

## THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 100 | Episode 100: A Look Back!

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



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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 Vision for Life podcast, and Hunter is joining me today. Hunter, thanks for joining me on the podcast.

**Hunter:** Autumn thanks for having me. This is our 100th episode.

**Autumn:** Wow.

**Hunter:** That's right. And friends who podcast tell me that you get better and better and better and better as you go. And it probably takes 100 episodes to be any good, so I'm hopeful this might be our first good one.

**Autumn:** Oh, well, maybe today will mark a turning point.

**Hunter:** Actually, you have to do 100 to be good. So, 101, that's where this thing is going to all turn around.

**Autumn:** So, keep listening. Please, keep listening—listen, like, subscribe, share. Though it is a little bit remarkable that we have recorded 99 episodes and are about to record our 100th episode.

**Hunter:** I remember when I first asked you if you wanted to host a podcast, and you were terrified by that idea.

**Autumn:** Yes.

**Hunter:** And it has taken us a little bit to kind of find our rhythm, right? But you are an amazing podcast host. I believe that with all my heart. And you finally gotten comfortable admitting that?

**Autumn:** I don't know. I'm working on it. This is how things have gone for me with Fellowship. When Dave asked me if I would like to join staff and lead children's ministry, I said, 'No thank you.' And then he just kept asking. So, thank you for asking me if I would like to be the podcast host, Hunter. I have enjoyed it, and I do think we are improving. I think we're getting better at this podcast thing. At least I hope so. We always ask for listener feedback. So, this is the point at which you have the opportunity to tell us if our conclusion is correct.

**Hunter:** Well, today we have a purely objective way to determine, based on our listeners feedback, if we're getting better as we go or not. And that is that we have selected to review today our top five most listened to episodes. And we're not going to rehash everything that was in those episodes, we just thought it'd be fun to say, here's our top five most listened to episodes in the now 100-week history of the Vision for Life podcast, and what do we learn from the fact that these were our most popular episodes?

**Autumn:** So, let's start. We're going to count down. So, we're going to discuss our fifth most popular episode first and work our way to the first.

**Hunter:** And I should add, when we ask the question, what do we learn from the fact that our listeners really seem to say this was one of their favorite episodes by the number of times that they listened to it—what do we learn? We're totally just making it up.

**Autumn:** Yes, we're drawing conclusions from these top five most listened to episodes about what it is that is interesting

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for our listeners to engage.

**Hunter:** We are psychoanalyzing our listening audience based on their listening behavior.

**Autumn:** And doing it in a way that no statistics professor would ever support.

**Hunter:** Alright, so we're going to count them down. Our fifth Most listened to episode was number 72, and this was a Vision for Life Reads episode, *The Case Against the Trauma Plot*. What was that all about?

**Autumn:** Well, it was an article that was written by Parul Sehgal in the New Yorker magazine. And I think this was one of your suggestions, Hunter, that we discuss, but the author of the article is suggesting that trauma has become a device used—and in the article develops this argument—overused as a device of character development. But then we looked at it and made certain observations. So, I'll let you pick it up from there.

**Hunter:** This is one of my favorite things I've read in the last year, and I remember where I was when I read this article. I was on a bike trainer and I almost jumped off the trainer. I was so excited by what I was reading here because someone was putting into words and giving some thought, and this is what a good author does, they give some thought and some order and they put into words often something that you sense is true. And this doesn't make it true, but it certainly confirmed something that I had been sensing, which is that psychological and therapeutic categories, which were developed in clinical and professional settings, have become popularized. Meaning, they're being used way outside of clinical and professional settings by uneducated lay people like you and me. Trauma is one of the biggest ones, and we're using them to try to understand each other. So, I'm trying to understand you based on well, if I know Autumn's past and know what she's been through, then I can say she is the way she is for this reason. And this author was observing that's happening in literature, and so I kind of drew the connection. If authors think they can make sense out of fictional characters for their readers this way, I think we are starting to relate to each other, just real people in the world, this way as well. We think we can understand them if we understand the plot of suffering, the plot of trauma that they have been through. So, that was why this was interesting to me.

**Autumn:** And apparently interesting to our listeners.

**Hunter:** And I think there is a layer of truth to that, but there's also perhaps a promise that doesn't quite deliver. And that's what I found interesting about this particular article as well.

**Autumn:** Truth to the assumption that we might be able to understand someone if we know their background?

**Hunter:** Absolutely. If we know hard things someone's been through, we can understand them quite well. On the other hand, I'm not quite as sure that we can psychoanalyze them as much as we think we can and as much as a trained professional maybe could do.

**Autumn:** Yes, and the author of the article, Sehgal, was observing that this lends itself to that perspective that we can understand someone by knowing the hard things they've been through or what's in their background lends itself towards moral determinism. And then we assume, based on that, that we know the trajectory of someone's life. And there's a danger when we adapt that into real life.

**Hunter:** Her observation was it creates thin characters in literature, almost oversimplifies the characters to the point that

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they become a little bit uninteresting and predictable, as you said, or deterministic. I think it does the same thing in real life. I think we thin people out and we overexplain them in a way that thins out some of the complexities of them. I've been personally related to by someone who basically treated me as the way I am because of psychoanalyzing me. And I could even sense in that they think they understand me, but they really don't. And they think they can explain why I am the way I am, even though I would go, that doesn't really resonate. And other people who know me better would say, that's not even who he is. And I think we've all probably had that experience. I've probably done that to other people as well. So, this phenomenon in literature I think plays out in real life. And our application from that was the gospel of Jesus actually gives us far more hopeful and creative categories for relating to people. We don't just relate to them as a product of their past, but as who they are in Christ, which is still emerging. And so, I think this was a helpful episode as well, and maybe that's one of the reasons that resonated with people.

**Autumn:** So, how in this warning about psychoanalyzing people, how are we disregarding our own warning and attempting to psychoanalyze our listeners and draw conclusions about why this may have been a popular episode?

**Hunter:** Well, the whole premise of this podcast that we're recording right now is a false premise, and it's simply a conversation device. But we did make some observations that hopefully help us in thinking through what is interesting for people to listen to. And we are actually trying to answer the 'why' of that. And we always say we do want to hear your comments, suggestions, feedback. And so, that is also true here. We're going to offer up our hopeful insight. If these things resonate with you as you're listening, then let us know. If there are other reasons that compelled you to listen to any particular episode, we'd love to know that too, because as much as we want Vision for Life to be helpful, we need to know what is interesting to listen to. So, we made some observations about why this might be our fifth most listened to episode, *The Case Against the Trauma Plot*. What were some of those observations, Hunter?

**Hunter:** Well, the word trauma, in the title, is used prolifically in our culture. And so, I think even the title of this article captured me. And I think the title of the podcast probably just captured people because it uses a word that's being tossed around a lot. I also think there's a theme. We noticed that several of our most popular episodes were these Vision for Life Reads episodes, and people are interested in what other folks are reading. They're probably interested in what we're reading. And it might even be the case that when we read something and respond to it, summarize it and respond to it, it makes for a more interesting podcast episode. We're just coming up with things on our own thoughts, because what we're doing is we're interacting with something that's already been well thought out, well formed by an author, and then we can agree, we can disagree, we can summarize and follow their thoughts. So, maybe it just makes for a more interesting conversation.

**Autumn:** I agree. I helped you construct those observations. We did it together, so I concur with those observations. Let's move on to our number four. So, we're counting down. Our fifth most listened to episode was *The Case Against the Trauma Plot*. The next one in order, our fourth most listened to episode, was episode 88. This was another VFL Reads. And the title of the article that we discussed on the episode was *Why American Teens Are So Sad*. So, how would you summarize this article and episode for us?

**Hunter:** The author, Derek Thompson, is noticing that adolescence has always been a difficult period. It's always been fraught with emotional turmoil and anxiety. And part of that is just because the hormonal changes you're going through at that stage of life. And yet, he's noticing that something beyond just the typical adolescent experience, coming of age experience, seems to be happening right now. And that is that there's an unprecedented rate of depression and anxiety

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reported among teens. And so, he starts with the observation that, statistically speaking, once you norm out everything, statistically speaking, teenagers are reporting more depression and more anxiety today than they were at any time in the past.

**Autumn:** An observation that we drew from this is that there's another theme that developed. So, our VFL Reads episodes are highly listened to, and several episodes touching on mental health, including this one, are also listened to at a higher rate. And so, similarly to what you mentioned in the previous article, *The Case Against the Trauma Plot*, I think that this is simply a topic that people are really interested in and it overlaps into this area of mental health. And probably many people are curious about why the rates are rising and about our approach to that discussion about the whole topic of mental health in the church and how the two relate.

**Hunter:** And I'm not surprised that mental health is a huge issue in our culture and it appears that mental health is on the decline. And I as a pastor noticed the correlation between the decline of the influence of the Christian faith and the Christian tradition in our culture. And so, I do think that relationship with God and the fixed categories of creation that God made, and the sureness of redemption in Christ that He gives us, and the security of relationship with Him that comes by justification, and the hope of life in the kingdom that comes through Jesus's resurrection, and the empowerment of the Spirit and the fellowship of the body of Christ—all of these things which are unique to the Christian gospel—they are the gifts to us of the Christian gospel. As the influence of all that wanes, I'm not surprised at all that people are suffering more mental health issues because all those things I just mentioned are what support us as mentally, psychologically healthy people. Now, I'm not saying that you could tie all mental health back to, if we just preach the gospel that would solve all our problems. I'm not over simplistic, and I welcome the insights that mental health professionals have developed; I'm pro counseling and all of that. So, I'm not trying to fall into a simplistic, just preach the gospel-ism. But I do think it's no accident that, as our culture becomes more secular, we've lost some of the support that we used to get from the real gifts of the gospel. And so, those have to be replaced by something. And this is an observation that many sociologists have made, and that is that therapy for some people is replacement religion. So, it's not something to supplement their life. It really is functionally their religion. It's their church. I don't think it's a good substitute. So, I'm not surprised that as we become more secular, these gospel categories and these gospel gifts have waned and for some people therapy has become a replacement religion. I'm not surprised that it's not as good of a replacement and therefore mental health is on the decline.

**Autumn:** And as mental health is on the decline and higher rates of anxiety and depression are reported among teens and in our broader population this topic continues to generate more and more interest and discussion in media outlets. And also, all of the systems around that are getting built up, the programs that are offered at universities and seminaries, the amount of mental health professionals that are entering the workforce, the reported needs and requests for mental health from community advocates—all of those things raise our own interaction with the topic and our awareness of it. And so, some of this might be personally experiential, and some of it might simply be that you're receiving all of these inputs that say this is a really big deal right now. And so, we're all paying attention to this topic.

**Hunter:** Yeah, I think you make a great point. The profession of mental health has expanded a lot in the last 20 years, and so there're just more people in our world that are studying this and thinking about it. That's probably one of the reasons why it is more in our consciousness. There's a great book that I read years ago, and it was first written in the 1980s, called *Habits of the Heart*, and the subtitle is *Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. It was written by a team of sociologists out at University of California, Berkeley. And they're studying kind of the progress of individualism as it

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shaped American culture and especially where it sits in the modern world. And one of the things they noticed—and I find it fascinating that they noticed this in the early 80s, which means their research was done in the 70s—things they said was happening, was biblical categories were waning and mental health professionals were filling the role that pastors and priests used to play in people's lives or the church used to play in people's lives. And this is by a team of non-Christian sociologists who are just studying this and running real statistical research on this. And they're noticing that trend. And when I read that years ago, I thought, that is exactly right in terms of what I experience. And so, our listeners will hear mental health is a huge topic, and whenever we talk about it on the podcast, it seems to be really interesting to folks.

**Autumn:** I think that, coupled with the history of Christianity in its sometimes-combative stance against mental health, especially several years ago, a couple of decades ago, probably even in the era when the sociologists were writing, initially, the Church maybe made some correct observations and maybe had a very poor posture towards what was occurring in culture. And so, whenever the Church, whenever ministry leaders or pastors begin to talk about mental health, I think there's that level of interest as well.

**Hunter:** My guess is that pastors and churches could see and feel how strong the mental health categories were coming and could see and feel, in some sense, how much it was displacing religion. And so, they felt like they needed to push back against that. And that was probably an overreaction to this emerging field of knowledge that was really trying to protect space for the Church, but in doing that might have given people the message that something that can be helpful within a proper framework of God's world and proper framework of knowledge, that is, I think, in the Gospel we have the proper framework of knowledge, but it denied them that or told them that was bad. And so, there's a lot of reaction that people are having to wrestle with based on what they've been told in the Church about mental health. Which leads to our third episode, our number three most popular episode. It was, what?

**Hunter:** Episode 18. And it was titled *A Redeeming View of Mental Health*. Sam Elvis, a member of Fellowship Denver who is a therapist who has her own practice here in Denver, she joined us on that podcast episode, and we were once again talking about this topic of the Church and mental health. And some of what Sam shared comes from her own experience being raised in the church and experiencing different mental health struggles personally and via people very near her and then through her own training and now being able to share insight as someone who is a counselor and does actually interact with people in this way. Sam mentioned a couple of the things that we just touched on. She did say that she personally had a bad experience with this topic. The church she was raised in very much gave her the idea that she had to be okay. So, mental health struggles either weren't real or had to be ignored or pretended away in order to be present in and participate in the life of the church. And so, she had the sense that she had to do that work on her own outside of the church, outside of even relationship with God. That somehow she had to figure out a way to be okay, to be allowed entrance into life with God and life with God's family. So, one thing we discussed in that episode is that is just categorically an incorrect view based on Scripture.

**Hunter:** Well, it's the opposite of the gospel. It's the opposite of the gospel. The gospel is not that you have to be okay in order to experience God. The gospel is that you have to admit your sinfulness. And I would add, you admit not only your sinfulness, but you admit all the ways in which you're struggling under the weight of living in a fallen world, and you come to terms with that. And that's where the grace of God meets us. Unfortunately, the religion she grew up in, even if it flew under the banner of Christianity, actually denied her opportunity to experience the gospel by telling her to suppress every aspect of where the fall had impacted her.

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**Autumn:** So, Sam shared, based on that, that meeting God in our need and acknowledging our inability to save ourselves, ask for forgiveness and rescue, that's what allows us to be joined in relationship with God and God's family and actually begin a process of transformation or finding hope, finding healing within the context of that relationship with God and his family. So, to what you just said, Hunter, Sam also points out that counseling or therapy can be helpful, in some cases extremely helpful for people, even somewhat transformational. But ultimately, Sam shared counseling or therapy can't heal anyone. That only God can do that. And so, interestingly, as you said, that some of these categories of pastor or categories that were previously within the realm of religion or church have been filled. Now in these therapeutic spaces. I think that often people turn to counseling or therapy with that hope that they will find actual healing or transformation. And Sam is cautious to point out that it is a good and helpful tool for many people, but that your therapist can't heal you, your counselor cannot save you.

**Hunter:** I think Sam is actually giving us a really good reflection on vocation, period. Meaning, all of the work we do in the world, and that is almost all of our work fits into the space of it serves the common good, and it's a way that we experience what theologians sometimes call the common grace of God, which is where He gives us good gifts. Sometimes He gives us good gifts that help us overcome difficulties, heal, get healthy again, from the knowledge that's accessible to us in the creation that you don't have to be a Christian in order to access. And most of our work fits into that space. And work becomes idolatrous when it tries to promise more healing or more redemption or more transformation or more solution to all that ails us then it really can deliver. And a lot of fields are tempted toward that. So, think about how this theme is present in the tech industry. Tech promises to heal all of our problems, and if we can just connect the world, we can make the world a more peaceful place. It almost over promises more than it can deliver. Rather than, you know it actually can't heal the relationship of the world; it can help you keep up with your high school friends and see what their kids look like. It functions great. It's a great replacement for Christmas cards. It's a terrible replacement for community, right?

**Autumn:** Yes.

**Hunter:** So, a lot of fields of knowledge work this way. And even for me, as a pastor who does deal in these gospel-redemptive themes, Sam's story is a reminder for me even my work itself is not the redemption, it is the gospel that I hold out to people. And that's ultimately a work that God uses the gospel and only He can do. So, I can't be a savior either. And a pastor can't be a savior. So, for all of us to see that limitation in our work and then to engage the world and to ask God to use us in ways that are fitting our limitedness as human beings, I think is really helpful. And so, I love that she brought that out in this episode.

**Autumn:** Yeah, I think our observations about the fourth most listened to, *Why American Teens Are So Sad*, and a *Redeeming View of Mental Health* fits both of these. The interest in mental health, the relationship between Scripture and mental health and the Church and mental health, we're going to run with that assumption as far as our observation as to why these episodes may have been popular. This is the conclusion we drew. Okay, so let's move on to our second most-listened-to episode. What was that one, Hunter?

**Hunter:** It was number 59. Another VFL Reads, Glennon Doyle's *Honesty Gospel*, which is an article we read in the New Yorker. And this one was probably second most popular because I tweeted about it a lot and I put it out on my Instagram a lot. And so, we really just promoted this one really heavily. And so that's probably why it's number two. Our listeners really respond well to advertising.

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**Autumn:** Alright, so that's the conclusion we're drawing about this one. What did we talk about in this episode? Glennon Doyle's, *Honesty Gospel*. Glennon Doyle is, we said, an archetypal figure of a secular gospel of self-redemption and self-identification and make yourself and redeem yourself and create yourself and express yourself. She's an archetype of that story. And one of the fascinating parts about Glennon is she started out identifying as a Christian, early in her blogging writing, speaking career, she identified as a Christian. She told her story in more explicitly Christian terms and categories. And then over the course of her career she moved away from Christian themes and she departed significantly probably in her beliefs and in her lifestyle from the teaching of the Christian faith. That became less and less of a theme in her work. The author Ariel Levy notes that. So, this author has done kind of a career retrospective on Glennon Doyle, and she notes that Christianity isn't much part of her story anymore. And she says this but honesty is meaning just being an open book about who you are and letting people see. One of the things that Dawson noticed that we brought out in our discussion was even the honesty that Glennon Doyle represents is a very curated, cultivated honesty. It's a very selective honesty. There's a lot of parts of her life she doesn't put onto the charcuterie board of honesty that she shares with us.

**Autumn:** Selective authenticity.

**Hunter:** Which is then, what? A faux authenticity. One of the things that I think is a reason this was interesting to people is Glennon Doyle is well known and she's kind of a confusing person. And so, to the extent people are familiar with her work, familiar with her life, they've been somewhat interested in her but maybe a little bit perplexed what to make of her. I think we've probably tapped into that with this episode and opened up a can of worms.

**Autumn:** One thing that the author touches on that we noted also in that episode, Hunter, is that I think this actually compounds why she may be confusing is that some of the ways that Glennon Doyle still writes and speaks do use terms that echo Christianity or kind of echo the gospel. She even talks about her relationship with her current partner, her current spouse, I believe, as redemptive. And so, that's brought out in the article and in our discussion. Some of the terms she uses are still, in a sense, borrowed from religion or directly from Christianity or allude to this kind of gospel message, but they're really not substantively Christian.

**Hunter:** Yeah, there's kind of the feel of Christianity, a little bit of the language of Christianity, but without the substance of Jesus Christ and without the substance of His death and His resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and His coming again to judge the living and the dead. None of that is in her story. It's not in her how she makes sense of her life and of the world, and yet she still tells it in a very redemptive kind of way. One of the things we also noticed was that her partner—she describes me and her partner in really conversion like terms, godlike terms—just off the top of my head I still remember one of the things that she said; that article she said when she saw Abby, the woman she would later marry, that suddenly a woman was standing where nothing had been, like filling this void. And we said that's how we're called to respond to Jesus. And so, Abby is kind of the messianic figure in her story, which ties into an observation that, again, sociologists have made. One of my favorites is Ernest Becker, who wrote a book called *The Denial of Death*. And one of the things he noted in *The Denial of Death* was that as religion wanes, romantic love becomes religious for people. And so, the way we treat romantic relationships is almost with a redemptive, salvific expectation. And that's a big part of her story as well. There're so many fascinating lines in her story like that and so many confusing lines in her story like that. I think all of that came out in the discussion. That's probably one of the reasons why people found it interesting.

**Autumn:** I think in this and in all of these kinds of topics that we've touched on, things that are highlighted in the media,

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categories from therapeutic culture that we now hear about a lot, even just in the use of terminology—so, trauma, and then with the VFL Reads about American teens, rates of depression and anxiety, a redemptive view of mental health—so, in all of these things, I think, if I'm going to go back to our attempt to say, why are these interesting to people? I think our listeners in our church family at Fellowship do have a real desire to engage in all of these areas with discernment and so are interested in how we're talking about them because they're interested in how to think about and talk about them. And in this article in particular, thinking about Glennon Doyle's story, what you shared about how confusing it can be tracking along with someone who said distinctly they were Christian and then became not-Christian or doesn't even say they are anymore, and supports a theology that is decidedly not-Christian

**Hunter:** But never raised her hand and said, 'I'm going to quit being a Christian.' She didn't make it that clear.

**Autumn:** Yes. So, even just in that, I had to ask, how do I engage with authors or public figures who maybe are similar to Glennon? And I'll still be interested, still share things with humor, how do I then engage their work or think about their life? How do I do that with discernment? And so, I would say that's another theme that runs through these top listings.

**Hunter:** And we want to model discernment and kind of work it out in conversation. It's one of the reasons we do this. Rather than just being reactive, just saying, well, I mean, she's not a Christian anymore, she's bad. Or rather saying, well, mental health, that's not the gospel, that can't save you, that's bad. We want to be more thoughtful than that. We don't want to just accept everything at face value, but we also want to even understand the reasons underneath some of the conclusions that we reach or some of the instincts we would reach. And so, we just want to model discerning, conversation and thinking that's part of the reason we do this podcast.

**Autumn:** Okay, I think we have worked our way to number one.

**Hunter:** Our most popular episode was way back in the early days of the Vision for Life podcast.

**Autumn:** Which is also not what you said earlier. You said that your friends, I think your friends from Coram Deo, maybe other friends, had said that you get better at podcasting.

**Hunter:** Well, according to our listeners, apparently not. This was our fourth episode ever. Now, it could mean that our listeners listened early on and they decided that we are so bad at this that they quit listening later on. The fact that our number-one episode was our fourth episode, the fact that we peaked at number four could mean that we were so bad in the early days of this podcast that we lost a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of listeners. I know that was true in my early days as a pastor and a preacher. People would come once and be like, yeah, no. So, I'm guessing that that's been true for us too as podcasts. Well, in your case—podcast host—I'm just a frequent guest, so really this is more on you than on me.

**Autumn:** I don't know if I like where this interpretation landed.

**Hunter:** I was on this one, so I contributed to its popularity, the fact that no one wanted to listen more afterwards. Okay. Our fourth podcast was this: *How Can Government Promote Good?* That was the question, and that was the title of the podcast. Now, if we were to go and look at our top 20, we actually have several that go back to our early days where we talked quite a bit about politics. And we did that because I had just taught a series of classes, not sermons, but a series of classes online. Because in the middle of pandemic I sat right here in our green room and live cast them on politics back in the early fall of 2020. So, about two years ago. And we had hundreds of people every night tune into that.



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**Autumn:** Okay, I just want to interject. This is a new theory and maybe one I like better. Maybe episode four had so many listens and maybe your Zoom classes on politics were so well attended because this was during COVID shutdown still and people had fewer things vying for their attention.

**Hunter:** It has nothing to do with the quality of the content and everything to do with the boredom of the listener. They had gotten through all their Netflix and were willing to listen to mediocre podcast by neophyte host and neophyte frequent guest.

**Autumn:** What does neophyte mean, Hunter?

**Hunter:** That means someone who is barely skilled or experienced, just starting out.

**Autumn:** It's accurate. Okay, so episode four how can government promote good? We had a couple of guests on with us that day, Blythe and Jill, and we had asked them to join us because they both work in various, have experience in various, areas of government. So, we had this discussion with the four of us. Was there any particular portion of the content or summary that you could share about that episode?

**Hunter:** There's another lesson that I just take personally from not just this episode, but the popularity of all of the politics episodes. A lot of them were popular, and that is I do think people need a lot of help and are open to a lot of help in thinking about the political environment in which we live. And one of the growing interests I even have as a pastor is to develop and teach for people what I might call a political theology. It is a way of looking at politics through the lens of Scripture, the Bible, theologically, and saying, here's what we should be trying to accomplish in our common life. Here's why God has ordained government. And to help people think about that from a biblical lens, not just speaking to issues like, well, here's the Christian position on this issue, this issue, this issue. I do think that is important to do on an issue-by-issue basis. I'm not disregarding that. But I think a lot of Christian political discourse has tended to sit in the issue space rather than in stepping back and asking, big picture, what's the point of politics? What's the point of government? What are we trying to accomplish when we get together with our fellow citizens and do things? And I think there's a lot of need for teaching in that realm.

In the last few years, I've been trying to study and read quite a bit about that just so I can equip and prepare our people to live in the world. That honestly is not something I was terribly interested in when I started out as a pastor. In fact, I probably had developed an understanding that American Christianity had become so politicized, which I think it had in church, I need to just avoid politics because that is a barrier for people to hearing the gospel. I still want to capture some of that insight and say I don't want the church to become a political campaign platform. That is a barrier to people hearing the gospel. But I might now add, my older self would tell my younger self, 'But people need to be shepherded in how to engage the political world and the political society we live in.' You can't escape politics. I made that point in a sermon a few weeks ago. You actually can't escape politics if you live in the world. People need to be shepherded and prepare for that. So, it's not enough just to say, well, let's avoid politics because it might prevent someone from hearing the gospel. We also need to say, how do we shepherd Christians to think about politics through a biblical worldview? And some of the feedback I'm getting, some of it comes through seeing the stats of what people listen to, but also just in conversation, some of the feedback I'm getting is people saying, hey, I really appreciate that and I need that.

**Autumn:** A theme that underlies this topic as well as some of the others is this question about how to interact with politics. With the political realm, with a whole area, a discussion that can be very divisive and we see dividing churches

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Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



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or being divisive even in the context of Christianity. The presentation of many of these themes in culture, questions surrounding politics, mental health, and then as a subset of that, questions about topics like trauma, what is the reality within that discussion. All of those can be presented in broader culture and in media in a way that is very contentious. It's of interest to me and probably to our listeners to ask how do we engage these topics in a way that is thoughtful and compassionate and intellectually honest and aligned with Scripture. So, my guess would be that some of that drives our interest right now in episodes having to do with political issues or questions of mental health.

**Hunter:** Well, I think that's a great place to land this retrospective on our first 100 episodes because we started this podcast in order to do exactly what you said, to help people think about where the gospel meets the real world they live in and the real issues that they're wrestling through in their lives. And sometimes that's private, spirit issues like, how do I spend time with God? Which we talk about quite a bit extensively on this podcast, and apparently is not as interesting as some of these other things. But it also hits these public sphere issues, things that are being talked about in our world. And so, we want to help people think about where the gospel gives real wisdom and vision for navigating the real problems and questions that we encounter in our everyday lives. And all kidding aside, you've done an awesome job leading those conversations.

**Autumn:** Thanks, Hunter. I do have one more question, though, before we wrap it up. So, we're at the end right now, recording our 100th episode—where do we go from here? We already said that we hope we get better, so listen to episode 101 and we hope it will be great. But what would you say? What do you hope? Where do we go from here?

**Hunter:** You say this every week in your introduction. You say a conversation between the pastors of Fellowship and the church at large. And my hope is that this continues to be and grows even more into being a back-and-forth conversation. So, I would love to hear from our listeners. What topics would you like to hear discussed? Where do you see what themes do you see in your interaction with the world and in your life? Where do you need help thinking about how the gospel meets you there? What have you read recently that has sparked those thoughts and conversations for you that maybe fodder for a future Vision for Life Reads episode?

**Autumn:** Yes, absolutely. So, I'll conclude that way today. Thank you for listening and we would love to hear your comments, questions, suggestions, and feedback. If you have an idea that might be something you've read recently, an article that you found particularly interesting or confusing, as we mentioned before, or a question that you'd like to suggest for discussion on a future podcast episode, you can send all of that any time to [podcast@fellowshipdenver.org](mailto:podcast@fellowshipdenver.org).

Vision for Life is a ministry of Fellowship Denver that exists in two forms. One is this podcast, our Vision for Life podcast that releases episodes weekly. The other is in-person classes that are held periodically at Fellowship Denver Church in Denver, Colorado. We have one of these in person classes coming up soon. It will begin on October 12. It will be held for three consecutive weeks, from 6:30 to 8:00 in the evening. This Vision for Life class is on the topic of understanding abortion and will examine both a theology that helps us understand this issue and gives us biblical categories to help us navigate it. And we'll discuss some of the history of this issue as it's existed in our American politics and in the American church. So, if you, like many of us, are struggling with how to think about and engage and be discerning about the topic of abortion—it's really contentious within our culture and within the church right now—I would love to have you join us for this class. You can register by going to [fellowshipdenver.org/calendar](http://fellowshipdenver.org/calendar) and looking for the signup for Vision for Life: Understanding abortion. 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.