

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 106 | Faithful Presence, Part 2: Law & Politics

Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Hunter Beaumont, and Alex Harris



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 I have two guests joining me today. Hunter, you're one of our regular guests, so welcome. But I particularly want to introduce our other guests.

Hunter: Oh, I've prepared some remarks I would like to share.

Autumn: Really? That's not surprising. You usually have remarks that you've prepared that I know nothing about, right about here, every podcast episode. So, our other guest today is Alex Harris. Alex is a member of Fellowship Denver, a friend of Hunter's and mine. And Alex, we're so grateful that you're taking some time to record this with us today.

Alex: Thanks so much, Autumn.

Autumn: This podcast conversation is one of a series of conversations in which we're examining a couple of themes. The first is faithful presence in the marketplace or the workplace, and the second is that we're looking at some specific sectors of work or the marketplace. So, I recently had a conversation with Jill and Hannah on the topic of education, and today we're talking with Alex about law and politics. And Alex, first, I wonder though, before we get into law and politics, if you would just give us some information about you, help our listeners get to know you a little bit?

Alex: Sure. So, I'm an attorney. My family and I have been members of Fellowship now for about six years. My wife Courtney, who both of you know well, and who is, I should say, a very faithful listener of the Vision for Life podcast.

Hunter: A frequent submitter of good ideas.

Autumn: And such a good encourager.

Alex: Yes, and great questions and topics, the best. So, that's my wife. She grew up in Denver. She's how I got my foot in the door, so to speak. I grew up near Portland, Oregon, where I was homeschooled through high school, along with my six siblings, by my parents, Gregg and Sono Harris, who are really pioneering leaders of the Christian homeschooling movement of the 1980s. And so, I grew up in a very entrepreneurial ministry family. And I'm a first-generation college graduate; first person in my extended family, to my knowledge, to go to law school. I graduated from Harvard Law School in 2015, spent a few years clerking for federal judges, and then joined the law firm here in Denver where I work now.

Hunter: Alex and I got to spend a year together in a men's discipleship group, and so I got to hear a lot of your story and process. That was really a transitional time of life for you, and that was really fun. And I would be curious if you would share with our listeners just a little bit of what you got to share with our men's group about your faith journey, your faith story, and how growing up in this Christian homeschool movement where your parents were leaders, how that shaped your faith, and then how you kind of had to make sense of that as an adult.

Alex: Yeah. Thank you, Hunter, and I appreciate you framing it up that way, kind of asking about that larger picture, because I think for so many who grew up in the church like I did, our individual faith story is one thing, and then the context, which really gives so much of the meaning and substance to the story, is a whole other thing. Maybe a bigger, more complicated, messier thing. And for me, I think in some ways, looking back, I would describe faith as almost this

inevitable, obvious thing growing up, because both my parents were saved during the Jesus movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. And faith was always this kind of all-defining reality for our family. It was the reason that we homeschooled, which was this crazy countercultural thing, especially starting in the 1980s when homeschooling wasn't even legal in many states. And really everything we did as a family, our identity, fell in kind of the ministry bucket, whether that was church planting, Christian publishing, or what I would refer to as kind of a parachurch ministry. So, that started with my parents and their home school workshops and seminars that they did as I was growing up, and it continued through their kids.

So, my oldest brother, Joshua Harris, when I was about nine years old, wrote this bestselling evangelical book on dating and relationships called *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*.

Autumn: I, like many Bible college students, were required to read.

Alex: Many, many students were required to read *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, and resent my brother ever since. And so, that was kind of my childhood, was growing up with those parents with that older brother. And so, it's no real surprise to me, kind of in some ways, that age six I prayed the sinner's prayer, asking Jesus into my heart to forgive my sins—always considered myself a Christian, and yet I do see God's kindness and His faithfulness in that. I would describe my own journey as kind of a steady abiding and growth in understanding first my own sinfulness and need for a savior, and then more in the second half of my life and in recent years, more sweetly growing in my awareness just of God's grace and His kindness and Christ's heart towards me. Despite my sinfulness and my weakness, I was blessed as well to be exposed kind of as a preteen and teenager to sound doctrine, systematic theology, biblical apologetics, which really provided more of an intellectual grounding for my faith that was already present. But to go to some of the bigger picture issues that you mentioned, Hunter, part of my faith heritage is that for many years, because of the successes, kind of the prominence and the influence of my family within the circles, at least where we were known, we were always considered something of like the perfect Christian homeschool family. And that charade has ended most publicly in just the last few years, really around the time that we were in the men's discipleship group together, my oldest brother Josh made international headlines by disavowing his books, by divorcing his wife, and announcing he no longer considered himself a Christian. And I have several younger siblings who have also left Christianity. And so, while I have looking back so much to be grateful for in my faith heritage, I've also found myself evaluating some of the dynamics and the theological emphasis and the cultural expressions of religion that I grew up with. So, the core of the gospel has not changed, the mission to be faithful has not changed, but I think my understanding of what that looks like in practice and in application has changed, and I like to think grown and matured.

Hunter: One of the things I really love about your story is you've been able to differentiate between what you just called the core of the gospel and some of the trappings, and that was surrounded with some of what we might call the cultural package that came with. And you've been able to say, I want to hold on to the gospel; I don't necessarily have to have to retain all these cultural trappings. And you've been able to differentiate that in your mind, whereas I think a lot of people that have that background have trouble differentiating that. So, I'm really curious what it took for you to get to that point where you could do that work.

Alex: I don't know that I can really take credit for it. It's really been, if anything, just God's kindness to bring voices, mentors, pastors—including you, Hunter—and Dave, over the years, who have kind of helped me navigate that. And I

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think the biggest kind of mental shift for me has been really identifying ways in which certain things that were very black-and-white in other contexts, that felt this must be core because it's how we treat it, it's how we think about it, it's how we live and work out our faith in this particular faith community, is not how Christians everywhere who sincerely love Christ and are seeking to follow Him, how they live and work out their faith in good conscience. And just having that exposure was helpful. Working with people with very different political views, very different faith backgrounds, very different religious traditions, kind of still within the core of orthodox Christianity, that was helpful. And I was blessed by God to be put in situations where those experiences happened. But ultimately, it's kind of an act of discernment, a constant act of discernment to see what truly is core, what truly is at the heart of the gospel, and what is more a matter of individual conscience and freedom in Christ. And I think I view a lot of things a lot less black-and-white today than maybe I would have 10-15 years ago.

Hunter: And what I also know about you is you view the things that are essential to Christianity and are essential to the gospel and are essential to biblical faithfulness, you do view those in very clear black-and-white, to use your term terms, which I think is remarkable and really is why your story is compelling. Another theme that is interesting in your story, and I think part of even your faith development but it bleeds into what we're going to talk about today, is you, as a young man, kind of left the world that you grew up in. You went to college, and then you went to Harvard Law School. And so, if you had grown up in this education system, homeschooling, that was really outside the mainstream, you went from that into the main stream of the mainstream of elite American education. I'm curious, what made you want to go into law and what made you want to go to Harvard Law School?

Alex: Yeah, there's a lot in the answer to that, so I'll try to keep it concise. But my twin brother and I, my twin brother Brett, we really came of age in the homeschooling movement as part of this mission, or this vision, called the Joshua Generation. And the Joshua Generation is a concept based on the Old Testament patriarch, where the first generation of homeschooling families were like Moses, and they fled into the wilderness, pulled their kids out of public schools, raised them sometimes literally in the wilderness. And then our generation, we would be like Joshua. We would be the ones who were trained to think with a biblical worldview, trained in public speaking and debate; we would grow up to take the land for Christ. That was meant, in some ways, very literally. We would be the future presidents and the senators and the Supreme Court justices. That was the idea. And so, at age 16, my twin brother and I kind of took our first step into leadership of our generation by starting a nonprofit organization, kind of following in the footsteps of our parents and older brother, and began challenging our peers to rebel against low expectations—to do hard things. And we held conferences, we wrote a couple of books, and got very involved in politics on the local, state, and even national level, most prominently during the 2008 presidential primary, on the Republican side, we built up this grassroots network of around 20,000 volunteers for former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee—shout out to Arkansas.

Hunter: His daughter is fixing to be the governor up next, so thanks for that.

Alex: And so, we built up this online volunteer network with state coordinators in almost every state, and really provided a lot of the campaign infrastructure that the actual campaign didn't have as kind of a dark-horse, surprise campaign in that election cycle. And so, my vision was very much politics. That was the goal and even the decision to kind of step off the track of speaking and writing books and all of that to go to college was with this idea that going to college is going to set me up for greater success in that path. And so, I went to a small conservative Christian school called Patrick Henry College that's mission is to raise up leaders who will lead the nation and shape the culture, including and especially in

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politics, and went to law school and pursued that with the idea that you can do a lot of things with a law degree; you can go into politics; you can go into business, something more entrepreneurial—that was certainly my family background—and then, if you really had to, you could always be an actual lawyer and practice law. That was kind of my mentality going into it.

And then to step into Harvard Law School, which was a very different environment than anything I'd ever been in, where every other environment, almost everyone around me was very like me, similar background, certainly shared faith commitments. And suddenly, I was surrounded by folks who had very different backgrounds who had no similar faith commitments. And that was in God's kindness a very healthy wakeup call, a very healthy change for me at a time where I felt secure in my own faith but needed to kind of step outside of the bubble that I'd really been raised in. And that more than anything probably cemented my kind of faith identity as an adult to be placed in that environment. And at the same time was the beginning of a real kind of souring personally on the idea of going into politics. That coincided—this was in 2012—coincided with the rise of the Tea Party movement, and just a real increase in polarization and anger and fear in politics. That quickly kind of turned me off to it. Along with seeing my fellow Harvard Law School students who are clearly the rising political stars and realizing I don't want to work with people like that every day, and I certainly don't want to be someone like that if that's what it takes to succeed. And I also found, hey, I actually like the law. This is interesting. I'm good at this. I find the ideas and the stuff that I'm studying here fascinating. And so, I kind of threw myself into actually being a law student and did well in law school, had the chance to clerk for two incredible judges. First, Justice Neil Gorsuch when he was a judge on the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals here in Denver, and then for Justice Kennedy at the US. Supreme Court. And both of them were true lawyers who had practiced laws, trial lawyers, in the early parts of their career. And listening to their war stories and seeing how that experience influenced how they judged even as two very different judges by temperament and judicial philosophy, really convinced me that that's what I wanted to do. And so, that's what guided me to where I am now, where I work at a law firm, that we take cases to trial, which is rare, but that's what we specialize in and that's what we do, and that's what I do day to day.

Hunter: Your vision for what you want to do with your vocation in your life is probably really different from what your parents imagined when they sent you to college with this idea of the Joshua Generation you described. And yet, God has used that to bring you to where you are today and to give you the interest and the abilities that you have today. So, there's this wonderful theme of God's sovereignty where we can thank God for how He sovereignly orchestrates our lives, even the parents He gives us, and the emphasis our parents had, even if we don't always agree with or have the same exact commitments or aspirations that our parents had for us. There's just a theme of God's sovereignty in how He's orchestrated your life. You've been able to accept and then ask, how do I steward this in a way that's true to the gospel and true to what I know to be right? And I love that theme of your story.

Autumn: You've shared, Alex—thank you for giving us some insight into your background, your faith heritage, and the work that you've done past and now that you're doing here in Denver as a trial lawyer—I'm curious how those two streams of your story, which Hunter has just alluded to, have come to be integrated now. So, did your faith and your faith heritage and what you have settled into as your line of work, did those two things grow up together for you in a sort of natural integration, or have you had intentional moments, a process of asking how your faith and your work interact and inform each other?

Alex: Yes, I think in some ways it has been natural, and that's really a credit to my parents. And to go to Hunter's

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comment just earlier, that some of what I'm doing and certainly some of the things that I'm saying or thinking and reevaluating maybe are different than what they would have predicted or envisioned. But at the same time, it was always very clear, they said this explicitly, their goal was to raise their children to be reformers, kind of, in the best sense of that word, who work to make the world a better place wherever they happen to be, who seek to be faithful to the call of Christ. And that's still my vision, which I learned from them. And I think in conversations with my dad, especially in recent years—my mom passed away about twelve years ago—but in conversations with my dad, he sees that. He affirms that even if we may not see completely eye-to-eye on every particular, but as a result of that, I think I have always viewed my work, certainly when that work was ministry-related, as part of a broader vocation. And by vocation, I really mean being part of a bigger story, bigger than yourself. And it's not just your career. It's not just your day job. My vocation is to seek first the kingdom of God, to build up His church, to be a faithful witness to Him until He returns, and my job as an attorney, or whatever I'm doing, is simply one arena or perhaps a platform or one tool for that larger vocation. And the great thing about that is it elevates and dignifies the mundane and the drudgerous aspects of any work, but it also tempers and puts into perspective the successes and keeps our focus where it should be.

Autumn: We asked you in particular to come on the podcast because of both your background and because we know and respect you and see that you actually live out what you just described as this vocational calling, and because of your particular insight into this area of work. So, I want to shift the conversation a bit from your background and your work into some of your perspectives on this area of law and politics and, particularly, first, I'm wondering if you would give us some insight into—it's just a simple question—how would you help us understand, how would you describe, the state of the judicial system in America today?

Hunter: Such a simple question.

Autumn: Just a short, simple podcast question.

Alex: The first of a series of softballs, I'm sure. No, so my answer will certainly not be comprehensive, but a few things that come to mind immediately, we're seeing the judicial system right now really in a position of transition driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, which, like every other sector of society, has been heavily impacted by that. And so, you know, as a trial lawyer for several years, there were no trials. And it's not because people weren't filing lawsuits. It's not because people weren't committing crimes. It was because there was no safe way to host a bunch of people in a small room for extended periods of time. And so, a transition, a backlog now that the courts have been opening up, my firm, many other firms, the system as a whole, have trial after trial after trial, which is very unusual just because there's kind of that backlog. So, there's a transition there. There's a transition as well in a more positive way, in that the pandemic forced the courts to adapt and to become more accessible from a technological standpoint. So, a lot more remote options for everything from hearings to depositions and all sorts of things that typically would require you to get on a plane, fly somewhere, or show up at court and sit around, wait for your turn and then be present in a courtroom. Now, a lot of folks are able to do that wherever they have an Internet connection. And that has increased the accessibility of the courts in encouraging and good ways. And then the other word I would probably use to describe the court system today is distrust, which is less positive, for sure. There's a growing perception, some of which is justified, some of which is not, that the courts are simply creatures of politics and that judges are just politicians in robes. And that the outcome of your case depends on whether the president or the governor or whoever appointed this judge had an "R" or a "D" at the end of their name. And so, that's another term I would use to describe kind of the current state of our judicial system today.

Autumn: What would you identify as some of the most consequential issues facing our state and federal courts?

Alex: I think the first issue that probably comes to mind for many people would be abortion. In the wake of the Supreme Court's decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, suddenly the relevant question is not, what's the federal, constitutional rule here, but instead, what is the state legislation, what does the state constitution have to say about abortion and its availability in this particular jurisdiction? And that opens up a host of questions, and some of them are very difficult questions. So, that's one. That's a big one, but equally big, perhaps bigger, there's a growing movement, a growing consensus across the political aisles on the need for criminal justice reform in many different ways and many different areas. And that's greatly needed. It's very important, and it touches on a lot of biblical concepts of justice that I think Christians especially should be sensitive to. And then, the last one kind of overlaps with what I said on the prior question. I do think how the courts navigate this current political moment and the growing distrust and perception that what they are doing is not this impartial application of law to facts, but instead simply a political exercise of power, which is not how it should be. It's not how the system is designed. From my perspective, having served a number of judges and been in the room and been in the courthouse when decisions are being made, it's not my perception of reality, but it is certainly the media narrative, it is certainly the perception of many, and that's a huge challenge and consequential issue for the courts to navigate.

Autumn: Do you think it's feasible for the courts to reclaim that sort of status or standing in the general eyes of the populace in America?

Alex: It's so difficult, it's hard to envision and to be as hopeful as I would naturally want to be on that given the current political climate which colors all of these conversations. But ultimately, it's up to judges to apply the law, to apply it and to reach outcomes, even if that's not what they would choose from a policy or political standpoint, and really to explain their decisions in language that a lay person who is reading the opinion can understand and can see that this is not simply a political exercise. This is something different, which it is, but you don't get that in news headlines where the outcome is just kind of blared out there as if that was all that was being decided. And all of the actual difficult, nuanced legal issues that went into that decision are often ignored and not seen.

Hunter: One of the things I'm noticing from the layperson cheap seats is that justices, and I'm thinking here particularly about the Supreme Court, are having to ask themselves, how is this opinion going to be received publicly? What impact is it going to have politically? They're having to think about that and not just ask the question, how do the facts and the law in this case meet and mesh up? So, I saw that with the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, for example. I think Chief Justice Roberts was very attentive to, and maybe his main concern, or one of his main concerns, seemed to be, how is this going to play and what is this going to cause people to think about the legitimacy of the court? Which, in a perfect world, that's not a question they would have to ask because the legitimacy of the court would be trusted. And then they could just apply the law to the facts of the case. But it seems they're having to do that; am I reading that right? Or how would you, with a little better understanding, kind of nuance what I'm perceiving there? Or, correct it entirely.

Alex: No, I wouldn't correct it entirely. You're spot on in that there're these competing impulses, certainly, and Chief Justice Roberts, both by temperament and philosophy, but also in his role as Chief Justice, has always been very sensitive to kind of institutional issues and the legitimacy of the Court. And you're right, in a perfect world there would be no questions. But we don't live in a perfect world. And the legitimacy of the court is a valid consideration because the

Supreme Court doesn't have an army. Its rule is law. To the extent that the law is respected and observed, the legitimacy of our courts is something that's central to our functioning democracy and our functioning form of government. And it's a tricky thing to navigate, for sure. And the one thing I would say is, we see the decisions overturning Roe versus Wade, obviously, for good reason; we hear about other hot-button cases. The vast majority of the decisions made on the local, state, federal and Supreme Court level are not those hot-button issues. They're important issues; they affect people's lives and livelihoods, but they're not those hot-button issues. And if you were to see the day-to-day working of the courts, most of it is not in this kind of PR, outward-looking sort of mentality at all, because it is that these are questions of law and reasonable minds can differ, but they can differ reasonably. And that's what you see when you're inside the court that you really don't see when all you see are the headlines on the most controversial, political hot-button types of cases.

Autumn: I think this is one of the softball questions that you referenced before: so, I wonder what you think how you would identify some of the operating assumptions about the nature of people and the nature of reality that shape the practice of law and specifically the judicial system.

Alex: I'm pausing because it's such an easy question. I think maybe first to answer that more kind of on a higher level of generality and then maybe a little bit more nitty-gritty or practical. On the high level, we do have a judicial system, a form of government, a constitutional republic that's built on the idea of the equality of all people, which really goes back to the imago Dei, that all people are made in the image of God. And that's one stream and strain. And then at the same time you have related but different the radical individualism of kind of the Western society and the United States in particular. And so, within the judicial system, much of the tension and the struggle is to realize the aspirations of the imago Dei and equality while also dealing with the fact that for many, the idea of what it means to be free, what it means to have rights, is this radical individualism to be and to do whatever I see fit. And the difference, I think, between those two from a biblical perspective would be a recognition of the fall and sin and the need for moral order. But that's all at a very high level. I think, on the more-

Autumn: -but there's friction between those two streams.

Alex: There's a real friction between those two things for sure.

Hunter: As you're talking, I'm thinking of a book I read a couple of years ago by Patrick Deneen called *Why Liberalism Failed*. And he traces out this expanding notion of liberty or freedom and how that's impacted our society. So, I'll put a plug into that for our listeners who are curious and digging deeper on what you just described.

Autumn: Yeah, liberalism, the idea of classic liberalism, Hunter, that we've discussed before as a container, can only hold those two conflicting streams to a certain degree. And that's one of the central ideas in the book that you referenced.

Hunter: I'm glad you said that. Liberalism in the title that I referenced does not mean liberal in the conservative versus liberal sense of our political discourse. It means liberal in the classical sense of the pursuit of individual freedom. And our country was founded as a liberal country in the sense that we were founded with a commitment to individual rights that we encoded in our Constitution, in our Bill of Rights. And these rights are the rights that make people free. And that's what classical liberalism means. So, what Patrick Deneen is tracing out is our notion of what all should be incorporated within these rights toward freedom has expanded. Even our definition of what freedom is in of itself has expanded and

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morphed over the years in a way that makes our political life together harder.

Autumn: What was your second practical observation?

Alex: Yes, I think on the more practical level, there are some assumptions by many that justice depends on how deep your pockets are or the color of your skin. And unfortunately, any serious study of history or legal outcomes show that there's more truth to some of those perspectives than we would care to admit. My own grandmother was incarcerated in camps on the west coast during World War II simply because of her Japanese ancestry. So, we have the greatest legal system in the world with some of the greatest values and aspirations, which sometimes we live up to and sometimes we don't. But it certainly doesn't mean we don't have blind spots and areas where reform and continued improvement is needed to live up to those ideals.

Autumn: From your vantage point, Alex, what are some of the longings of our anxious age and how do you see those exhibited in your work or in this arena of work? And maybe then, conversely, how is your work influenced or shaped by those?

Alex: I think we all want security and stability, especially in an increasingly chaotic or threatening environment, in a divisive environment, where I think increasingly, especially in our political arena, there's a trend to demonize our opponents, to think they're not just wrong, but evil. And that's both sides, unfortunately. And in that environment, we want people or things that will give us security and stability. We want and look for things or experiences that help us escape the stress of insecurity and instability. And I think I also see and have observed, especially in recent years, just a very clear longing for acceptance and to belong. And that's obviously a core human desire, nothing new. But in our current political and cultural moment, and especially with the advent of social media, I think there's a corresponding impulse and desire to exclude. So, in other words, if I can exclude or ostracize you, that cements my own belonging and acceptance and security within the community and cements my acceptance. And that really kind of pushes everyone to extremes in a way that I think is very unhealthy.

These dynamics are definitely present in my line of work. They explain a lot of the burnout and depression and substance abuse and divorce and suicide and general unhappiness in the legal profession. I think recent studies show lawyers are the most unhappy and the least popular of almost all the professions, which is not great. I always say, you know, 99% of lawyers give the rest of us a bad name. And we think, and kind of what we're told, we're sold, is that money and prestige will make us happy. And they demonstrably do not; they do not correlate to happiness. And in fact, it's often an inverse correlation. But there's a strong social pressure to pursue them, to be accepted into the ranks of partnership or to be accepted within your peer group of wealthy, affluent attorneys by sacrificing everything for your career to have and to use your wealth in ways that make it clear we've arrived, that we belong. And all of those are our longings that I think anyone in the legal world can and does face.

Hunter: As you were describing the legal profession, I was thinking of the pastoral profession. Many ministers are burned out, tired, probably not as well paid, but burned out tired, but some of them with decent jobs that you can support a family on and have a comfortable life. And yet, that's still for them not satisfying or it's not sustainable. And then I meet people like you who live in that very anxious world and in that profession where there's a lot of burnout and you seem to be stable and sustainable, and that doesn't mean you don't feel the pressure and have to navigate hard seasons. I mean, I've had many conversations with you talking about the challenges of your work and the different seasons of your work.

But I meet people like you who seem to be doing okay and able to maintain some balance in that. And I would say the same thing about myself. I face all the pressures of pastoral ministry. I have good weeks and bad weeks. I have good days and bad days. I sometimes get tired, but I don't feel like I'm on the edge of burnout or wanting to quit, right? And I'm always curious what helps someone or what enables someone to endure and to thrive, to be healthy, to be balanced, whatever kind of term you want to use; what helps you to do that in the pressure world that you live in? And I realize that my question assumes you're doing okay. So, if you're having a bad day today, just be real about that. But my observation is you figured out how to be a grounded presence in a place that eats a lot of people up.

Alex: Yeah, there are good days and bad days for sure. I do think in God's kindness I have been able to navigate it maybe better than some of my law school friends and other colleagues in the legal community. And some of that is that I was very intentional kind of coming out of my clerkships deciding where I'm going to work, really prioritizing a firm where I felt that there was more autonomy, where there was more of a cultural fit, where some of the worst impulses and tendencies that are really structural in how law firms are designed, for the most part, were less present or just not present. And so, that was probably the key consideration for me and for Courtney as we were thinking through where I would work, and that has proved to be a big difference maker in that while work is very stressful and there's a lot of it, I'm at a firm where I feel I can prioritize my priorities, where I can come out in the middle of a work morning to have a conversation with two good friends about important topics and issues that are much bigger and more eternally significant.

Hunter: You're sending Jesse a bill for \$1200 for this, right?

Alex: Well, I mean, if he'll pay me, for sure. But no, I have some of that flexibility to pursue the things that truly are the higher priorities in my life. That does wonders for one's sense of wellbeing and mental health. But to the extent, just more generally, as I look back over the last ten or so years, I do think Courtney and I have just been intentional to prioritize our priorities, like I said, but to build routines, kind of baseline commitments that provide a sense of structure and predictability even in the hard seasons. So, I have done my very best through law school, through clerking, through working at a law firm, to be present for dinner, to do bedtime with my daughter, to talk to Courtney and to pray together before bed almost every night for the entirety of that time, to be at church faithfully on Sunday mornings. All of those things. Very conscious, kind of shared priorities that we have made priorities and then protected and been very honest and explicit about. So, there have been a number of times where I've had conversations with non-Christian colleagues or fellow members of the law review, and there's a meeting or something that's going to happen on a Sunday morning or we're on trial and everyone's working 24/7 around the clock, and I've just been able to say, hey, I'm here around the clock except Sunday morning. I have religious services and I'd like to prioritize that happening. And to the credit of my peers and my colleagues, they have always been incredibly supportive and respectful of that. But it is something that I have to put myself out there to say and prioritize and protect.

Hunter: You just said something that I want to make sure we capture, and that is that there're two things that really allow you to be sustainable. One is your personal habits, and you referenced a lot of them. Your personal disciplines, especially around your family life, your use of time, your weekly worship. That's important. And then you work within a structure that is in some way allows space for you to be true to what's important to you, the structure you work in. In your case, it's the law firm that's the institution, that's the structure. That law firm is a healthy enough structure that supports that as well. So, I think that's important. It can be easy for us as Christians to say, well, the key to personal

health and sustainability in whatever my vocation is, is that I just have to be really committed to my own personal disciplines of spending time with the Lord Prayer, spending time with my family, rest, whatever, and we ignore the structural side. You may have to work within a structure that's going to support that and allow you to do that.

I have conversations sometimes with pastors who are burning out where I know these men to be men of prayer. I know them to be highly committed to their family. I know them to have great personal disciplines. And yet, they're just working within a structure that doesn't support health and it actually just creates unhealth. And so, part of the answer is maybe you need to go work in a church that's going to support health for you, right? And then you can flourish. Now, I also talked to people who have not done the work you've done on the personal disciplines. And so they've not taken time to identify the priorities. They can't say as clearly as you just said that regular Sunday worship with their family is one of the commitments that they've made. And that's going to affect how they use their time. They can't say that dinner with family is a commitment they've made. Maybe they couldn't say that spending time with the Lord every day is a commitment they've made. And so they need to work on the personal side. But you just described both of those things working in tandem. And I think that's what we should all aspire to, knowing that there will be times and circumstances where they don't all mesh up, but that's a good thing for us to think about.

Autumn: This leads us into our last portion of our conversation today. So, with these things in mind that you have shared with us, Alex, about the judicial system in America, some of these issues that are facing our courts, the nature of this environment and what lawyers who are in this system often face and the pressures that they often feel, this last section is going to ask what essentially what Hunter just led us into, how do you maintain a faithful presence in this area of the workplace? And so, some of these questions are about your perspective and some of them are about your actual presence and practices. I wonder, first of all, about that perspective question, and you have already alluded to this and wrapped in many of these ideas to what you've shared with us today in our discussion, but how does Christianity affect your perspectives personally on the practice of law and our judicial system and your understanding of justice?

Alex: In many ways, the short answer, I mean, you look at Scripture and the story of God's kingdom is just filled with themes that resonate with the practice of law, the pursuit of justice. You have the equality of all persons made in the image of God, like we talked about rich or poor, male or female, Jew or Gentile, from every tribe, tongue, and nation. And the protection of the most vulnerable, the orphan and the widow, the immigrant, the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. And all of those groups are the ones who most need a functioning judicial system and most need the protections of our Constitution because the wealthy and the affluent and the powerful are usually fine. They usually do okay. But when we have scriptural commands to seek the good and protection of those who don't fall in those categories, that's where the vision of a truly healthy, functioning judicial system really comes to the fore. At the same time, I think whether you're talking about the judiciary or you're talking about politics more generally, I see in my own practice of law that I uphold some of these ideals, but sometimes I'm just doing work for corporations and seeking to make sure they're well represented in disputes over very high-dollar figures. But it doesn't necessarily feel like it's eternally significant or advancing the ball forward on some of these other issues. And there are ways to give time and energy to things that more directly touch on those things, but there's also a sense in which we do have to guard against putting our hope in the judiciary, putting our hope in politics. Ultimately, our hope is and must be in a new heaven and in a new earth where injustice is finally done away with, where true justice is done through Christ and through God's judgment on all of the injustice and the evil that so often, even in the best of judicial systems, goes unpunished and unaddressed. And so, kind of holding those two things in tension inform a lot of my bigger picture thinking about what it

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means to pursue biblical principles as a lawyer within the system that I operate in.

Autumn: Recently, Hunter and I read and discussed a book by Mark Sayers called *A Non-Anxious Presence*. And in it he's examining the necessity of a non-anxious presence in an anxious age, which is a phrase we used already in this podcast earlier today. And that the possibility of individuals who maintain that sort of grounded presence in anxious or stressful environments. He's contesting that our entire cultural moment is one of those anxious, stressful moments that people who can maintain a grounded, non-anxious faithful presence in the midst of those times have an opportunity to lead and to actually make a difference to the people to whom they're immediately attached, whatever that system may be. It could be a coworking system. It could be a family. So, I'm curious if we take that notion—we've already talked about some of the things that Sayers also says are necessary to do that. So, remaining grounded in the Bible, in a biblical worldview, via some of the practices and rhythms and habits that you described are present in your own life—but I wonder to that second part of it, the possibility of someone who has that kind of presence. So, we've asked, what is this environment like that you work in? We've asked how do you personally hope to and seek to maintain this kind of presence? But to that third point, is it actually possible for someone who is in a particular sector of the workplace, is under these cultural pressures, and also environmental pressures directly, because of the assumptions and the functions of that area of work, is it possible, do you think, for someone who maintains that kind of faithful presence to have a transformative effect, to have leadership opportunities within that system?

Alex: I really do. And I think the reason for that is primarily just my own somewhat limited but experience dating back to law school we talked about earlier, kind of going into an environment where for the first time being a relatively conservative evangelical Christian put me in the minority in a way that I've not experienced before. And I kind of went in there expecting all the persecution and ready to deal with that. But what I felt was necessary for me to be faithful in that moment was to not be afraid to identify as a believer, to not hide that aspect of who I am and what's important to me. Not in an aggressive, obnoxious way, which I think is sometimes a mistaken view as the only way to be open about our faith, but just to be honest about it. I went in and I did that very intentionally, and I've done that ever since. And what I've found one, I've been blessed that people have been very respectful and tolerant and it's opened up opportunities for conversations with people I never thought I'd be having a conversation about faith with. It has also had just radical implications for my own mentality and interactions in the workplace. Because it's one thing to know we're supposed to be a witness for Christ, but if no one knows I'm a Christian it takes some of the danger of that away. And when you know, everyone knows, you have to be so much more mindful of how does my attitude, my presence, my decisions, my words, my stress level, how does that communicate to my colleagues who maybe don't share my faith what it means to live and to serve Christ? So, I think about that on a weekly basis and it does involve living with different priorities. Sometimes that's visible, sometimes that's not. Sometimes that comes up in ways that everyone sees, sometimes just in private conversations. But it also means in a very stressful environment where in many law firms yelling, swearing, berating colleagues and staff members maybe the norm, to be very different, to not have that mentality even when mistakes are made, even when you're under pressure. And that is not something that you do in your own strength. It's definitely something that requires the work of the Holy Spirit. But having that sort of mindfulness and openness has kind of forced me to take that approach, and seeing that lead to real fruit and what I hope will be eternal fruit in the years, the years to come.

Hunter: One other thing I just want to add and draw out from your story is you're really good at your work, and you are an expert in your field, and I want to hold that out for our listeners as a key component of Christian witness as well. That

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doesn't mean we all have to graduate from the top of Harvard Law School in order to be experts in our field, but I think to be a gradual learner and to be really thoughtful and intelligent about the work itself gives you a measure of credibility. When you marry that with the kind of presence you're describing where you treat people with dignity and respect, and you maybe don't practice some of the ways of treating people that are accepted in the field, and you relate to people as whole people, I think that's just such a powerful, powerful witness. And even if you aren't in a place of leadership in your company or in your work environment where you get to control or set the pace for the whole environment, that presence is still transformative. And I could even experience that. I worked in a large accounting firm for years and started at the very, very, very bottom, and was not an expert in anything. And there was a mentality, a little bit of a mentality, that we're all just like Dixie cups—that was our saying, we're all just Dixie cups—if you pull one out, another one just falls into place. If you pull one out, another one falls into place. And it was just the way that accountants kind of described the fact that they felt very replaceable. And so, anyone who just treated people as individuals and related to them as whole persons stood out. And I worked for a few people like that, and they stood out. And I could see that, and I could say, I want to do the same thing for people in what can feel like a very industrial, mechanical kind of environment. And I think you're doing that as well. And so, when you marry that with being really good at your work and continuing to grow in your competency and your expertise in your field, it's a beautiful, beautiful thing.

Autumn: Alex, thanks for spending time with us on the podcast today. We're grateful for you, for your presence at Fellowship, your family, and your presence in this profession. We appreciate your insights. And if you, our listeners, have questions about today's episode, something you heard us discuss, an idea or suggestion that you'd like to hear us discuss 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.