

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 94 | Behind The Music: Rebuild, Renew, Part 1

Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Adam Anglin, Jordan Lucas, and Daniel Perez



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 new lives. I'm Autumn, the host of the Vision for Life podcast, and joining me today are Adam Anglin, Jordan Luca—look, I said it in the right order. I said you name in the right order, Jordan, two first names, confusing—and Daniel Perez. Guys, welcome. I'm so glad you're here with me.

Adam: Hello.

Jordan: Thanks for having us.

Adam: Yeah, thanks.

Autumn: So, all three of you—Adam is our worship and arts pastor, and Jordan and Daniel are musicians who lead worship here at Fellowship Denver—all three of you are involved in leading worship on a regular basis at Fellowship Denver Church, and you also were all involved—heavily involved, deeply involved—in the creation of an album that we will be releasing soon. What is the actual release date on that?

Adam: September 16.

Autumn: On September 16. So, you who are listening, hopefully, if you track along with the Vision for Life podcast regularly or are a regular weekly listener, then you're listening to this a couple of weeks before this album will be released.

Adam: That's right. In the future, right now.

Autumn: If you tend to listen a couple of weeks behind, then when you're listening to this album, may have already been release

Jordan: Or you need to go find it on your streaming services.

Autumn: Right now. So, if you're listening to this after September 16, go look for the album right now. It's a Fellowship Denver creation. So, our musicians, our worship bands, created this album. It's called *Rebuild, Renew*, and today we're doing a bit of a behind-the-music. Look, this is the first episode of this sort that we've ever recorded, and I'm your VH1 host, John Hine, here to guide you through this behind the scenes look. No, I am really thrilled that you're all joining me today. Before we actually start talking about the album and your part in it, would each of you just briefly introduce yourself? Adam has been on the podcast a couple of times before, but Jordan, Daniel, you're new guests to the podcast, and I would love for our listeners to just get to know you a little bit.

Jordan: Yeah. Shall I start? My name is Jordan Lucas. Like Autumn said, it's two first names, but it's in the order of Jordan and Lucas. I have been at Fellowship Denver a long time—nine, eight or nine years, or something like that. We're about to be here in Denver for almost ten years, so that's pretty exciting to think back on that. I originally hail from the great state of Georgia, who currently has the current college football national champion and the World Series champion.

Adam: Wow. It's a huge part of your bio. I like that.

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Jordan: It has to be. You might need to look up who those teams are, but I don't think you need to because it's pretty obvious. Yes, pretty much when we started coming to Fellowship Denver, I started serving within a few months and have been heavily involved with music. I've been the music teams here. I front and lead the band The Long Plains with church, and I also do a lot of music outside of the church. And I have an awesome wife and a couple of kids—an eight year old and a two month old.

Adam: Yeah, so sweet.

Daniel: Yeah. I'm Daniel Perez. I've been in Denver now for about 13 years, and right around when I moved here is when I checked out Fellowship. I got really involved, though, maybe about ten years ago. So, we've been around for a while. Married to Jennifer; we got three boys. And yeah, we love this church. We love this city. I only got involved with the worship ministry maybe two years ago, but I've been playing music outside of church since I was a teenager, and it's just been a huge source of joy and fun in my life. And it's so cool, these past couple years, bringing that into a way of serving here in church.

Autumn: In addition to leading worship on Sundays and being part of one of our bands, Daniel often helps us in our kids classes, too, and leads the kids in music, which has been really fun.

Daniel: So fun.

Jordan: That's awesome.

Adam: Yeah, and I'm Adam. I mean, I guess I'll do the intro.

Jordan: You know who Adam is, come on.

Autumn: No, please. Go ahead, do the intro.

Adam: I'm a worship and arts pastor here at Fellowship. I've been on staff for 13 years, and I'm married to Erin, and we have two kids, Everett and Maya. I'm really excited to have Jordan and Dan here is really sweet. These guys are really essential to our ministry, and so it's awesome to get to talk about this record with them and just to get their insight. So, yeah, this is fun.

Autumn: Yeah. We'll start talking about this album, *Rebuild, Renew*, here in a moment, but I'm wondering for many people listening who are primarily from our Fellowship Denver Church family who come and participate in worship, a part of this, part of the sort of behind-the-scenes look, is I would first love to hear you talk about being a part of the worship ministry and being musicians both inside Fellowship Denver and then also in your lives outside Fellowship Denver and some of your perspectives on worship and leading music at Fellowship. And one question I think that I have an inside look at because of being on staff and because, Adam, I've heard you talk about this some both in a teaching setting and then just in sort of conversation day to day in the office as well, but probably something that isn't extremely clear for someone who just comes on a Sunday, is that there is a really thoughtful structure to our worship ministry and to the way the groups are structured, the groups of people who lead are structured and the way songs are selected, some of those things that you don't necessarily talk about on a Sunday. We experience the fruit of those efforts when we

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collectively sing a song and participate in worship, but it may not be apparent always in the experience of a worship service. So, would you just explain a bit of the thought behind the structure of our worship in arts ministry and how it is structured?

Adam: Yeah, I'd love to. So, when I started on staff, I think it's worth knowing, like 13 years ago, it was just myself with a guitar, and that was how we would lead worship into a service. And so, from there it was really about how do we build a ministry that's inclusive. Inclusivity is a huge thing for me because it's so hard, especially with artists, to feel like you're a part of a thing and invited into it. And we just wanted to identify what are the gifts of the body and how do we equip those to be released to serve the church, to build up the church. And so, the structure really is we have kind of four primary bands that lead once a month, and there are specific numbers for all of those bands. And so, for the majority of the people that serve with us, they serve once a month in a particular band. So, Jordan leads one of these bands—he's a band leader. Dan serves in a band with Gina—Gina Nykerk is the band leader. And then I lead, kind of co-lead, two bands, both called Edbrooke Collective. One is an orchestral band, and the other is a little bit more of your typical rock setup where it's two guitars, bass, drums, keys, and so that's kind of a little bit of the structure. So, there's four band leaders, there's four specific bands, and then the hope and the idea is that we continue to create a spirit of inclusivity within those bands. So, every year we try to open it up and onboard new people; we hold auditions. And so, even if you're listening to this right now and you're like, 'Hey, I'd be interested in serving,' we try to just have it be an open door all the time, and so people can reach out to me. We're currently in a season right now of starting this North Metro congregation, and so this is an amazing time to jump in with us because we actually have a lot of felt needs in our bands. But that's kind of the structure. And then so, we have myself as sort of if you're thinking of, I don't know, 'Who's at the top of this thing?' I guess me.

Autumn: Like an org. chart?

Adam: Yeah. And then it's me and then it's our band leaders. So, I work closely together with them, and we meet regularly and discuss the health of the ministry and things we need to work on. And then within each of those bands, we have kind of band members, and some of those band members have specific roles. Some of them are musicians, and so they're responsible for their particular discipline, be it guitar or keys or bass. And then some of our folks are responsible for helping the band leaders with song selection, and they're called what we call song leaders. And so, they help lead our services. They're responsible. And if you've been at Fellowship for any length of time, you wouldn't notice—maybe you wouldn't notice—but we try to share our leading with a lot of intentionality. Not just to have our band leaders lead everything, but to have it shared between band leaders and song leaders. And in that way we want to really kind of divide up kind of who's leading, both men and women, and just kind of sharing that responsibility together to make our time singing on Sundays as congregational as possible. And so, that's kind of a little bit of the- yeah, not a little bit, that is the structure of how we built this ministry.

Autumn: What do you hope occurs through the worship ministry at Fellowship? So, there's this aspect of it that is a selection of musicians, they audition, they're placed stylistically in a band that maybe has a need for that particular musician or is a good fit for this sort of music they're good at or skilled at playing. So, you develop these sorts of bands with different styles. But there's this component of it too that exists beyond just being a skilled musician, and that is that they're actually leading our church family in worship. So, this question has these two parts: what do you hope our musicians embody and evidence as they lead Fellowship Denver, our church family, in worship? And then, what do you

hope occurs through their leadership? What's the aim of all that effort to structure them and thoughtfully select songs and people who will lead our church this way?

Adam: Yeah, I think there's two, I kind of say our ministry has two kind of big expressions. There is a Sunday morning piece—so, I think part of my hope or aim of the ministry is to really provide an opportunity for musicians to use their gift to serve the church and to kind of get a vision for like, oh, there's a place for me here to use this thing that maybe some of our musicians, maybe they're playing all the time, and then some of them haven't played an instrument in ten years, but here's this opportunity. And so, my hope is that we can kind of identify that gift and then give people a real vision for like, oh, I can use this to serve the Lord, glorify God, and to build up the church. And then there's another piece of it where it's like my hope also is that we're identifying these gifts and we're fostering a culture and an environment where we can use those to create new works and to write new things. So, we want to empower musicians. So, when I say there are two main expressions of our ministry, there's the Sunday morning service component and then there's the creative. And so, we hold both of those up and go, man, both of those have value. We think it's valuable to feel the sacrifice of using your gift and coming in on a Thursday after work and you're tired, and that's real sacrifice. And being away from your family and being here early on Sundays, that takes real effort and so there's a cost to that. But then the other part is we want to really empower our musicians. Sing to the Lord a new song, as the psalmist would say. We want to really put them into a spot where they can use their gifts to do that, to write new songs. So, try to hold up both of those. And then I think, what do they model? My hope is that our musicians really model what it looks like to be a healthy member of a church. When we talk about being kind of in the pulpit or on the platform or however you talk about where we're leading from, the stage, one of the things we talk about is that it's a leadership position by default. You're being amplified, your voices, through these massive speakers, there're lights on you, we're intentionally pointing people's attention to you. And so, the hope is that it really is a position of leadership. Doesn't mean that you have to be superstar Christian, but it does mean that this is your home church, this is where you are invested, you're a member, you're giving, all these kinds of things that we want to see modeled in the church for what does it look like to live here and be here in a healthy way. We hope that that's true of our teams as well. And so, that's a big aspect of being a part of the ministry.

Autumn: Thanks, Adam. That is a good reminder for any of us who serve in any capacity in the church that our connection to the church really is with our whole life, the way we go about community, and giving, and participation in the church, and that our service shouldn't be segmented from that. And for musicians particularly, it is not just giving our church their skill and serving in that way, but it is involvement with their whole life and the way they go about all of those things and their connection to our church family relationally, and relationally with God in it, and that they bring that when they're leading, even though what we see on Sunday is the way that they're leading through their musical ability. Jordan and Daniel, what motivates your personal involvement in the worship ministry, and then, therefore, as we were just saying, your leadership and that your leadership of our church?

Daniel: Yeah, I think there's a few things that draw me to it. But the big thing I keep coming back to is, a lot of what I think our culture and our times can do is force us to kind of compartmentalize a lot of our lives. We do things very specific and they're for specific places and specific times, but people actually want to be more whole, and they want to be more integrated. They want the different parts of their lives, their gifts, their skills, to be connected. So, I know for me, being able to do something creative that also checks the box of I'm serving my church, and I'm pointing people to the gospel, and I'm drawing people into the message and reinforcing it through song, I just love having a place at church where I can serve and bring in different aspects of my life, different aspects of my giftings and callings, and they can kind

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of come together and feel more integrated as opposed to music just being something I do at home or outside of church. I just love being able to bring that together.

Adam: I love that. That's good.

Jordan: Yeah, that was such a great answer.

Adam: Yeah, what are you going to say, Jordan?

Jordan: Yeah, I can't top it, but I will say that really just expanding on it for my own kind of own personal flavor, because a lot of what Dan said is pretty much spot on, but I will say, personally for me, I've been in some form of music ministry or worship ministry for about 20 years. I started serving as a teenager and have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly when it comes to leading in worship ministry and serving alongside different people and when people have different motivations, and whether it's selfish motivations or that sort of thing. But on the flip side, seeing people that are there to use their calling, use their gift that God has provided and God has given to bring Him glory, and help be a vessel for people in church and members and guests and visitors throughout that entire experience. One of the things that ring true for me is that having an avenue to not only use that gift and use that calling to worship God and help people in that space, but also be creative is incredibly valuable to me as someone who writes music and creates music and has that pulling up at my heart to do that. It will always be there, and then having an avenue to do that in a healthy way in a church setting is huge, and it's not something that comes along very often. And so, it's been a huge gift for me being here and being able to create in many different ways too. So, I think that's probably been my biggest motivation being here, which is kind of secondary, that point—second point. But the first point is ultimately to give God glory and bring the focus towards Him and having an avenue to do that in a healthy way.

Autumn: That second point, though—what you mentioned as being sort of secondary in your thought process of what motivates your personal involvement and leadership at Fellowship—so, that aspect of an outlet for creativity that also supports that first priority, that also points people very clearly to the truth of the gospel and to an expression of this in which we collectively can glorify God, in that question of creativity, you all are musicians who produce work that exists outside of what you do at Fellowship, also. And as we start to shift into talking about this specific album and your work on the album and your contribution to it, I'm curious about the nature of that work compared to what you do as musicians who share your work publicly in different venues. So, is the nature of working on this sort of album, the one that we're talking about today, *Rebuild, Renew*, different from your songwriting and production work for—I pulled up a few titles of songs that you each actually have written—so, I mentioned *Lost My Way*, this one that Jordan has written; *Am I Gonna Die Now?* Adam, that's one of your songs; and then, *Do I Feel At Home Here* is a song that the group Daniel is currently a part of called A Place for Owls, that's a song that is this a new song?

Daniel: It is a newly released song, yes. As of this week.

Autumn: As of this week. So, if you listen to Indy 102.3, you might even hear that song this month because A Place for Owls is one of the featured artists, featured groups, on that local station. So, along those lines, when you're writing a song like that, one of these three that I've mentioned, is the nature of that work different, quantifiably sort of different or qualitatively different, than the sort of work or effort or mindset maybe when you're writing an album, a song, for an album like *Rebuild, Renew*?

Adam: I mean, at the end of the day, it's all songwriting. But it's wildly different—very different—in some real sense. I'll just speak for me, but the personal stuff that I've written and put out under my own name, I love the freedom that it's not tethered to anything else in my songwriting. So, if I want to write something that doesn't feel terribly accessible and is kind of just sort of this little creative idea that I have and I want to kind of execute it, it's a very small little world—it's just me, it's my computer, it's a few instruments, and I might bring people in along the way throughout the process. But it's this very small kind of thing, and I am trying to make work that I love. And if other people love it, that's sweet. But it really is this thing that I'm not trying to live on it. So, it's just pure artistic expression. And so that's kind of how I think about my own songwriting, which is way different than how we worked on this project. This project was highly collaborative. We hosted monthly songwriting cohorts where we invited our musicians to come and sit down, and all three of us, we led those cohorts, and we would walk people through, 'This is how you write a song, and so let's do some songwriting exercises.' And we wanted as many voices in that process as we could possibly get. So, we have people who've contributed to this record for Fellowship—it's probably a dozen people or more have written and contributed in some way to these songs. So, for me, that's just significantly different. And then the way that we're thinking about these songs for a worship record, we are thinking about, 'Is it theologically true? Is it vocally accessible? Is it a melody that are people can sing?' So, those are just way different categories than I ever consider when I'm writing a song for me. Sometimes when I'm writing a song for me, I'm intentionally maybe not singing it well on purpose for an artistic reason, which I would never do for a worship record, right? So, really different. But yeah, I'd love to hear you guys' thoughts.

Jordan: Yeah, I totally agree. With this album, there's, not in a bad way at all, but there are barriers that we have to kind of set in order to, like Adam was saying, create accessible songs that people can sing to. It's incredibly important that if you want to be able to sing songs in church, it has to be accessible and that people can latch onto that can be repetitive. And some songs kind of vary in that way. There're songs that we have on the album even that we don't really repeat as often, and then there are songs that we do kind of repeat the chorus over and over again, which all are great things, but you have to kind of go through that experience of singing and writing that song in order to figure out what works best and figure out what's going to work congregationally. And then also it was a bit painstaking, but we had to figure out just the little details of what is the best key to sing. Like Adam was saying, it's like we literally figure out, okay, what's the best key to sing this song in that works best for my voice, but then also works best for congregation, and can we make it accessible to where we change the key for other bands, and all that sort of thing. When we write for my project and the stuff I've released under my name outside of the church, I don't have to worry about that; I can sing however I want, and there's no barriers. And in some ways it's good, in some ways it's challenging. So, there's really no kind of right or wrong way. But that is definitely what made those experiences and these experiences way different. Where the stuff I'm working on, outside of it, I actually can kind of write about whatever I want. A lot of the songs that I wrote on my album that I released earlier this year are songs about just mental health, and anxiety, and things, and pain, and stuff that I've experienced, and kind of things that go on in my brain—and I definitely think it's accessible and listenable and stuff like that—but there're a lot less barriers on how to kind of structure the song. When you say 'barriers,' and we say those kinds of words, it kind of sounds like it wasn't a fun process, but it actually was incredibly fun to make music with that intentionality and having it like, we're going to focus on a particular topic, we're going to try to pull from particular verses, and chapters, and books in the Bible, and we're going to be intentional about how we do that, but then also really try to hone it in and make these songs that we can sing not only when we introduce them, but for many years to come for our church.

Daniel: Yeah, I do think the idea of having the audience in mind from the beginning is very different because just kind of, as it was mentioned, most of the creative stuff that I've done, I'm not really thinking about will people like it, and often they don't and that's fine, but it's like, what do you want to make? What is the song going to be? And you just kind of chase that. Whereas this was very much, let's think first about the church and the body and how it will be received, how it will point people to the gospel. So, the starting point was different, but I would say that once we kind of had the framework for a lot of these songs, the lyrics were written, we kind of had the big picture. A lot of the creative collaboration, at least from my perspective, felt very similar to what I've done in other creative projects. Because once you've got that framework and you've got the outline, then it was the fun stuff of like, okay, what instruments do we use? How do we put the song together again? How do we tell the story? So, in that way it felt very similar.

Adam: Yeah, I would agree with that. That part was really fun, especially when we were dividing up the songs because all the songs kind of start on guitar, they're really simple, and then even thinking through who would it be fun to give particular songs to and particular bands. So all that's really fun. And then when you get into that, that is very similar, that is very much just like being in a band. It doesn't matter what the band is. Then you're just trying to figure out, how do we make this as good as we can?

Autumn: Practically, when you're putting together an album, what does an undertaking like that involve? So, what goes into the creation of an album? You just mentioned some of it, Adam, selecting people, assigning parts—what's more? Elucidate this for us.

Adam: Yeah. Well, with this particular project, and because of the value of having the creative process be inclusive—so for everyone in the ministry to be involved in some way—what that really means then is, logistically, we're trying to have forty-ish, around there, people involved in recording in some way. So, we did a song on the record called *My Help, My Deliverer*, and I did it with the orchestral team, and I had to schedule like 13 or 14 individual recording sessions. And so, in terms of what goes into making a record like this, a lot of just planning and recording and trying to find time with people who are simply giving their time, they're all volunteering their time. So, this is not a thing where it's like I can just ask somebody to show up on a Wednesday in the morning and go from there. So, it's a big undertaking. The way that we did this record in particular is that we—myself, Jordan, and Jesse Cowen—kind of owned chunks of the record, and we were responsible for recording and producing a set number of songs. So, we really did this divide and conquer kind of mentality. To put it all just on one person, to produce it, record it, be responsible for it, without going to a studio and asking people to take time off of work, it's really almost nearly impossible to do it in a timely manner. So, we had to divide it up, which meant a lot of home recording stuff, recording in our houses, mixing, and then kind of bringing it back up here at the church, and then we would go through it together and we'd all listen to it and pitch in thoughts. But, yeah, I'd love to hear kind of what are your thoughts and experiences with it.

Jordan: Yeah, I mean going all the way back to the beginning, a lot of these songs were birthed out of that songwriting cohort, and so whenever we kind of had a healthy list of songs, I would say I think it was probably around like 14 or 15 songs that we kind of had. We got it narrowed down to ten, I think, on the album, we divvy them up and got them to our prospective team members. And then it was hit the ground running, kind of like you said, divide and conquer, and take it upon yourselves. And so, I—fortunately—didn't have to do as much planning as Adam did with the orchestral band, but there was a lot of planning and figuring out people's schedules. And then I think some of the work that we were doing, it started early last summer, so there was a lot of schedules to plan around for vacations, all that kind of stuff. So, like we've

been saying, a lot of people are all kind of volunteering our time and taking time out of our lives to make this project and not only make it, but make it good because we want it to be good. We did practice sessions and then recorded the practice sessions, and then I personally took our songs home and recorded parts of my own at home and overlaid that, and I even went through some sessions of rewrites, not only lyrically, but musically. Some of the songs—actually, the song that we'll be listening to today—it had a completely different intro to it. And once we got into kind of the studio work of writing the song, I kind of had the decision to go, 'I don't like the intro to this anymore.' And we rewrote it, and we did it, and it's better.

Autumn: This is what's called the creative process.

Jordan: This is the creative process, as you say, yeah. And having that license to be able to do that is really a gift to be able to go, 'I think I want to do this differently.' And then yeah beyond that it's scheduling time with the band and getting the sessions in and recording it, editing, mixing, all that kind of stuff. And it was months and months of time and effort to kind of get it to the point to where we could finally get it down to final mixes and then bring it up to the church, and final-final mixes, and then master version one, version two, version three. That's kind of how it goes from there.

Autumn: Alright, let's string this together into linear fashion. Daniel, give me an assist. So, the birth of an album for someone who's unfamiliar with things like mixing. So, step one.

Daniel: Well, I mean, I'd almost want to dial it back a little bit to the very, very beginning, because something that people might not know is that songwriting really is messy and vulnerable, especially at the beginning, because what you're appreciating at the end is this cleaned up, mixed, mastered, kind of perfect product. But those songwriting sessions—I mean we're— you have a guitar or maybe a piano or something—and you're making sounds come out of your mouth that you're like, 'I don't know if this is actually going to work.' And sometimes you're putting together lyrics that it just doesn't work. And you have to be vulnerable. You have to pitch ideas that even to yourself you might be like, 'This is not good. I need to fix it.' It's a little scary to do that, especially in front of other people, but you have to go through that messy, vulnerable part before you get typically where our first rough draft is like a voice memo on the phone. That's when it's like, okay, hey, this is actually a song idea that we could do something with, and then we build from there.

Jordan: Yeah, the vulnerability was an interesting experience because, like we were saying earlier, where we have our own personal projects, we will certainly bounce ideas. Like, Adam is a great voice. It's super helpful for me when making my own project outside of this church to help out with, like, hey, does this sound sometimes you just need that voice to go, 'Is this good or is this not good? Be honest.' And it's great to have that. This was kind of like a democracy where we submitted a song, and we had a text chain where we were bouncing ideas back and forth, and you'd have to hit that send button. You're like, oh, man, please say it's good or just shoot me straight. And then it's so vulnerable that when you got no response, even that was crushing. You're like, oh, man, nobody likes the song. And you wait like a whole day and finally somebody says something.

Autumn: A lot of creative endeavors, I think, are kind of like this. You get into it, and it could be production of art or writing or music. You're trying to either communicate something or to create something, to fashion something, and when you've put a lot of effort into it, it can be really hard to submit it for honest feedback. I'm sure there's a lot of that that is involved, but this sort of collaboration also probably affords a level of accountability to one another, which is a small representation of then who you're sharing it with. So, you all are brothers and sisters together already sharing it

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with our church. And so that ability to interact in that way in the creation of the album then probably gives you this assurance when you're sharing it with the rest of our church family that what you've put together already has enacted this kind of participatory element, this communal element, that you want to share with our church, which very much gets this differentiation that you mentioned. When you're just writing a song individually, there's sort of a performance mindset or of a personal mindset versus this participatory mindset when you're writing something that is intended to involve and include and pull a lot of people in for a very different audience.

Okay, same question though: if we were to attempt to string this together for someone, birth of an album—like starting point, step two, step three—how does an album happen for a think who's like, 'I don't understand the creative process.'

Adam: Really, for us, it started with 'What does the church need from us as songwriters and leaders? Where can our song book grow?' So, we're thinking about pastors who are dissecting a text for Sunday morning. It was kind of like, what's the song that God is calling us to write for this season of the church? And when we started writing, it was really we were in the midst of this—and we can get to the theme later-

Autumn: No, go for it.

Adam: Okay, we were in the midst of this sermon series called *Rebuild, Renew*, and we were going through the *New City Catechism* and taking all these kind of catechism question and answer things that are foundational truths of what we believe as Christians. And we were kind of just trying to reestablish these things for our church and for our people who through the pandemic had maybe gotten disconnected from the life of the church and from Scripture and from God. And so, we started there. Then we had these cohorts writing around these themes. And then from there we went and decided what are the best songs and who should have them. And then from there we hand the songs off. And they're really, at that point, it's kind of a couple of months where it's sort of radio silence. We're just letting the teams take the songs and mold them as Jordan talked about and make them what they should be. And then from there, we kind of move into the recording process. And again, that process is a little bit left up to the bands to decide what makes the most sense for them. But typically, it starts with one person laying down kind of what are the foundational instruments of that song, at what tempo does it need to be recorded at, and putting down what we call scratch vocal, which is just sort of a demo vocal that we're not going to save, but it's going to give everybody a reference point when they go to record their parts. And then from there, it's like we're creating a building. We're starting with the foundation and then we're just adding layers. So, we're doing that with our songs. We're starting with the most kind of foundational parts, and then we're bringing people in. And typically you start with drums and bass so that the tempo is locked down and that we all have something to work from and can follow along in the song easily, and then you start adding in keys and guitar parts, and hopefully in a good recording session you're referencing something that everybody already knows. So, you're not kind of making it up as you go. It's not on the fly. It's really, 'Hey, now it's time to record your part,' and you already know what your part is. You're listening on headphones, getting to hear everybody else, you're putting your part down, and then you're slowly moving the song kind of towards the goal line, and then you kind of get to the point where everybody's recorded their part and we're simply just mixing the song. And the mixing process is usually just an individual process. It's one person sitting with the whole song. They've got everything in front of them on a computer, and they're just kind of trying to make the song come alive—to make it really jump through the speakers and to kind of be this really exciting, engaging thing, which takes a lot of work when you're recording stuff. A lot of times you're recording it into a microphone. It's very simple, it's very basic, it's very dry. And so, it's really in the mixing process where

you kind of make it jump off the page. And so, that kind of is its own lengthy process. Sometimes it can take a couple of days, sometimes it takes several weeks or a month; it just kind of depends on the song and how complicated it is. And then from there, we finished the song with mastering, which is really just kind of helping the song be a level of kind of loudness that you would expect if you were to hear the radio or if you were to stream songs on Spotify. Just kind of making sure that your songs are sort of an industry standard in terms of loudness so that they can be experienced the right way. So that's kind of the whole process, start to finish. Like anything creative, it's really messy and it never feels that linear when you're doing it. And we had a deal, I know with Jordan's, one or two of their songs, where I think you guys had to rerecord drums—is that right?

Jordan: Yeah, we did three songs and all three of our songs we knocked out all the drum and bass parts, and a few weeks later finally got those tracks sent over to me because we did all the recordings here at the church, got them sent over to me so I could start working and making edits and then adding to it, and there was some technical issue where there was kind of like a popping or something of the sort that was happening in every single track. So, it became completely unusable. And that was basically like a month and a half of work and waiting sort of down the drain. So, we had to go back, we had to come back up to the church, I think it was a few weeks later or something like that.

Adam: But that kind of thing is in some ways that's abnormal, but problems are not abnormal, and having to rerecord stuff is not abnormal. And having to do multiple guitar takes, vocal takes— I know that when we record almost anything that we record, no matter how well we think we do on it, we record just multiple, multiple takes because you think you've got something great, then you go to mix it and you go, 'Oh man, we're missing this big part,' or, 'We didn't quite nail this as well as we thought we did.' And you do get a little delusional in the whole recording process. You're kind of doing it over and over and over again. And so, sometimes it can be hard to kind of just keep everything in focus and to discern in the moment, 'Is this going well or not?' So, the whole thing is obviously that you can make it sound really neat and clean and super linear—we write songs, and then we recorded them, and yay!—but it really is kind of just like any creative process, it can be pretty messy.

Daniel: Yeah, any recording session you should have at least one moment where you question if you know anything about music, and you just question everything, but then you push through and then it's fine.

Autumn: You have an existential crisis and that's what signifies that it's been a successful recording session.

Jordan: The tiniest thing too can just absolutely take the wind out of your sails. You could just be feeling great about a song, and I love where this is headed, and then one little thing kind of throws a blip on that and you're like, 'I don't want to do this anymore,' you know? 'This is no longer fun for me.' And then take a day off or two, and then you come back to it and you're like, 'Okay, we're good.' So, yeah, it is messy for sure.

Autumn: There are all these different elements, different voices, different people, different writers, all the different tracks you've recorded. And you alluded to this, Adam, what you identified initially as the need for a church and how an album of this sort could support what we were discussing, learning together and how we wanted to reorient ourselves and our lives towards God. Particularly, as you mentioned, kind of coming out of COVID, even though it ended up we hoped we were coming out of COVID and then we were still in COVID really when we took on this *Rebuild, Renew* series. But simply stated, what would you say holds together all of these different aspects for this album? What's the central

unifying theme or what defines this album in a way that you would explain it to someone who you were encouraging to listen to it?

Adam: I think the simple answer is to say it's really an album—and I'd love for you guys to chime in and I'd love to hear what you guys think the album is—but for me, the album is really this holding on to hope and joy in the midst of suffering or uncertainty. And I think you hear a lot of songs in kind of the church worship world, songs of lament, songs of real suffering, and then we have a lot of songs of hope and joy and this is a weird kind of mix of both of those things happening at the same time. And so, we didn't set out to really make a pandemic record. We were really just making a record during the pandemic. And I think what we made is a pandemic record, which is like a really weird thing because I think we set out to make this really hopeful—let's be reminded of the essential things of our faith, who is God, and what has Christ done for us, and are we aware of the work of the Spirit—and let's just kind of reestablish these beautiful foundational aspects of our life with God. I think going into it, we're going to make this hopeful record. It's going to be upbeat and celebratory in some ways, and I think in some ways it really is, and I think that comes through. But what we really made was a record where we're all processing the pandemic in real time and writing songs as a response to that. And I don't think we realized that fully until after we made the record. And then we were like, oh, that's what this is. Yeah, this is really a response to a hard season. We kind of know what's true and let's just sing that. It was really like there's some dark, hard realities communicated on this record, but I think communicated in a way that's not simply lament, which is really sweet. I'm excited about that.

Autumn: That's how so many of the Psalms flow. It's that they do, very clearly, openly discuss something really hard, an aspect of suffering that is real-time that the psalmist was going through. And then yet, in so many of the Psalms, attention at the end of it is redirected to God and to the truth of the psalmist's place within their relationship with God that overshadows even the present situation. So, it's interesting that that is how you would, in retrospect, kind of reflect on it, Adam, and define it. Jordan, Daniel, anything to add there? What would you say the theme is that holds the album together in all these different aspects of its creation?

Jordan: That's so true, too—I'll just basically expand on what Adam is saying, is just they were totally songs that were, yeah, we were experiencing a rough season. Whether it kind of hit us differently than others and stuff, you can sense it and feel it. It may not be right there in your face. I often write music, not every time—there's not a rule book for songwriting—sometimes you have complete intentionality on what you want to write about and it comes out perfectly, which is incredibly rare, and then sometimes it's like you look back on what you are writing about and go, oh, wow, yeah, I was experiencing some really painful stuff, or some hopeful stuff. For me, it was some of the songs that we sang pulling from Psalm 54, 55, 56, kind of those areas where, like you were saying, there are moments of suffering that the psalmist is writing about. But then ultimately saying, despite that, I'm going to honor You and glorify You, despite my failings, despite my suffering—whatever it is those are showing me—that all I have is You. That sort of thing. So, it's all throughout this album, and it's really cool to see that too. And then from a practical side too, it's like we had the avenue to create and we latched onto that, and these songs stylistically are different, but one of the things I was most encouraged by—because I'm sure there was some uncertainty of like, oh man, this is going to fit, these songs are going to work together as an album?—and they do, and it's really encouraging to see that two songs that stylistically really are completely different, have a place on the same body of work because they have a good theme, theologically rich, and they glorify God, and they're also accessible, singable, all that kind of stuff. I think for me it was a great experience to go through that, and that's what it meant to me and the kind of the theme for it as well.

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 94 | Behind The Music: Rebuild, Renew, Part 1

Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Adam Anglin, Jordan Lucas, and Daniel Perez



Daniel: Yeah. Some of the more upbeat songs. The way I kind of think about those fitting in. Is that even though we were writing some of this stuff when it felt like the world was ending and we all kind of remember what that was like. To just not know what tomorrow would hold or what was going to happen in the world around us with COVID and just all the chaos of that time. But I found in my walk that there are just times where you have to sing and pray things that you know are true, but you don't feel. And the act of singing them, the act of reflecting on them and praying them, is an encouragement to you. So, to me, that's where a lot of those more upbeat songs fit in a pandemic record, because sometimes you lament and then sometimes you praise, even though you're not feeling that at the moment. But then as you do it and as you sing and as you reflect on that truth, it actually builds you up.

Autumn: That's a good reminder, Daniel. And even though the pressures of COVID have abated, so much of life and culture and shifts in culture still feel uncertain. And I think that that is true in so many different circumstances when grieving or experiencing a time of particular difficulty or uncertainty. That aspect of being honest again, like this almost is about our circumstances and even our response in it, in our own state of grieving or processing or being anxious because of it, in any of those seasons, that reminder to direct our attention again to God and be reminded of these foundational truths about God's character, our relationship to Him, and the promises given to us—the fact that all of that means that our life each day, our breath that we're given every day, is a gift—that's such a beautiful way to define the theme of this album. And we're going to wrap our conversation here today, and we're going to pick up part two of this conversation in behind the scenes look at our very own Fellowship Denver worship album. I know I say that a little tongue in cheek, but it's true. That's what we're doing—that's what we're doing. We all talked a lot about your vulnerable creative process.

Jordan: The pop up video will come out in a few weeks. I know my target market of older generations.

Autumn: So we'll pick this up in another conversation, and we'll talk about some selections from the album and the process in writing those. And those are songs that each of you were the primary songwriters for, so we'll share that. Again, this album is called *Rebuild, Renew*. It will be released on September 16th. And, as always, if you have questions or comments about today's episode or suggestions for something you'd like to hear us discuss in the future, you can send all of that any time to podcast@fellowshipdenver.org. Jordan, Daniel, Adam, thanks for joining me. I look forward to picking up our conversation.

Adam: Yeah, thanks for having us.

Autumn: 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.