creating flourishing for all stakeholders, it really allows you, I think, to shift your strategic focus just enough to really be creating this environment that you're talking about. And when it comes to anxiety at work, I kind of bucketed into a few different categories that are probably worth diving into a little bit if you want to. The first is really identity formation issues. As a manager, one of the things that I have seen over and over and over again is that people get frustrated, anxious, nervous, upset when they are equating their personal success at a task or a job with their personal value. And they are forming their identity around the work that they're doing or the image that they're creating for themselves through their work. So, I think identity formation stuff is a big one. The next is just personal financial discipline. There're so many opportunities for us to get into a place where we've built a life that is only fundable by a certain type of work. And if you get into that tension of, I don't like my work, but I have to have it because of what I'm doing over here, there's a lot of anxiety that comes there. And then the last one is kind of the environmental issues that people would probably point to if you asked them, why are you upset with your- well, my boss is doing this, or, you know, we're crazy busy right now. Those environmental issues are probably that third bucket.

Autumn: Identity in your work, the questions around money, and then this work environment that's greatly affected by all these external factors to you. So, some of these are internal. Your identity is internal, and money is practical. And then

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the work environment is external pressures. How have you personally navigated that? Have you experienced some of these tensions or anxieties?

Tim: I've only learned about them because I've experienced them.

Autumn: You've only learned about them because everyone else has these problems. No, and then how have you navigated that in returning to a place where you can maintain a grounded and non-anxious presence? You mentioned that in an example earlier about when you felt lonely and disconnected, and then said, maybe I actually need some connection and I could step away and read a book with Evie.

Tim: Yeah, so I think for the formation, the identity formation is such a critical one, it is so easy as an adult in modern work in America to get your identity through your work. We had an amazing session that Michael Goldstein led earlier that really informed me how kids and teens are kind of navigating identity formation. But I think as an adult, there is a very common experience of identity formation through work. When you meet someone at a party, what is the second question they ask you after, what's your name? why are you here?

Autumn: What do you do?

Tim: What do you do? Yeah. And so, we've built it into our social fabric that work is part of our identity and is maybe a critical part of our identity. And so, if I only find value in myself when I am successfully growing, leading a business, getting to a place where I want to be as an entrepreneur, then oh my goodness, I'm destined to anxiety and frustration. But if I find my identity primarily as a follower of Christ, then my work can be free of so much of that anxiety. And so, I've worked through that in many different ways. I still work through that. I found help and understanding just personal psychology as being really critical in seeing so many times where if I'm able to not react and step back from a situation, then I can see, okay, this is actually my subconscious ego driving this. It's not who I truly am, it's not how I want to be acting. And so, I've had to navigate that in sales. I told you, I kind of came up through the ranks through sales and sales leadership. Sales is this constant process of, did you get the deal or did you fail? And so, you have to learn how to navigate.

Autumn: That's why they asked you if you could handle rejection, correct?

Tim: Exactly. And so, I had some natural ability or they wouldn't have let me do it in the first place. But it still has been a growing process for me to be able to not treat each deal as kind of the success. This is what I can say I did today, this is what I can say I'm good at this job because I close this deal. There's so much personal work for everyone to be done, myself included, to just constantly remind yourself of your primary identity. And I'm glad you said it's a growing process because I don't think we ever arrived. I certainly have not feel like I've arrived.

Hunter: And the same thing is true for pastors. There is a tendency to build your identity based on how well your church is doing. For some, that's how big is your church, or for some that is what's the budget of your church? For some it is, what are people saying about you? Are they happy with you? There're all kinds of opportunities in every line of work to get a sense that I am somebody from it. And you're telling us, hey, we have to constantly work to reorient ourselves to what actually is true. I also think there's an interesting connection here between our earlier conversation about how disruptive our technology is and what a frequently disrupted world we all live in. We live in a world that is far less stable

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than most cultures who have lived. And that means that even some of the things, good things, we could rely on previously, we can't always rely on to be there. Which for me all the more says I need something that I can for sure rely on to form and shape me. Even the word identity is based on identical, so the assumption is you build your identity on something that's always going to be true of you, regardless of your circumstances. And I think because of what you just said, the circumstances of our world are far more disruptable than they were previously. And so, all the more important that we build our sense of who we are on something that won't change.

Tim: Yeah. Another thing that I've been working through personally, you know, I finally get to this place where I get to kind of call myself the leader of the business–I get to show up here at a podcast and say I lead a business–and there's ego in that that I'm wrestling with is something my father in law has been talking to me about in quiet moments after kids have gone to bed on vacations, and something he's actually just written a book about, but is really the kind of elevation of the idea of followership. And I use the word, I'm a follower of Christ, right? And yet we spend all of our time talking about leadership, about what we're doing to lead and what we're doing to create and what we are doing to build. And I'm naturally drawn to that. I've shared with that through this entire conversation. But some of the work I'm trying to do personally is understand what it means to be a really good follower. And yes, that means a follower of Christ, but it also plays out in my work. How do I listen to the wisdom of my investors and not try to insert my own thoughts, but actually follow their advice and learn and listen? How do I serve more than try to build and create? So, I think around identity formation, leaning into that idea of followership has been really important for me recently.

Autumn: There's a connection here to a theme that was in the book that we've referenced, *A Non-anxious Presence*, and that is that the only way that we really can go about maintaining a faithful grounded presence is through continual connection, repeated connection, with God the Father. And you're capturing that just in different language. That this aspect of being a follower first, a follower of Jesus, means connection. You can only do that when you're connected to Him through accepting His sacrifice on your behalf and becoming His child and realizing that you're united with Christ that allows you this connection to God the Father. So, being a follower first means maintaining that sort of presence, having this access to God that works in your life such that you can develop this kind of rootedness and then carry that into the different aspects of your life, primarily including our work, as we're discussing today, but because that inhabits such a large space in our minds and our time in our perceptions of each other, it's such an incredibly important area in which we live this out.

Tim: Yeah, absolutely. Can I make a quick plug at the end?

Autumn: Yeah, of course. If anyone's still listening. That's the real question.

Hunter: You've given me an idea for what I'm going to do in the future. I come with a plug that Autumn was not expecting.

Autumn: Jesse gets to ax that, so go ahead Tim.

Tim: Yeah, I think in my journey in this, it's been so helpful to find resources and places to learn about this. This has not been something that I've learned of on my own. And so, the two places that I'd encourage people to go, one is Denver Institute for Faith and Work. That organization has been just monumentally helpful for me and a connection to other people in Denver who want to do this type of work and explore their vocation this way. And the other is Praxis and Praxis

Labs. Practice is a national organization that writes about what they call redemptive business and redemptive entrepreneurship. And if you care to kind of explore the thoughts that I'm trying to explore, Praxis Labs rule of life, they've got just some really simple frameworks around how a believer can interact with their work and their work in entrepreneurship and technology.

Autumn: Tim, thanks so much for your work, for spending time with us on the podcast today. This has been such an encouraging and insightful conversation, and I'm really thankful for you and your family, the work that you're doing, the way you're being so thoughtful about your approach to this area of industry and your own presence in it. If you have questions or suggestions about today's episode or anything you'd like to hear us discuss on the podcast in the future, you can send all of that anytime to podcast@fellowshipdenver.org. Thanks for joining us on the Vision for Life podcast special. Thanks to Adam Anglin for our theme music, to Jesse Cowan, our producer, and to Judd Connell, who provides transcription for these episodes.