

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 107 | Faithful Presence, Part 3: Realty & Restaurants

Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Hunter Beaumont, and Jeff Cazer



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, the host of the podcast, and today I have a couple of guests joining me, Hunter, who's a regular guest on the podcast. Hunter, I'm glad you're here with me. And then our friend Jeff Cazer is also joining us on the podcast today. Jeff, welcome.

Jeff: Thanks. Thanks for having me.

Autumn: Yeah, we're so glad you're spending some time with us today. And this podcast conversation is one in a series in which we're talking about the idea of faithful presence in a particular aspect of work. And I was contemplating, as I was putting together this series, how long I could make it. It's going to ultimately be five conversations, but I really wanted to focus on different sectors of the marketplace and the perspective for a Christian presence, an integrated faith and work perspective in different aspects of the marketplace. And I thought you were the perfect guest because you can tell us about five different sectors of the marketplace. So, we're just going to cover a lot of ground in one episode today.

Hunter: Jeff is one of those interesting people you'll meet because he has what our friend Jill Anschutz Shoots calls a 'portfolio career,' which means that Jeff has a folder—a portfolio—and in that portfolio, he has four or five jobs that he does, including a craft fair.

Jeff: That's true.

Hunter: Not your main money maker.

Jeff: That's the bell cow, the whole thing. That's the prize money.

Autumn: Which you do own a craft fair. And my mom was super into crafts in the 90s, so I feel like I know what these craft fairs entail. And I lost just a tiny bit of respect for you when I found out that you bought a craft fair.

Jeff: Well, if your mom's ever in town in the fall, tell her to come up to Boulder County. We'll get her in, and she'll be pleasantly surprised.

Hunter: My mom would make wood cuts and paint them with things, and then she started teaching other people to do it. And then our house filled up with wood things that had been cut and painted. So, this was part of my traumatic childhood. And you're perpetuating that.

Jeff: Sorry about that.

Autumn: I think that was a really liberal use of the word traumatic, but we'll just keep moving forward.

Hunter: We've talked about that in the podcast in the past.

Autumn: Jeff, Can you introduce yourself? Let us know a little bit about you.

Jeff: That was a great introduction; he's proud and I'm also traumatizing him. So, yeah, my name is Jeff, and I'm a

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Colorado native through-and-through. I grew up in a small farm town about 60 miles north of Denver called Eaton, Colorado. Grew up on a farm there. And, yeah, it was a good upbringing. I have two sisters and my parents still all live in a small town, so kind of the quintessential small American farm town. Moved to Denver about 20 years ago to attend Colorado Christian University. I studied business there, and just haven't left the city since. So, after college, I kind of hopped around a few jobs, which is not surprising knowing that's just my career track. But I was in higher education for a little bit. I was in the music industry as a tour manager for a band for a bit. I was in the restaurant industry as a server and kind of in the meantime was going back to school to get my MBA. And after I finished that, the owner then of Terracotta, the restaurant I own, said, hey, you should think about getting into real estate. And so, that was kind of the journey into real estate and then also entrepreneurship and along the way just kind of picking up businesses, including the craft fair, over the last ten years.

Autumn: And you're also a part of Fellowship Denver, as is your family. So, can you tell us a bit about your family?

Jeff: Yeah, so my wife Megan and I have been going to Fellowship for about eleven years. When we were dating and engaged, we were going to different churches. I was going to another Acts 29 church, and she was going to a church down south. We just kind of made the decision like, hey, we want to just find a faith community together, kind of form new friendships together. And so, I kind of knew I wanted to be Acts 29 church, and we were living in City Park at the time, and so Fellowship just made a whole lot of sense, practically. And we just started going and fell in love with it, and yeah, I've been going ever since.

Hunter: That's really our strategy is to, first of all, get you with our practicality, and then eventually cause you to fall in love. It's a good dating philosophy too. It's worked well for me.

Jeff: Yep, hand the girl your resume first and it's like, hey, this makes sense on paper, and then really woo her in the first couple of days.

Hunter: I'm a very practical, commonsense man.

Autumn: Jeff, we've been asking our guests in this series, and I would love to hear you share too, what is your faith heritage?

Jeff: Yeah, so I grew up in the church. My parents were heavily involved in our small-town church and so kind of that was just a rhythm. Growing up is just every Sunday, it was kind of the thing we did. And so, I feel like I accepted the Lord probably as my savior and kind of understood that at a pretty young age, like five or six it started making sense, and really have just kind of had this slow kind of stumbling, sometimes ups and downs of sanctification and just kind of stumbling forward in it for the last 35 years. So, I always tell my testimony is so boring compared to my wife's, where she kind of had this life of hedonism during college and after. And then her mom took her on a trip to Israel and she was literally standing at where they said the tomb of Jesus was and had this vision of Jesus that said that's the answer to life, and became a believer right there. So, she had this total conversion story. Mine's just been this messy sanctification for three and a half decades, but it's always been a part of my life and obviously just in our marriage and how we raise our kids it's of the utmost importance for us.

Autumn: Okay, you mentioned all of this a moment ago, but I want to clarify for the sake of the rest of our conversation;

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your current work is you own a craft fair, which Hunter already mentioned-

Jeff: Yes.

Autumn: -You own a restaurant that you alluded to, Terracotta, in Littleton, and you are in real estate.

Jeff: That's right, yeah. So, of those, kind of have been a real estate agent the longest. So, I've had my license for about eleven years now, and then just over the course of the last few years, I just kind of wanted to dabble a little more in different business ventures. And I'm an enneagram seven, so the next thing always sounds like the right thing, and more is always better. And so, I'm like, sure, let's buy a restaurant, sure, let's buy a craft fair. And so, my job is kind of morphed from being a real estate agent to now I kind of say I'm an entrepreneur. I like just dabbling in different things and kind of having a nice variety or portfolio career.

Hunter: Now, what I know about you is you do like the variety, and there is a certain aspect of just how you're wired and how God made you that you're able to juggle a lot of things, have your hands in different things. You're also really intentional, though. I know you, you're very thoughtful about what you do with your time. You're very intentional about how you spend your energy, your resources. And there's stories about you having giant whiteboards at home where you map out like a year—you and Megan—map out years at a time. So, there's a little bit of strategy and a lot of thoughtfulness and prayer behind what appears to be a guy who's just dabbling or doing a lot of different things. You're not dabbling anything, but doing a lot of different things. So, describe what the intentionality looks like for someone who has a lot of things going on.

Jeff: Yeah, I think for a long time I thought the goal was freedom or was autonomy. Like, hey, I just want to find a job where I can make enough money, kind of do whatever I want, when I want. Because again, that's kind of my personality, always on the go, always doing different things. And I quickly realized that is not where I flourish, that I really am better when I kind of have structure and even if it's self-imposed structure. And so, just kind of early on in our marriage, Meg and I talked through this and just realized, hey, we need good boundaries, we need good structure, we need intentionality, or I will be left my own devices. I'll just sit there and procrastinate and dream about big things without actually doing anything. So, I think I need very goal oriented any of those things. Not because that's how I'm actually bent, but because I've realized to be successful in a professional sense, but just intentional with my time, with my community, with my family and friends in church, I have to have kind of some pretty strong structure.

Hunter: I love this about your story because you have learned things that aren't in your "personality," or they don't "come naturally," and yet they are skills you've acquired and disciplined yourself with that actually help what does come naturally to be stewarded and channeled and focused in a good life-giving direction, which I think is just what a lot of what Christian sanctification looks like. Sometimes it's working with your natural personality, but not just giving full expression to it, but letting other things that don't come intuitively speak into that shape, that hone that. And you do that really well.

Autumn: An aspect of this intentionality too is what I think we can actually see you live out now, and that's the integration of faith and work that has grown into your story as well. And so, how did that process look for you?

Jeff: Yeah, so like I mentioned, I started real estate about eleven years ago and it really was birthed out of a conversation

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where I just finished grad school, just got married, I was waiting tables. Megan—she's a registered dietitian, and she was fully gainfully employed at the point—and I think even after a couple of months was getting a little leery of her husband that was hanging out at the gym until noon, and then would go to work and be home late because I was a waiter. That's when I was approached with the real estate idea. And so, at first it was really, hey, I need a job; I need to be gainfully employed and providing. And where, because faith has always been a part of my life, it was integrated, but not in the way of like, this is why I'm going to go do this, I went to become a real estate agent because I thought, hey, I think I could be good at this; I know that you can make money doing this. And it still lent me some flexibility in my schedule. Not necessarily this nine to five, you have to wear a shirt and tie to work. So, it started as kind of, yes, my faith is integrated in the way I work, but not exactly why I chose that profession right then. And the same thing with the restaurant and with the craft fair.

So, there was a period where—Megan and I got married a little later, so we started having kids pretty quickly after we got married—so, we had two young kids, I was already selling real estate and pretty busy because the market was picking up, got approached to buy part of the restaurant. So, it's just kind of like things were moving really, really fast. And so, again, the way I operated it, I think my faith was integrated, but not purposely making decisions of *this is our next career step*, because of my faith. I think that shift happened probably about probably three or four years ago when the dust kind of started to settle with just our family. We're done having kids. They were getting a little older, out of diapers, things like that. And the different segments of my career were going well. And so, I had the luxury to stop, take inventory, and really kind of start thinking about, okay, don't just be reactionary in your next move—try to map out, be intentional. And a lot of it came from a guy's group at Hunter's House on Wednesday mornings at 06:00 AM, and he just had us go through this exercise of just kind of casting a vision for our own lives and writing down where we see the cultural mandate and the Great Commission kind of coming to an intersection in our lives and our vocation. And so, what a gift. What a tool that was for me to be able to say, alright, here's what I want to do with the next step, the next several steps. So, I'd say that was the point where really faith and work integrated fully, not just the way I do business.

Autumn: And it sounds like you developed this mindset of stewarding what God had already given you to a different maybe end or with different vision.

Jeff: Yeah, and that's, again, not my normal bent, but that's what I'm trying to do now. Rather than thinking of, what's the next thing? Thinking about, what is God giving me right now? And focusing on those things. So, rather than thinking about what the next business could be, being like, okay, these are the businesses that you currently own—are you stewarding those? Well, this is your wife and kids—are you loving them? Well, this is your church community, these are your close friends—are you doing well with the things that God's put before you right now versus daydream about what could be the next thing?

Hunter: I like that you caught yourself right there.

Jeff: Stewarding my family.

Hunter: Yeah, Megan must be loved, not stewarded. Yeah.

Autumn: There's an aspect, there's an aspect of that, most certainly. But yes, maybe a different turn of phrase.

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Jeff: When I say, what the next thing could be, I do not mean wife and kids on that either.

Autumn: Jeff, I wonder if we could shift our conversation a bit into discussing the different arenas of work that you move and operate in and helping our listeners get a handle on those a little bit. And then on your perspective, you can offer some perspective on those different realms. So, in these conversations that we've been having, this is the third that will air—and so, I've spoken with Jill and Hanna Skandera on the topic of education, and they both shared this sense of motivation that they have in their work, the compulsion they have towards this kind of work is because they both see this huge impact that educational systems have on individuals and on our society, and they're drawn to do the kind of work they do because of this common desire to help children thrive and grow into mature adults who can navigate life and navigate our society. And then Alex; Alex Harris joined us and spoke about his work as an attorney and his progression of growth in his career path, what God has led him into and how he is stewarding that, but ultimately where he has landed is that he is a trial lawyer and he wants to engage the law and his clients and his partners with integrity so that he can support his family well and pursue his work in a way that allows him to live and work out this vocational understanding of calling in his life. And I think both of those are beautiful and visionary, and I appreciate that they shared those things. So, you've offered a little bit of insight into what motivated you initially into this area of real estate. And I think that there's probably some commonality in what does compel certain people or types of people towards certain sorts of work. So, my question is a bit of simplification, but I wonder if you would share a little bit of your personal motivations and maybe how those are being changed and shaped, now and then, what you see as an attractive element towards this area of the real estate industry.

Jeff: Yeah, to be honest, I was a little nervous when I saw that I was following up Mr. Harris. That's kind of tough billing there. I think the early motivation, especially with real estate, was I need to get an actual job and provide for my wife and hopefully the children that come along. And real estate seemed like a good avenue for that. I had just finished grad school and had an MBA, and I interviewed for a couple of jobs, and it just really came back to a little bit of that autonomy, freedom piece where I didn't want to go sit in a cubicle. And so, like I mentioned, my restaurant business partner is also my real estate business partner, okay? And so, at the restaurant, he was obviously owning it and I was waiting tables, and he just kind of talked to me about, you know—he had three young kids at the time—and talked to me about pros and cons and really convinced me that it was a good path to take. And so, again, it was kind of a practical move to start, just like joining Fellowship Denver. Just the practicality of it made sense. And then really from there I did kind of fall in love with the industry. It's a really fun, exciting job. I get to work with people. The way I kind of view my job now is I get to be kind of their Sherpa through one of the most stressful transactions of a lot of people's lives of buying or selling a house. And so, I enjoy that. I kind of like taking on other people's stress and helping them kind of feel at ease going through what can be kind of a tremulous transaction. Hopefully not—Jesse can maybe attest to it.

Autumn: Jesse's always here with us.

Jeff: What's that?

Autumn: Jesse's always here with us.

Autumn: That's right. He's the unspoken but very important partner in all of our podcast conversations.

Jeff: And then with real estate- and so I guess, what's the commonality between people that start becoming a real estate

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agent? I think it's those things. I think it's the flexibility of your schedule. I think it's the kind of fast paced nature of the job. I mean, you're wheeling and dealing with showing a house, running back to your office and write an offer, and so there is some excitement to it and things look different week to week. But I think the overarching reason that most people get into real estate is just the people aspect. Having and serving clients is a joy and it should be for all real estate agents. And I know that that's why a lot of people get into it.

Hunter: It's also a hard industry to get going in. I've had several friends in real estate. Some have done really well in it, as you have, and some have struggled to get going in it. So, talk a little bit about what makes real estate hard to get going in.

Jeff: I think it's hard to get going because there is a huge trust aspect to it. Again, it's the biggest financial transaction that most people make in their lives and so you want a trusted advisor in that. And so it's hard to get that trust with people without having that pedigree or that background in it. So, convincing clients when you're just starting out that you're able to handle their finances adequately is a tough task. So I mean, I was a little older when I started, but you do see a lot of young agent start in their early twenties, and it's a tough task to get people to say, yeah, I'll sign up with you. So, I think that's an aspect. And honestly, the ebbs and flows of the market, I think they said last summer there was more real estate agents than listings on the MLS in Denver. And so, there's just a lot of competition out there.

Hunter: So, it's an interesting industry to me. In that on the one hand, there's a low barrier to entry, meaning the training, the certification you have to go through to be a realtor. There is something there, but it's not as significant as what you would need to be an attorney who's practicing law, for example. The education requirements, all that, are lower. And so, it's something that a lot of people can try. And yet the skill set that it takes to really be successful and the discipline it takes to really be successful lends itself toward a lot of people who have a real estate license may or may not be able to make a sustainable career out of it. So, I think as people are asking, what kind of work should I pursue? It's just interesting to think about the kind of work that is low barrier to entry—sales jobs might be the same way—low barrier to entry, but also a low level of success in subsets.

Jeff: Yeah, I think that's totally true of why a lot of people get into it, because they do see- because you can make a great living selling real estate, similar to an attorney or a doctor, but the entrance barrier is so far lower than that. You have to go to a real estate school and study for a few months and take a couple of tests and get your license. And so, it's not nearly what obviously medical or law school or things like that. So, I think people get really excited like, oh, I could get my license and sell a couple of houses. And I've seen statistics of what the average is of how many homes your normal real estate agent sells a year, and it's like less than 1 or 1.5 or something like that. So, a lot of them are just people that it sounds like a good idea and they go through it. And then at the end, like you said, they don't have the kind of consistent discipline or sphere. That was a big part of it too, just growing up in Colorado and going to college in Colorado and being here for, at that point, 30 years, I had a pretty good built-in network, and that's very helpful. But there are people that don't have that kind of built in safety net, I guess.

Hunter: On the other hand, some of the careers that have a higher barrier to entry, we mentioned law, we mentioned medicine, accounting, which I worked in, is the same way. They have a high barrier to entry in that you have to complete quite a bit of education and then a certification process to practice in those professions. There's also a pretty big safety net there. Meaning, even the basic doctor who didn't kill it at med school and didn't graduate top of their class, but who did make it through med school and made it through residency, is going to probably have a pretty sustainable career

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without being a high achiever in their field. Real estate has a lower barrier to entry. A lot of people can try it, and yet not a lot of people can make it sustainable. So, I just think this is interesting as a lot of our listeners are thinking about their career, their work, what kinds of work to pursue. It's just interesting to know these differences in lines of work.

Autumn: I have a question back in that regard, Hunter, to you, and then, Jeff, if you, looking back over your career path so far, have something to add, I would welcome your feedback too. But in developing this kind of broad understanding of vocation and the theological underpinnings for it, you're saying Hunter, if someone is imagining what to do or what to do next or what path to pursue, perhaps this understanding, having a broad vision of work and calling and seeing whatever work you choose to do as a part of your vocation helps, I think, within that conversation. So, can you speak to that for a moment, just that process of discernment and a perspective that enables us to navigate those kinds of questions?

Hunter: When you're talking about discerning what kind of work the Lord has gifted you and called you to do. And that's a big process for a lot of people. And it takes a lot of prayer, it takes a lot of feedback. It takes some trial and error. And I think it's just interesting to note some things are easier to try than other things are easier to try. So, it's a different commitment to say, I'm going to try real estate, or—I'm trying to think of another example of something that has a pretty low barrier—a sales job, perhaps. I'm going to try-

Autumn: -being a children's minister, like getting a job at a church as a children's director. There are lots of jobs available. I get posts about them every week. They'd probably hire you if they're listening.

Hunter: Okay, versus something you're going to have to go to school for years in order to pursue. I think it's important when you're asking about something you're going to have to go to school for years to pursue, to ask, do I want to give myself to the discipline of years and years of education? For someone who's going into an industry like real estate, you have to ask yourself, am I willing to embrace the risk that comes with this? Because there's not a guarantee, so to speak, of a sustainable, well-paying career for everyone who goes into real estate. Whereas to my earlier point, if you complete the course of education that it requires to become an attorney, you probably have a marketable skill. Some attorneys graduate top of their class, some attorneys graduate middle, some graduate lower, some graduate from prestigious law schools, some graduate from very middle-of-the-road law schools. And that's all going to affect kind of what kind of work you're going to be able to do, but it's not going to probably affect if you are going to be able to make a living as an attorney. If you commit to the process, you will be able to.

So, obviously these are interesting tradeoffs. I see the same thing with pastors trying to plant churches. Church planting is in a lot of ways a very low barrier to entry field. I wish the barriers to entry were higher, but there's not a lot of big certification processes for planting churches. A lot of pastors probably get approved by whatever sending organization or church they're working with to go plant a church who are not going to- the church is not going to be sustainable. So, it's low barrier to entry and pretty high failure rate. Or, if we don't want to use the term failure, which that could be too strong of a word, there are a lot of pastors who plant churches who it's not going to be sustainable for them or for the church for a long haul. That's part of the reality of this. There's just, you have to ask, are you willing to embrace that risk when you go into it? It doesn't have a guaranteed safety net.

Autumn: And as in many stories like, Jeff, yours that you're sharing with us today, this understanding of calling, invocation develops as you're in a given career path. It is possible to have these theological understandings when you're headed into this decision-making process, but more often I think it grows up in the process of maturing in a job and

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learning through it. And we see how God uses that job as a tool of spiritual formation in our lives. Alright, I'm going to hard shift us back—thanks Hunter, that's really helpful—into talking about this particular sector of the marketplace. And I'm wondering, Jeff, first we'll take real estate, but I'd also like to ask you about the service industry. What trends are shaping the real estate market right now?

Jeff: Yeah, I'd say the biggest trends, nationwide, the biggest trend obviously is interest rates. That is a huge impact on the market in Denver over the last three years, we've just seen prices skyrocket and inventory drop. And so, it's a fascinating time in the real estate market, and it makes it exciting, but it also makes it pretty challenging. So, I think those are kind of the macro trends of the real estate market right now.

Autumn: How about that second question that I mentioned, the service industry? Similarly, could you comment on trend shaping the service industry?

Jeff: Yeah, I mean, you couldn't name an industry that hasn't been rocked in the last two and a half years. I mean, I feel like obviously with a global pandemic everything has shifted and changed. I think the restaurant industry obviously was largely impacted by a pandemic and the fact that we had to close our doors. And so, you're seeing a lot of shift as over the last year, year and a half of opening back up just different styles of restaurants popping up or different operational models or unfortunately, a lot of restaurants have had to just close the doors permanently; they couldn't ride out the storm. So, in that, I think you're seeing a couple of shifts. One is this: I feel like a little bit the middle part of the restaurant industry is getting weeded out where you're going to either big corporate chains that are kind of taking over the market, or even farther, smaller, independent kind of one-off neighborhood restaurants. And so people are going one of the two ways of either we're going to be really specialized and we are going to be the Asian fusion place in this little neighborhood pocket of Denver, or we are going to be the Chipotle's of the world and just continuing to grow and grow and grow. And with the Chipotle, with these larger corporations, I've seen a big trend in just everything being automated and really trying to take out a personal piece of personal touch piece of the restaurant industry. So, yeah, I think that's kind of a major trend right now.

Hunter: Talk about where your restaurant cafeteria cottage sits in the landscape of restaurants.

Jeff: We're your typical Chipotle type restaurant, just thousands of stores.

Hunter: Which means when I go to Chipotle, because of the way takeout has changed everything, there can be no one in Chipotle and I can still sit there and look at the beans and the rice for five minutes while they make all the takeout orders.

Jeff: You know, I was just talking to Megan about this this morning of trends and what my presence can be and how my faith can be integrated. And I mentioned that I said I am tired of restaurants prioritizing the online order versus the actual human being that's standing right in front of them. I don't like that.

Hunter: Hospitality is something you're passionate about. So, your restaurant is a local restaurant. It sits in the space if you want to offer a hospitality experience. Now, I'm assuming you do take out.

Jeff: We do, but it's really small and just our location. So, it's a restaurant café, Terracotta. It's in old town, downtown

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Littleton, and it's in an old Victorian house. We have 15 tables inside and about 15 tables outside in our garden area. And so, it really is the kind of whole package of the hospitality of we pride ourselves on having a really cool space, exposed brick and hardwood floors in a house that was built I think 1906, and we have really good servers. And so, it is kind of this- it's less of a transactional, I'm hungry, I need something to eat. It's more of a, hey, it's a special occasion, let's go out and celebrate. And so, I love that aspect of it. I love that it's more of an experience. I love that it's more of a night out versus just a means to an end of I need a hamburger. But, yeah, there are challenges to that. Anyway, I would say that we are obviously on the spectrum of the small, independent little shop.

Autumn: Yeah, your comment earlier about being a Chipotle-style restaurant was sarcastic, which sometimes doesn't read well on podcast. Sometimes I have to come back and remind Hunter of as well.

Hunter: You have a vision of hospitality that comes out of your faith, though, that informs how you lead your restaurant, how you lead your team.

Jeff: Yeah, I think all through Scripture, there's a huge hospitality aspect and a huge piece around the table, around breaking bread together, around community, having a meal together. And so, there is definitely an integration of my faith in that piece. Even before we own the restaurant, Megan and I always dreamed of that, of having something in the food and beverage industry just because we love to cook, we love to eat, we love to have—one of my favorite things is just have friends around the table and just sitting there telling stories and having good food. And so, it's fun that one of my entrepreneurial avenues has to line up with a passion, and I feel like a calling and a spiritual gifting.

Autumn: Jeff, your personal presence in your different avenues of work looks a little bit different. So, in your real estate profession, you are an owner and you interact with clients sometimes, but you also work with some other real estate agents who I believe work for you. So, could you describe and maybe compare or contrast your different roles in that industry versus as a restaurateur and as an entrepreneur? In that way, you're overseeing a staff of people, and so you're present with them in a different way, in probably a leadership or managerial way that isn't quite the same as in your real estate business.

Jeff: Yeah, that's exactly right. For real estate, we do have a team. We have other guys in the office, but for the most part I'm working for myself and by myself, and really the relationships are with my clients. And then with the restaurant it is we have about a team of 35 to 40 people. And so, it is a lot more of the leadership and kind of team aspect and working together to accomplish a goal versus just, hey, I'm in a coffee shop on a laptop and I'm working. You're in a busy restaurant and working side-by-side with people. So, I appreciate the change up. I like going from one to the other. Sometimes I do need just a minute to kind of go to a coffee shop and work by myself. But obviously, being kind of an extroverted person, I love being in the restaurant and working with a team and being able to pour into a staff and lead people.

Autumn: I imagine that your personal presence there is very shaping for not only the atmosphere of the restaurant and weaving in your perspective on hospitality, but then also in the ways that you're able to actually interact with the people who are on the staff at the restaurant. And so, do you have any maybe anecdotes or thoughts to share about that, about the opportunity present when you're in a space like that in which you have an actual leadership role via your title, but then also you have the opportunity to provide a certain—to develop, really, and shape a certain atmosphere or environment via the way that you're present with people?

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Jeff: Yeah, I think, kind of thinking through my staff at the restaurant, it's really kind of broken out into three pretty clearly defined groups of people. And not to over characterize everyone that works there, but one group is just your typical younger hospitality industry workers. So, college kids just need a job bussing tables on the weekend or someone that's maybe in between college and their first job and want to wait tables. So, that's kind of one sector. Another one is being a higher end restaurant. I mean, we do have several of our waiters are mid to late thirties or even older than that. They decided, I love the hospitality industry, I want to be a career server or a chef—this is my plan. This isn't a transition from one thing to the next. So, you have that sector and then the third is like a lot of restaurants, especially in Denver and in the west, we have a lot of workers from Mexico and from Central America and they're here and they're working 1, 2, 3, 4 jobs. And so, we kind of have these clear sectors, and I feel like my presence and my leadership kind of gets the ability and the privilege to kind of speak into each one differently. So, they're young kids. We have a lot of sharp high school and college kids that again, they're needing a summer job or a part time job and it's fun to just see them and coach them to hey, I know that this is a part time job, I know that you're not thinking you're going to be a waiter or a cook 20 years from now or when you're done with college, but teaching them the value of just working hard, no matter what that job is, and just the value of being part of a larger team and taking pride in your work, whether it's busy tables or filling up waters. So, that part is fun. It's kind of the career hospitality industry people just with this change in my own vocational journey over the last four years of being able to step back a little bit and see bigger picture, and it's not for everyone. Like, hey, I am happy as a clam just serving, making my money, going home, skiing a couple of days a week, and living that life. But for the people that haven't maybe thought about a career change, or just hoping kind of do a little coaching of, kind of career coaching, on the fly with them. So, that part is fun. And then the third category, just the immigrants from other countries, just loving on them. And I can't tell you what an amazing testament it is to those cultures how hard they work, how kind they are, how much they appreciate just family. One had a quinceañera for her—both the parents worked the restaurant—and their daughter had a quinceañera, they invited everyone there after shift, the whole staff. One got married and everyone was there. And just their idea and their vision of family is really, really cool. So, I love learning from them and just being able to interact with them day to day is so much fun.

Hunter: In American history, with every immigrant community, there's often been a multigenerational perspective. The first generation that comes often sees themselves self-consciously. They are creating a pathway for their family that's going to follow them, their children, and the family that's going to follow them. Do you see that?

Jeff: Totally. So, one of our top employees has worked there since we opened in 2006. He started as a dishwasher. He's now our kitchen manager. And so, his wife and his daughter who had the keys, she works there as well, and just how hard they work. And she's going to school and she's applying for colleges and just starting that path. And they're instilling hard work in here. And those fundamentals, that work ethic, but also saying, we're setting you up for the next step. You're going to go to college and do these bigger things. And so, I just love that picture of family and again, how many risks they took to get here and how hard they work to just to be here, just to provide a better life for their kids and what they're going to do with it.

Autumn: Jeff, you've been on both ends of this deal, this restaurant business. You said you started as a waiter and now you're an owner at the same restaurant.

Jeff: At the same restaurant.

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Autumn: At the same restaurant. And you were invested in by the person who's now a business partner. And so, Hunter made the point earlier that a lot of people in our congregation probably have had experience in the service industry in some way. From your vantage point now, how would you encourage someone who maybe is younger or is going to school and is picking up a couple of shifts a week at a restaurant or in retail to make ends meet or to bring in a little extra income in the season of life that they're in right now? What kind of vision could you give them for the way that their presence can still be really important in the place that God has them in the moment?

Jeff: Yeah, I think with both restaurant industry and retail, I think there's such a, I mean, most positions are forward-facing where you're serving the guests right in front of you. And so, it's not this, hey, I'm a cognitive, a production line of one thing. I don't see a bigger purpose to what I'm doing. You see the purpose, like, you were bringing food and beverage to that person that is hungry and thirsty. So, I think for younger people, it's easy connect that this is why we're doing what we're doing. I think for people that are maybe questioning like, oh, it's just a job—I'm just making ends meet. I would just encourage them the same way I do with the bussers and hostesses and people at the restaurant of really dig into—this might not be what you want to do for the rest of your life—but dig into the why and dig into the how you're doing it. Just work hard and have integrity and showing up on time and being honest with your dealings and treating, yes, the way you would want to be treated when you go to a restaurant. And I mean, I always say I think everyone should hopefully have worked in a restaurant some point in their life because it just gives you such perspective on a how hard waiting tables and just the whole service industry is. But just deal with people when you're out and about differently because you remember those times of when you were bussing tables and taking gum off the bottom of the table or cleaning up kids crayons and mess under this table. So, yes.

Autumn: As we start to wrap up our conversation today, Jeff, I wonder how your faith or your presence as a Christian has affected your experience personally in these industries in which you work and now lead. For instance, I wonder if there any time you've encountered issues in which your faith may be brought greater clarity and was helpful. Or on the other hand, if your face has ever caused friction for you in one of these realms in which you work.

Jeff: Yeah, I think with the restaurant specifically, I mean, obviously COVID is still a very fresh thing in all of our minds. I think my faith really framed the way our team as a whole kind of went through that time. I remember before, you know, pre-pandemic, I would just be a little more anxious at the restaurant of what a bad review would do, or if someone is angry, or what happens if the hot water heater went out and we had to close for a day, and just real angsty about it. And I think we just had this forced stop, this like, okay, this is the worst-case scenario, this is my worst nightmare of the restaurant is empty and it's a Friday. And just getting to that and being like, you know what? We're okay. I remember sitting—this was early on the week after kind of everything shut down—and sitting in an empty restaurant on a Friday night. And it was me, our executive chef, and our kitchen manager, who I mentioned earlier. So, our executive chef is a big guy from El Salvador, our kitchen manager is a big guy from Mexico, and I'm a big guy. And the three of us are all kind of teary eyed in an empty restaurant, and it's like, okay, guys, we're going to be okay. Let's go. In that early period of COVID when we were just doing takeout and we weren't sure what was going to happen, those are some of my favorite memories because I feel like I was able to lead out of my faith of like, no matter what, we're going to be okay, I'm going to be okay. And I think that hopefully, and I believe my staff would say that they picked up on that and they act in the same way. And so, I think without that it would have been a really tough time of just like, I don't know what's going to happen. But just having this baseline of, I know what's going to happen. I know ultimately I'm secure in my faith, and so I can operate, even in the most trying times, I can operate in a consistent place. I think that's kind of an area where just,

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without my integration of faith, it would have been a lot more anxiety-filled days, and I would have led from a place of that and it would not been a good thing.

Hunter: Jeff I think, practically speaking, I'm curious, how did you guys survive COVID? Because financially, some restaurants couldn't make it. What allowed you guys to make it? Were you able to do enough business through takeout to keep the lights on? Did you have to make some drastic cuts in other areas? I'm just curious how you got through it.

Jeff: Yeah, I think, and I'm saying the opposite today with real estate in the restaurant, but that was a time where my business partner and I both really heavily leaned for our own personal finances, leaned on real estate, so we were able to operate the restaurant, not thinking about- like we basically said, okay, we're not getting paid through the restaurant. Let's pay everyone that wants to stick around. And so having those kind of multiple streams of income really helped where one was really high early in COVID, and one was obviously low. And now it's like, man, I'm really glad I have the restaurant right now because real estate is kind of a little slower last couple months.

Hunter: Well, we've come full circle now. You have a portfolio career, and you have a portfolio career of things that are in these types of industries we talked about that are pretty volatile and there's maybe low barriers to entry. It's not a low barrier entry to owning a restaurant necessarily, but the industries can be up and down. And one of the wisdom principles, and I think this is a proverbs wisdom principle that you actually practice is you spread out your risk a little bit. You don't have all your eggs in one basket. And that allows you to have this vocation where you give yourself to several things at once and you get to be involved in several different industries and you do it in a sustainable way. I think one of the things that makes it sustainable for you is the intentional variety that you have cultivated. An investment person might call it diversification of your portfolio.

Autumn: I think Jeff is really visionary because, as opposed to Hunter, who was indicating that craft fairs were traumatic in his life earlier, I think that craft fairs are really trending. So, I think you're in on the front end of something.

Hunter: The craft fair is like the naked guy streaking across the end of Mark's gospel in your life. I've just been preaching this gospel and there's like suddenly there's a naked man running away. And you're like, what is that? That's kind of how the craft fair strikes me, metaphorically, in your portfolio career.

Autumn: Sometimes things should not be turned into a metaphor.

Jeff: It is very, very random. And like I said, we're joking. Before we start recording of just, when I introduce when someone asked me what I do and I say, I own a craft fair and I just get these puzzled looks like, uh what? There is, there really is kind of how I mentioned with the restaurant of I don't like the automation piece, I like the hospitality, I like the hands on, I like the face to face. Really, the ethos behind the craft fair has that too of like we're the anti-Amazon. I mean, people show up in person to go purchase something and the person they're buying it from made it with their own hands. I would say of all the crap, we're pretty high-quality craft fair. Like we jury and we have to say yes or no on things and it has to be all hand-made. At first when we bought it, I was like, I don't know what I'm getting into. And once we started thinking about again, not the what, but the why—why we're doing it—I really got kind of excited about it. We are given an avenue for each fair. We have about 160 different vendors. So, we're giving an avenue for 160 different makers to make something with their hands and present their art to people and present their product to people. And people actually show up, and there's this transaction. The same thing with the restaurant. Rather than just driving through a

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drive through and a robot serving you a meal, you sit down, you get served by someone, you're face to face with your guests or with the people you're dining with and it brings something different. So, the same thing with the craft fair. I think you'd like it.

Hunter: I've been sitting here making jokes and you actually have a very intentional, thoughtful, really inspiring rationale for the craft fair. Which is why I love you, Jeff. This is what I find every time I talk to you. I'm inspired.

Autumn: Thank you for sharing that. It is really insightful. And I wonder, Jeff, what you see as the necessity or benefit of Christian presence, a presence that's really rooted in faith, in these different sectors of the economy.

Jeff: Yeah, I think the need for Christian—let's just call them small business owners—is one bringing it back to maybe away from bottom line profits and more to, this is the why we do things and this is the how we do things. I think a lot of times in smaller businesses and big businesses, people can be just seen as just a means to an end, a cog in a wheel. And I think Christians are needed to be entrepreneurs, to be business owners, so they can see our God-given worth an image in each one of their employees and each one of their clients and each one of their, whatever constituent you're dealing with and treat them as such, versus just like, well, this makes sense profit-wise. Or we could be more profitable with the craft fair if we just didn't have the actual fair, didn't rent out a space, but just mailed things to people and just take out those human elements. And same thing with the restaurant. I think people would be easy to say, we'll make more money on to-go because we cut out overhead, we cut out people, we don't need servers if we go to-go. And I think you lose kind of our God-given cultural mandate to subdue the earth, to fill the earth, to grow God's kingdom here. And so, I think when you view small business as kingdom-minded with the kingdom mindset, I think you put back in those, especially the people aspect of it and the relationship aspect of it. So I think it's highly important for there to be Christians in that sector.

Autumn: I want to loop back for our final question here to something you mentioned about the way that you were able to navigate COVID. A question that we're weaving into each of these conversations is this question of non-anxious presence. So, on the podcast a little while ago, Hunter and I discussed this book, *A Non-anxious Presence*, by Mark Sayers. And one point that he makes in the book that I've brought into each of these conversations is that leadership and influence are leveraged not so much through a particular position or title, but through a particular sort of presence, which he calls a non-anxious presence. And we've identified that we're living in an anxious age for many reasons, but there are specific moments too, like that of COVID, the scenario that you shared about sitting in your restaurant in an empty restaurant due to factors beyond your control, the time that could have been very anxiety-producing for you, and the way that you were able to navigate it was different because of the sort of presence you were able to have. So, our last question is just, can a non-anxious, faithful, grounded presence be transformative in the workplace or in a specific sector of the marketplace?

Jeff: Yeah, I think that's going to be one of the biggest transformers in the marketplace right now is someone—because it is, we are in a highly anxious time right now; I mean, it's everyone, both in social media and the political scene and racial injustice and all these different, COVID still, and we just have hit a fever pitch in the last two years—and so I think again, back to how we dealt with COVID at the restaurant, I think me, by the grace of God being able to say, okay, I'm going to be okay in this. That was shocking to my staff around me, like, wait, why aren't you freaking out? Or why aren't you saying how much you can't sleep at night? Or where I just kind of had this peace that passes all understanding because,

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again, what the Lord has done in my own heart, and I think that was revolutionary to nonbelievers. They didn't understand, and so was actually having them ask me, why are you acting like you're acting right now, you should be freaking out. And so, I think if more and more Christians operate because even, I mean, Christian and non-Christian, it's an easy time to be anxious right now. And so, I think as believers, because in the book he talks about you can't have a non-anxious presence without God's presence. And so, if as believers, we say our faith is secure, our hope is secure in the work of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus, and I'm going to operate out of that, it's going to turn heads in the marketplace. And so, hopefully that does spark more conversations of why are you not anxious right now, because you should be. And then you say, because of Jesus. And hopefully that has kind of exponential or I know that it will have exponential results in the marketplace.

Hunter: In a lot of ways, you're just describing the doctrine of justification, which is our secure standing with God that puts us in relationship with Him. You're just describing the doctrine of justification worked out in practical terms. You're also describing the doctrine of the kingdom of God that we belong to a kingdom that is eternal and that will never fade away. You're describing that just worked out in practical terms in someone's heart and mind. So, thanks for doing that for us.

Autumn: And that's exactly what the Vision for Life podcast is about. Jeff, we're so grateful for the work that you do for your family, for your presence here at Fellowship and your leadership in our community. And we're really grateful that you took some time to talk with us.

Jeff: Thanks for having me.

Autumn: If you have questions about today's episode or suggestions about what you'd like to hear us discuss on the podcast in the future, you can send all of that anytime. To podcast@fellowshipdenvers.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.