

## THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 102 | Cultivating Gospel Culture In Ministry  
Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Joel Limpic, and Charlie Hall



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**Autumn:** Welcome to the Vision for Life podcast, an ongoing conversation between the pastors of Fellowship Denver and the church at large. Each week, we talk about life, faith, the Bible, and how to follow Jesus as we go about our daily lives. I'm Autumn, host of the Vision for Life podcast, and today I have a couple of special guests joining me. Joel Limpic and Charlie Hall are joining me on the podcast. Welcome.

**Charlie:** Thank you.

**Joel:** Thanks for having us.

**Autumn:** Yes, I'm so glad you're joining me. I was going to say that this is the first time I've had C-list celebrity level guests on the podcast.

**Charlie:** You should just say it.

**Autumn:** Okay. Hey guys, this is the first time that I've had C-list celebrities, church celebrities—I got to add that qualified. I got you. Yeah—on the podcast. But then again, I mean, I do record regularly with Hunter, so within the Acts 29 world, he might be-

**Charlie:** He's A-list.

**Autumn:** He's A- list.

**Charlie:** He's red-carpet style.

**Joel:** Yeah he is.

**Autumn:** Yeah, he is. Alright, well, this week, many leaders from around the country and around the world have gathered in Denver for the Acts 29 national- is it called the national or international commission?

**Joel:** This one's The North American Conference.

**Autumn:** North American Conference. But we had ministry teams from South America and Africa and Canada and Europe joining us here in Denver. And Joel, you live here in the metro area, but Charlie, you are coming for this conference, so thank you both for spending your time with us.

**Charlie:** I'm so happy to be here.

**Autumn:** I'm going to just go ahead and cast it to both of you and ask you to introduce yourselves to our listeners. So, would you tell us a little bit about your life? We'll start with you, Joel.

**Joel:** Great. So, I was born in California, and I was actually raised in Brazil. So, we just mentioned that a few leaders were in from South America, so I got to meet up with a few Brazilians that were at the conference as well. So, I grew up there till I was 18, and so I'm a third-culture kid. I'm not really American; I'm not really Brazilian. I'm a little bit of both. And I moved back to the US, to California, for college, and then worked in sales for a little bit after college. Moved to Oklahoma

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City for nine years, and I've been in Denver for over nine years as well. And so, I'm married, I've got three daughters, and I met Charlie how many years ago? 98, 99? Yeah, a long time ago. So yeah, that's my intro.

**Autumn:** Yeah. Charlie, how about you?

**Charlie:** Good. So, I moved to Oklahoma City when I was six, and so I've been there over 40 years and tried to escape a few times, but I really love my city now and feel very planted there. Have given my life in ministry for 30 years there, and I have a wife and four kids there from 23 down to 14. And so, I'm entering a whole new phase of life and ministry. I'm very excited. I think about early years of ministry and the things that God was doing in my heart there, and I love that I'm still in the same city asking God for the same kind of passion and heart for the same place that I'm living.

**Autumn:** And both of you are on leadership teams at churches. Charlie, you just mentioned being in ministry for 30 years, so would you tell us a bit about the churches that you serve at and your particular role at those churches?

**Joel:** Yes, I'm at a park church here in Denver—so, northwest Denver—and I've been there for nine years. My official title is Pastor of Liturgy and Arts, and so I'm an elder at the church and then also oversee and help out with Sunday morning, particularly the liturgy, the musical aspects of it. It's always interesting talking to people that don't go to church or that I interact with in my everyday life in our neighborhood. Because I'm like, oh yeah, I work at a church. Or if I say I'm a pastor, and in Oklahoma City it was like people would just change their language pretty quickly, at least when I was there, just be like, stop cursing, at least when I was there. Here they're like, what does that even mean? Like, what do you do? And so, I'm like, man, I meet with people, I lead a couple of bands at the church, and I just want to see the church be healthy, know Jesus more, walk with her. I mean, walk with Him in kind of all that we do.

**Autumn:** Yeah, so true. Our Denver culture lends itself to when you say you work at a church, either the reception is fascination or they don't know what to say.

**Joel:** After that, they're like, wait, what does that mean? I'm like, well, I'm sometimes like a counselor, sometimes I'm there, so I just try to give them some of the roles, but that's me.

**Charlie:** Yeah. So, I go to Frontline Church in Oklahoma City. I've been on staff there for twelve years. I've been on the elder team there for eight years now. My specific title is Central Pastor of Worship and Liturgy. We have five congregations, so I help oversee worship liturgy, our worship ministry, our pastoral care. I try to inject a lot into the prayer life of our church and then really help serve centrally, looking over the five congregations and trying to help maintain unity and life and serve the culture of the church that we're all heading the same direction. That's a very short way of saying what I do there.

**Autumn:** So, both of you are in roles in which you are leading and caring for different both staff and lay teams. So, teams of volunteers. Charlie, it sounds like you sort of lead the leaders of these different groups of people within the Frontline—is it a network?

**Charlie:** No. I mean, we would say one church in five locations kind of thing. So, we have all of our lead pastors. They all preach. We're not a video church, but we all plan the preaching together. You know, all of our worship leaders are definitely heading the same direction without a demand to emulate each other each Sunday. So, everybody gets to be

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themselves, but we all get to be ourselves inside of a really great fenced-in area within worship and liturgy. I'm trying to serve and build a culture alongside of five other worship directors, pastors. They each oversee pretty large teams, so I walk with them both just kind of helping them blow up blockades, things that you wish you had when you were 30. I'm able to kind of help those guys do that, things that happen inside of our hearts just as humans as we go through life. I really try to walk real close with them and help them untie things as life gets heavy or hard, whether they caused it or someone caused it for them. So, I try to shape that ministry, that direction.

We write all of our liturgy pieces as a team. And then just from an elder standpoint, I'm a part of a team of a few guys that really try to oversee the health of the church. And we talk about our elder and wives' community, and our leadership community, as our little church. And so, I helped kind of serve the health of the little church because the idea there is as healthy as that can be that flows out into the larger church. So, as guys walk through stuff, I try to at least be available, have a longer period of time to listen, not set a clock on an hour, but really walk with them in that way. My wife is a big part of that. She walks with a lot of the ladies as needed. And so, it really is just a community of caring for each other. I'm really grateful. I think part of it is with age, years of ministry, and the amount of maybe scar tissue I have. I'm able to just slow down enough and really just care about how people are and where they are and go toward the fear of, are we all going to make it to the end? And so, my hope is just to help carry people as they need it.

**Autumn:** Joel, what's the nature of your work at Park and the team that you oversee?

**Joel:** Yeah, we're one church in one location. And so, from a practical perspective, there's Sunday morning leadership leading our Sundays, which I generally do a couple of times a month, and then there are other team leaders that flow through. And so, overseeing a team of musician music leaders. And so, I think in a sense that's probably more of my little church. We have a music leadership team of band leaders and song leaders that are trying to develop them and create a culture that they feel free to and empower to kind of lead out of their giftings. And so similarly, you know, trying to create liturgies and put together song set lists that kind of captivate the imagination of our people that are doctrinally rich but also experiential at the same time. We talk in terms of we want our church that both kind of tells and rehearses the story of the gospel. It also experiences the God of the story, and often we can kind of stress one as over the other. So, some churches will just be like, okay, let's just tell the story accurately and just get through it, and this is our liturgy, and we do it weekend and week out. And there're other churches that often must be like, the liturgy is Jesus, Jesus, come on, we're here, and that's it. And both have beautiful elements, too. Then one has a sense of expectation, and I want that in our church. I think that sense of where you see in 1 Corinthians where it says non-believers will come into the church and they say, 'Surely God is among them,' where there's like, 'Oh my goodness—what in the world?' And then also I think I've been around long enough that there's nothing new under the sun at the same time where I tried to create the newest, most creative, sexiest thing, and then all of a sudden you just get tired after a while and you're like, man, the best thing that we can hand to our people rhythmically is the gospel, is the good news of Jesus. That's a story that we need to train ourselves because we're buying into other stories the rest of the week.

**Charlie:** That's right.

**Joel:** Yeah. So, I think that's it. I also participate as an elder in the church, and so it's a little bit tricky. The elders have regions, shepherding regions, where we kind of work with gospel communities. So, all of our elders are part of those different regions that we're trying to get better and better at. So, we'll go visit gospel communities if there're just

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questions or difficulties or just a sense of relationship. We think elders are called to be pastors and to know the sheep no matter how big the church is. And so, I think that's trying to hold all of those things together, and I'm not a great multitasker, but trying to do that as well as I can.

**Charlie:** He's great at it.

**Autumn:** Both of you used this word in your description of your roles. Both of you said you help create liturgies. Just explain a little bit of what that work is, what that means.

**Charlie:** Yeah. So, I would say a good picture would be like a liturgy is a trellis, and it gives you an order, which we have liturgies in our regular life, an order in which we live life. But this gospel liturgy is a way to help the Scriptures and the gospel story oversee that hour, hour and a half that you meet in the morning. So, it's a way to rehearse that gospel story over and over. You know, we typically, from a call to worship and the benediction we'll typically use just straight Scripture, and that will be what we speak and call people into our confession and assurance, which is an important piece of what we've come to do. We haven't always done this at our church, but that piece of the whole of the Christian life is one of returning to God over and over. But we don't naturally do that. So, we write a confession that's built into that particular sermon for the day, or just a clean gospel—I've sinned against God, my neighbor, myself, the world—and people, you know, some of the people that would kick back on that would say, 'You're putting words in my mouth.' And our feedback is generally, we need to have those words in our mouth because our heart is already experiencing those things. So, it's an active way to act toward returning to God. And then you receive that assurance in the gospel because of what Jesus has done. He's freed you; He's given you life; He's forgiven you; He's given you hope; He calls you a child of God, a new creation. I'm a pastor—I'm actively pursuing God; I'm actively in community. And still my heart is distracted in a thousand directions away from God. I don't look like a prodigal anymore. I used to. I now look, well, I don't know that I look normal, but I look more normal than I used to. But I know that there's still prodigal places in my heart that have to return to God over and over. So, we get to write those confessions and those assurances out of the Scripture and just help people confess. And we think of it as like, will anybody in a relationship, especially a marriage relationship, there's a sense of like when there's a conflict or that canyon gets put in place in that relationship until one or both parties sit down and say, hey, this is my part that I need to own, I really am sorry, I want to come back into this relationship and I want it to be whole. And so, that's just an active way of doing that from a gospel perspective. So, we have that trellis that gives us a gospel story, a way for the Word of God to oversee the service. And then we still are hungry charismatics, and desire to be following the Holy Spirit and asking the Holy Spirit, what do you want to do? We've got our plan in place, we've got our songs, we've got our sermons, we got all this built-out. But hey, come in and wreck us if you want to. We really, ultimately, it's what Joel is saying we want this plan, and we want Jesus to be our biggest plan. The plan is to get us to Jesus, to awe and wonder and hope and to bring all of our busted-up-ness—I just maybe created a new word-

**Joel:** It's a good word.

**Charlie:** —but all of that brokenness that even leaders have. It's often that I'm leading a confession saying, hey, I'm the first among you guys that needs to say this today. And my heart is rebellious, my mind is rebellious. And I'm not leading you from a place of perfection. I'm leading you knowing that I need Jesus with you, alongside of you. So, I've come to really be grateful for that gospel liturgy inside of a service because it really has shaped my heart. We end the assurance with, hey, so let's just all just get rowdy, celebrate Jesus, and say, thanks be to God. We all say thanks be to God, and

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everyone just starts clapping. We did that for three years, and I had a young guy come up to me and frustrated, 'You basically just have taught us to celebrate and applaud God after you say that,' and I'm like, exactly, when else do you just stop and say, 'Oh God, thank you for what you've done,' and just start clapping? Are you doing that in other parts of your life? So, I've come to understand just the beauty of a decisive discipline that your heart can catch up to becomes really powerful in people's lives.

**Autumn:** Yeah. It's such an important aspect of how we exist together as the people of God is to have this element in our services that does direct our attention and give us a place to express corporately as the people of God that we are being shaped and counterformed by this message and by this repeated confession together rather than by the world and the culture in which we're immersed.

**Charlie:** Yeah, that's right.

**Joel:** Yeah, that was really good, Charlie.

**Charlie:** Well, thank you.

**Joel:** Yeah, no, I'll keep mine, I think, brief. A couple of thoughts—one is the word 'liturgy' literally means work of the people. So, it's what do we do when we get together, when the gathered people of God get together, what do we do? And I think the word has been defined a little bit more broadly. We all have liturgies or rhythms or practices rites, r i t e s, human rights that we take on narratives. And so, when you go to a Broncos game, I went, my wife graduated from University of Oklahoma, and I was like, this whole thing is a liturgical service teaching you to an affection for the Boomer Sooners. I think that's a thought. And I think the other encouragement too for me is that every church has a liturgy, from the most charismatic and wild church to like, I think we typically think of liturgical churches or churches that use liturgy as like high-church, kind of chill, subdued, boring, stale, dead churches. At least me, growing up in an Evangelical Protestant. That's their thing.

**Autumn:** We have the same conception of it.

**Joel:** Yeah, we're like, we were fresh. We do like, three songs, a sermon, and a big song at the end. And then we go and it's like, oh, that's cool, but that's a liturgy as well. And so, I think coming to recognize that and I think all of these liturgies aren't just a one-and-done. I think the best liturgies, in a sense, come to Adam and even the Garden like God did and said, where are you? And these liturgies are, in a sense, like these invitations to respond and engage with God. And I think some liturgies can keep you behind the bushes and hidden, and if you stop thinking about them. But the best liturgy, you say, man, come out and engage with God. Where are you? And I think these liturgies are embodied stories that affect the rest of your week. It's not just a Sunday thing. I think every liturgy of ours has a Monday-through-Saturday reality that it kind of takes on.

And so, a quick story about this: we moved here from a more charismatic church in Oklahoma City. And we're at a charismatic church, and so my wife would be meeting with people and they'd be talking, and then she'd be meeting with some gals and they'd be like, oh, I had this dream the other night, what do you think it means? What is God speaking to us? So, there is a sense of expectation, but those liturgies were ones that even on Sundays like, what is God speaking? And so, there're elements of the Sunday service that played into the rest of the week for her. When we moved to Denver,

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we had a weekly confession of sin, and she was like, 'Man, I feel like it's kind of like you're forcing me.' So, similar to the assurance thing that the guy was like, you're forcing me to clap and celebrate after this thing. My wife expressed to me, she's like, 'I feel like you're kind of forcing me to like-' it's almost like if I went to her and I'm like, hey, do you have anything to apologize to me about? You know what I mean? I feel like less relational. And I was like, okay, yeah, that's part of it. Well, all of a sudden, like a month or two later, she's like, I've come to realize, as I've met with different people from the church, they are quick to confess their sins to me. And it's interesting because I think as you go through every order of the service or every aspect of our Sunday liturgy, from the call of worship, from the confession of sin, assurance, there are weekly realities that you hope to see in your church. So, the call to worship is a reminder that we are not just called on Sundays, and then we get about with our life and that's the rest of our time. No, it's every day we rise and God gives this call to worship saying, rise, child, son, daughter, live for Me today. And we step into our days, and we are called to maintain a sense of intimacy with Him. And the confession is an attempt to live out of that place, not in order to win His approval, but because we already have it, because we're loved, because actually the next portion, assurance. We're called to preach the gospel to ourselves daily. It's like we tell people that. It's like, what does that mean? It's like, well, they actually have fuel for that on Monday or Tuesday when they fall into sin, when that same pattern of sin, whatever it was, whatever it is, to be reminded of that. And even if it's a small return, like, there're some Sundays where I've come, I don't lead every Sunday, but to step into that time feeling either shameful or just unaware of God, to be invited out from behind whatever bush I'm hiding in from God. And every Sunday, the liturgy is like, where are you, Joel? And it's like, come out, come out. And so, I think the best liturgies kind of call you out and keep you from hiding. That's a little bit there.

**Charlie:** That's good. That's better than what I said.

**Autumn:** You're both doing great. There's no competition.

**Joel:** Oh okay. I thought someone was going to win.

**Autumn:** I'm sorry if I misrepresented that to you in the beginning, Charlie.

**Joel:** Did you like what he said better or what I said better?

**Charlie:** Yeah, you're than a judge.

**Autumn:** No, I'm the host. Very different.

**Charlie:** I'd rather be a host than a judge. That's what I always say.

**Autumn:** You can keep saying, and it is true today. So, the writing of liturgies is a way in which a central part of your role that affects leading the whole church, especially in these gathered spaces. And then there's an element of it, as you just described, Joel, that really is powerful as we head out of our gathered space into our scattered work and daily lives. Another aspect of both of your roles that you mentioned earlier, Charlie, is your direct leadership over the people who you are interacting with more frequently, and that has a component of that. You mentioned something like coming alongside, a real mentoring, listening in a personal way to what is going on in people's lives and coaching. I think you used the word blowing up barriers.

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**Charlie:** Blockades.

**Autumn:** Blockades. Something.

**Charlie:** Sometimes I like to pretend I'm in the army.

**Autumn:** Yeah. Blowing up things in bustedness.

**Charlie:** Yes, that's right.

**Autumn:** And Joel, in your description of helping people utilize their talents on behalf their gifts on behalf of the church, both of you have mentioned this aspect of your job. Could you describe a little bit more in detail of what that sort of work looks like in your church and how important that is for creating a ministry that has cohesion and clarity of vision and a purpose.

**Charlie:** Well, I mean, a couple of things. If you track God back—Joel and I just talked about this—He's an overflowing God. From the beginning, everything was flowing out, and He flowed out through His Son, gave His Son, Jesus gave His life, and while He was alive, He was on earth, He was overflowing to people, and then He ascends to heaven at the right hand of God, leads the Holy Spirit to pour out, and eventually it's to cover the Earth where God's name is most famous. So, a great emulation practice for a leader, pastor, minister is to overflow. And so, where there are places in my life that I feel inward or I want to protect my name or my position or my job or my thing or my past or whatever it is, if I feel protective and inward, it's usually a clue to me that I'm not emulating God. So, I think partly I can track back to my early years of faith. There was a natural part of me that was giving things away and including people and drawing people in, sharing things, collaborating, moving towards something. But as that went on, I kept doing it because I think there was a gift there. But I also think I experienced jealousy, contentions, 'Man, I probably shouldn't have included him because he's really actually way better.' So, you work through all those feelings in your twenties. Maybe some people continue on and on, but I discovered, especially my mid 30s, that it was like, this is meant to just be given over and over and over and to pass this baton, to pass this torch over and over. Because eventually, I mean, it could be today, could be tomorrow, it could be 40 years from now, but eventually, I'm not here, I'm not remembered. But we're passing on the name of Jesus. And so, it's not just like how you do something. It's like caring enough for the person that's going to do it. Where they're actually living, they're doing that thing, that ministry role, whatever it is, and they're doing it wholehearted, they're doing it full hearted. So, I've just been man, especially the last 10-12 years, I've lived my last decade of ministry years of like, I'm going to pass this down as drastically as I can for the rest of my life, as long as God will empower that. And so, I'm living like that, and I have tangible steps to that big statement to help me live that out. I've written a lot of my job description around giving that away overflowing past myself and not hoarding anything for myself and being willing to give up anything that it's time to give up. And those things are difficult. And I have to, like my greatest desire in ministry is to create a legacy that thrives with the presence of God and doesn't need my name in it. My greatest fear as a minister is for my name to be forgotten. And so, I think the teeter totter, as the years go by, I worry less and less about my name and get more and more excited about a legacy filled with the power and presence of God that doesn't include me, which is the whole, it's our faith, for God to get all glory and Jesus name to be the most famous name.

**Joel:** Yeah, I think for me, I think there's a role at the church—you, what is your role? And also, there's probably a season of life too that you kind of hit on. I think as far as the role, it makes me think about Ephesians 4. I was looking at right

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here, it says He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. And so, we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood, personhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. And so, I think in one sense-

**Autumn:** You don't even know this, but there's a theme that's developing in our last two podcast conversations. I just had Philip Moore in here recording a podcast with him and he also read Ephesians 4.

**Joel:** Nice, okay, I just saw Philip, but we didn't talk about Ephesians 4. But I think that sense, I think often I think in celebrity Christianity, it's like, you know, completion is seen some person on the stage and they are like the chosen one. And people are like, man, they're so great and I love their faith and it's inspirational to me and I come back to be inspired, which is great. Inspiration is a good thing. But I think proper ministry, as you see in Ephesians 4 is seeing actually the people being equipped to do the work of ministry. And that's broad; that's not just like ministry, like Sunday morning ministry, like sacred ministry, per se, quote unquote, but it's like people doing the ministry that God has called them to do and to live out. And so, I think that's one of the things. I think even this idea of being on staff at a church is saying, God, I want to do the best I can to empower and release people into the work of ministry, that they would be equipped to do what God has called them to do and to try to discern those things like, hey, what do you feel called to do? And so, trying to bring in younger people, older people, whatever it is, and just say, hey, look, let's do this. And we're talking about it today for our worship leader gathering, how do we shepherd through raising up more leaders? And you see this theme of discipleship and passing the baton on throughout the Scriptures, the Old Testament and the New, of Moses and Joshua. And it's fascinating because you see the ministry of Moses continuing through the ministry of Joshua. And I was reading one kind of observation on Joshua's ministry is you never read anything about the continuation of Moses's line after Joshua. And it's just Joshua, just as he kind of lived his days and it ended and people didn't know which way to go. It was some interesting end. Joshua didn't kind of really pass on the baton. It seems like we look at Elijah and Elisha, you know, all these all these continuations of these things, of Jesus with His disciples, Paul and Titus, and different elements of those things. And so, I think I want to be somebody that gives myself away in this, that empowers people to do that.

And I think the second aspect for me would be it's just a new season. I think I'm just scratching the surface of it. I think for a while you're trying to find yourself. And so, I think David Brooks's book, *The Second Mountain of Justice*, it's really like first half of life, second half of life type stuff—what does it look like? And often the first stage of life, first mountain, is, let's attain, I want to make a name for myself, and then kind of you either get to the top of that mountain or you fall down it, whatever it is, you realize that wasn't really it. And I think you're like, man, I'm not that impressive—I'm not all that great, but I still want to give myself away. I want to live a life of love. I want to free people up to be who God's called them to be. And so, I think some of it, even as we've thought about the church locally at Park Church, but also just broader as we consider worship leader communities of how do we empower this next generation to be who God called them to be and not be threatened by anybody that's younger, you know? Just say, man, be who God has called you to be, living a life of love. So, those are some thoughts.

**Charlie:** I love the passage in Hebrews that talks about Jacob. He leans on his staff, the very staff that he has because he wrestled with God. He worships, leaves a blessing, and dies. And I started looking at that passage a few years ago and it's like, that feels like a life vision for me. I've got a lot of staff that I hold on to from life, but if I could, at the end of days, which could be now that I'm living in, I want to lean on it where I wrestled with God, worship, leave a blessing, and die.



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Whether that be in the flesh or not. But I want to pass on that blessing. And I think Joe and I have partnered together both as friends and ministry partners because we care a lot about that and we love to see younger guys and ladies coming up and just using their heart and their gifts and following Jesus.

**Autumn:** Part of what's so interesting to me, just listening to you describe your roles as ministry leaders, as pastors, is that you've mentioned your Sunday morning aspects of your leadership and you've mentioned being elders. That involves personal interaction with, I think, Charlie, you said the little church. And then Joel, you mentioned your gospel communities with these smaller groups of people who you make an effort to know more directly, to be accessible to. So, that's a part of your work as pastors and elders. And then you've mentioned your role as ministry leaders over your teams. So, you've got this Sunday morning outward-facing sort of component that is to the whole church, an aspect of your eldership that is to a smaller group of people, and then this area of your leadership that is mentoring and coaching and helping raise up your teams. And your leaders in all of these things, I think, are aspects of what church leaders, ministry leaders, whether they're lay leaders or staff or elders, are doing together to create a culture within a church, within a church family. And hopefully what's evident in that culture is gospel values that are evident in the way that the church interacts with each other, interacts with their city. But I think we're also in a cultural moment in which some disillusionment is present because of the failure of ministry leaders that's been on display. And as I've thought over this, reading different news articles, watching things unfold online that highlight the specific failures of different ministry leaders, there are a couple of things that come to mind. One is that in some of those instances, these leaders were seeking exactly what you described just now, we can't, it's essential that ministry leaders don't seek to simply make a name for themselves. Sometimes that's a component of this. I think another sense that I have that probably other people have is they've read these articles and watched these things happen on a big stage in this critique of the evangelical church that then has become more and more widespread and just sort of bleeds into our general culture, is that sometimes this actually exposes that there is some sort of fractured culture within a church's leadership team. So, my question in that then is specifically as you raise up what you just described to these young people. As you work to lead the people who are leading these different areas of ministry or leading from the front on Sundays. What are you mindful of to help create a culture that does reflect to these gospel values, that holds tight to those or is firmly rooted in those?

**Joel:** I mean, great question. I think some of what you're addressing I think we've had to learn a little more over the last two and a half years. And I'll be honest, it's been hard. The last couple of years have been really hard. Both for just I think the church universally because of realities, the pandemic and different things, but also just different social dynamics at play, political things, cultural. All of that has been really hard, and then also every church has its own brokenness, like their cracked places-

**Autumn:** Their bustedness, as we like to say here on the Vision for Life Podcast?

**Joel:** Yeah, their bustedness.

**Charlie:** That's a word I understand.

**Joel:** Yeah, I think those realities, I think it's become more of a helpful grid I think for us of like, I'm a nine on the Enneagram. So, I'm a peacemaker. And so, the last two and a half years have been like hell, you know what I mean? Because it's just conflict, a sense of unsettledness, because everybody's unsettled. And so, I think one aspect of what

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you're talking about is a sense for the leadership to move towards leadership that is a non-anxious presence. You know, the best we can that we are differentiated, you know what I mean? But also, just because we're differentiated and we can stand against people or whatever they are, know what we think, which has a nine sometimes I use the word chameleonic, you know what I mean? Like whatever, I can be a chameleon to whatever this other person needs and then I actually don't say what I actually think or feel and that's a weakness in leadership at times, but also it doesn't mean that you can't be empathetic. And so, I think as we're trying to create these cultures of like. Hey, non-anxious presence, I hope that the people that I serve directly or that I serve with can come and speak with honesty and call me out, and then I could search my heart and say, man, where's there a real place that I can't own. And it's not always easy because sometimes there have been people that come to me and say, hey, this is where I feel like your leadership failed me. I'm like, man, I'm going to take time with that and there's a challenge because it's like, man, I actually don't think there was sin there; I think there's brokenness in there, but this is an aspect of that. But I want to own what I can own, and so I want to do the best that I can do to be a person that is approachable, that's empathetic towards what other people are experiencing, and then also that I'm confrontable, you know what I mean? And that people can do that. So, I think there are a bunch of different areas that works itself out is it with gospel community. So, meeting with people and just being like, man, I'm so sorry that hurt you. I think being married helps me engage in some of these conversations. I'm like learning from a counselor to say it makes sense to me that you feel that way and I had to learn those words, man, you know what, it makes sense to me that you would be confused by that, and I'm so sorry that that's the impact of my leadership, and I don't want to be that way. And so, knowing those areas and then also opening myself up for feedback, even on those feedback loops of people in our staff team of like, for my leadership, hey, where can I grow in my leadership? And trying to speak into those. So, offering them constructive criticism, that positives. Here are amazing areas. Here are some areas of growth as well for you. Let's keep growing towards these things. You were loved. You were loved. That was amazing. And here's some areas of growth. And so, we have some strong leaders on our team that it's funny, particularly in the music world, who are like, we've been in the church forever long, and we've never gotten feedback on what we do, a particular thing. And it's like, hey, because I give you particular feedback doesn't mean I hate it, I actually love it, these are some areas to grow. So, I don't even know if I'm hitting your question.

**Autumn:** Yeah, it sounds like you're saying you make effort as a leader to maintain a certain sort of presence to work on that. And I think that your differentiated, non-anxious presence, at least in our discussions, and from what I know of you, Joel, and of the leadership team at Park, that is based in connection with God. So, first of all, a personal connection with God, and then a modeling of a sort of approachability and vulnerability as a leader that hopefully sets a tone for the team that you lead. So, not only the staff team, but then your own ministry leaders, and then also encouraging them to be able to be honest with one another, both in their genuine in their encouragement to each other and genuine in their approachability with one another.

**Joel:** Yeah, absolutely. And I'll be the first to say also that everybody at Park has experienced our leadership that way, you know. And that's the sad thing too, that you try to be the best you can do to listen and be humble. And yeah, it's a thing.

**Charlie:** Yeah, I mean, I'll try to go down the funnel, but it's, culturally right now, it feels complicated because there's so much push culturally against Christianity, the church, organized religion, that I think a lot of leaders are back on their heels and starting to become and think more like the culture so that they can absorb some of those. It doesn't feel good to not be liked or wanted or loved, you know? And it's not the 80s anymore when church, at least in Oklahoma City, where church was a cool thing, a good thing, or at least a respectable thing. It's no longer that. I think a lot of leaders are

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on their heels. And then if you get a leader who gets on their toes and moves forward a little bit, they're seen as a jerk. And so, that's hard when—of course, they may be a jerk—but if a leader is just trying to be strong, they can be seen as being mean. But the heart is for a leader to like, my prayer the last year or two has been like, God, would you put my roots so deep down into Jesus, into the Scriptures, into orthodox Christianity, that I am just held firm in that? Meanwhile, so that I'm not just a religious curmudgeon, would you let my arms grow really wide, and when I'm around people, all kinds of people, that they feel deeply loved. So, I'm not compromising anything of my faith and my following of Jesus, of his claim on my life, but I'm also just like, he would fill my heart with compassion as I would listen to anybody in any coffee shop or bar that I'm at, you know, there would be a sensibility of me. So, I've got that strength, but I've got that brokenness.

So, coming down the funnel from that, I found that with friendship. So, I would say there's, like, one core umbrella, which would be communion with God. And by that I mean the spiritual disciplines, but even more than the spiritual disciplines, like, how we feel like we're interacting with God, more importantly is, do we feel loved by God? Do we know that we're loved by God? Are we experiencing that love from God? And so, I kind of start with, if I'm checking on someone and we've talked for a long time and we can't get a sense of what's happening, I'll start to kind of mentally go down those categories. So, like, hey, man, do you feel loved by God? And usually, we can explore that area. A lot of times people will say, well, I'm praying, I'm reading the Bible, I fasted last week, and they'll start talking about how they love God. And I'm like, no, do you feel loved by the Father? And so, it's a whole different thing. So that's kind of my first umbrella that I would call myself and other people too.

The second, or then I get in these three categories of spiritual friendship which Joel talked about, and that's just, do people know me? Do they know the dark side of me? Do they know the bright side? Do they honor the bright side of me? Do they know what's going on in my marriage? Do they know what's going on in my kids? Where am I hiding? Where am I confessing out loud, this is my fear, this is my need, this is my sin, am I fighting for other brothers while they fight for me? That would be a checkpoint. A second checkpoint is am I playing well in the world with God's gifts? So, it's the idea for me of like, when I feast and I feast big, is it under the face of God, or is it with my back turned toward Him? Like, I deserve this, I've worked really hard, and I do both honestly. And the last category is just, am I giving my life away? And I found that if you really explore with the umbrella of communion with God, those three little places, you start to find lots of things under the rocks, both with my own heart and with my closest friends. One of the things that we do is once a month our elders will get together in smaller elder pockets and confess in and pray for each other. So, the hope there is that there's this ongoing deep knowing of the harder part or a sinful part of another pastor's life. And just in that simple uncovering and going to Jesus, there's all kinds of healing and life that happens. There's the vulnerability that happens. All that gets churned up, created, lived in a lot easier. I found the longer I've been vulnerable, the easier it gets, the more I'm able to just let people know what's going on in my life. You know, you're out shopping and they say, how are you, sir? And you start telling them everything that's going on in your life. I'm just kidding. But I found those practices and those categories help keep a check on my heart and in the people who let me check on them. It keeps us all in a place like we're living. Well, we're living in the world in a strong way, but there's this deep knowing of we're loved by God and held by God and in deep friendships, or at least deep friendships that we're fighting for. And then the years go by and you still have those friendships. And so, those places have been powerful to hold my heart together in times where it felt like it was about to fragment and in times when my closest friends feel like they're falling apart, I'm able to at least have some ways that I can interrogate my heart and investigate their heart and then go to Jesus with it.

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**Autumn:** So, I'm going to attempt to summarize this list here. This is not an exhaustive list, but essential for gospel culture, whether on our teams or in our churches, think—alright, here's my attempt—we've talked about a sort of approachability and humility, honesty, with the people who you interact with regularly and as a leader in the church. Honesty about your own state of your heart. Connection to God. Dwelling deeply in God's presence yourself as a leader. And then alongside other people who you're living life with and leading. You said spiritual friendship, Charlie. And this aspect of living as brothers and sisters, this is what's on display, I think that's what you're describing is living alongside such one another such that we experience this kind of deeper level of friendship, enjoying God and His good gifts in the world. And then what was the last one?

**Charlie:** Just giving your life away.

**Autumn:** Giving your life away?

**Charlie:** Yeah, not being inward, but overflowing.

**Autumn:** Yeah, overflowing. Well, I'm going to round this out with one final question for both of you. What is Joel, in your 18 years of being in ministry, and Charlie, in your 30 years of being in ministry, what is one particular joy you've experienced during that time?

**Charlie:** Man, I would say the moments that I felt really human and very met by God in the midst of giving my life away, because it feels the most authentic as a leader. I'm just a guy giving my life away, and here I am getting met by God at the same time. And then there're lots of joys, there's lots of pains. But the second joy I would just say out loud is relationships. I have blood-bought relationships that maybe I can always- I don't have to always like a person, but I can always love deeply. And then again, as the years go by, blood-bought brotherhood alongside of similar loves really creates a powerful bond. And that's what I mean. Joel and I have been friends for 25 years, and he, among a handful of others, are some of the greatest joys I'll have in life. So, being met by God, surprised by God in human moments, and then deep brotherhood, friendship.

**Joel:** Yeah, I can think of a couple things that immediately jump to mind. I think the first thing is relationships just over the years that you look back, and of course you can look back to these relationships that have fractured and that there's a sadness there over some of the stuff. We're just talking about leadership, like an unconflictability, all of those things. But even in the midst of it, there's these places where you see you address certain things and you move towards one another. And there's been these relationships that are forged through fire that I'm so grateful for. And so, the elders that I currently serve with at Park Church are just, they're men of valor that I love and that broken men just like me that I don't expect to be perfect. But there's a sense of just togetherness, that we've walked through so much together. Another joy that I think back to is I go back to Oklahoma City, and even I was under Sam Storms, a pastor there, and just walked through pastoral internship, and just through that time it's a deep love for the local church, and church planting in particular, and wanting to see the church established, and making the decision actually to move out to Denver to work with Park out of a love for the church and seeing the church in Oklahoma City get behind that and say, yes, we love you, we love that—go do it, go be that. And moving here ultimately, but continuing in some of those relationships and moving out here, that was a great joy. So, those are a couple of things that come to mind.

**Autumn:** Well, thank you both for spending time on the podcast with us today and giving us some of your time. If you

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have questions about today's episode, or if you have questions or suggestions that you'd like to hear us discuss on the podcast in the future, you can send all of that anytime to [podcast@fellowshipdenver.org](mailto:podcast@fellowshipdenver.org).

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