

Gospel Conversations with Jeff Polen

Season 2 | Episode 21

Opening

Josh Yates: Welcome friends to another Sonlife Everyday Disciple Makers podcasts. And I'm your host, Josh gates. And I've got with me as usual. Wayne Wrzesinski. Wayne's great to have you in the podcast today.

Wayne: Hey, good morning. Josh is great to be here in the studio.

Josh Yates: Today's one of these cold crisp mornings here in the Pacific Northwest. And these are the mornings that, you know, honestly, I love just turning on a fire, having my warm cup of coffee or hot cocoa for yourself and actually spend some times reading a great book. Obviously the book, the Bible, you start my mornings that way, but sometimes we get so many friends of mine say, Hey, Josh, have you read that book?

Hey, you should check that book out. Hey, have you heard about, you know, I get a lot of book recommendations and it feels like in the last month or so it feels like my book recommendation list has keeps getting longer and longer. So I'm curious, Wayne, how do you filter out your books that you read and then currently, what are you reading?

Wayne: Yeah, absolutely. And just to clear everything up, I wouldn't even have chocolate. I don't like any hot drinks at all. Like if I go skiing for the day and it's the law that you have to drink a hot drink in the middle, I'll have apple cider, but I don't even really like that. So yeah. I've

Josh Yates: like hot drinks, but a whole, this is news to me, Wayne. You don't like any beverage warmed up period.

Wayne: No, nothing, not, not a thing. I think my brain is like, Hey, this is how I should be able to chew it like food, but you can't chew. I apple cider. So like what, what do you do? Like, I can't just swallow this. It hurts my throat. So no,

my, my favorite drink of choice. Anytime, anywhere is room temperature, water.

Josh Yates: Okay. All right. So you having your room, temperature, glass of water with a great book in your hand. So what are you reading?

Wayne: Yeah, man. Currently I am reading through Bullies and Saints, a book about church history, some places we've got it, right. Some places we've got it wrong. Next up on my list is the everlasting people, a book kind of talking about the native American history in our country. And I just finished reading through the Wingfeather Saga books from Andrew Peterson.

So, so I have friends that recommend books, pastors that recommend books, podcasts that recommend books. And I think at my best, I'm trying to read different kinds of books. Like I can't read two history books at the same time because I'll get confused, but I can read this Bullies and Saints books. So I love to have a book that is maybe helping me learn more about a subject or some type of history or something.

And then maybe a book that's helping me. Be a better human being, a better Christ follower and then a fiction books. That's kind of my limit. I can have those three kinds of books that I'm reading through at the same time. Without being overly confused between them. Like, but I don't, I don't read two fiction books at once.

Because I'm gonna be like, wait a minute. Are these dragons from this story? Or how did these dragons get to New York? But if I have those. Categories of books. I can read through some of those. What is your system for, for reading through.

Josh Yates: Wayne. I love the fact that you also have a, a filter. Deciding what books you're going to read. I didn't know that about you. And I think that's why we enjoy spending time together, because I think the, how these

common common threads that we find along the way, and one of those, I to have a filter for how I read.

And for me, there's four, four kind of buckets that I'm. That I'm gathering books and recommendations from. And I put them into send my Amazon wishlist. I have a private list and I just kind of have a labeled. So I see something or hear something. I just, you know, finding an Amazon park it there. And then, then maybe a few weeks later, or a month later, I might come back to those lists and say, Hey, is there anything here that I'm, that I'm ready to read?

So I try to be more proactive than reactive in terms of books that come my way. And the four categories for me is leadership. I always want to read something great on just leadership. And so I'm actually reading probably one of the best books on leadership. I've read in a while. It's Creativity Inc.. And it's the backstory of Pixar.

And I love the way that they're learning some leadership lessons in terms of innovation and creativity. The second category for me, skills I just want to know how to better like, do what I do making disciples following Jesus. And so I'm doing a book called Listening to the Land by Cindy Parker and as well as a Encountering Jesus as well by Cindy Parker.

So I'm doing kind of a double, a double read on those two books. And then as well as I want to, I want to have something for my heart. Just kind of like something that's just nurturing my own soul. Help me, help me, my intimacy with Christ.

I'm currently reading A Burning in my Bones, autobiographical of Eugene Peterson. And then lastly, I want something for my family. So how do I better leave my family? How to love my kids, love my wife. So I'm reading intentional father by John Tyson and Sabbath by Abraham Hershel.

And so I kind of cherry pick books along the way. And so it's funny. catch me reading like a deeper theological book and sometimes reading a little more light, you know, heart book or leading a leadership book. But it seems like I always got my, my, my, you know, my heart or my mind engage in one of those books at any given at any given time.

As leaders, we have so many things that are coming our way things we need to pay attention to even listen to this podcast. We're thankful for our listeners for tuning in listening to this. And I really hope today's podcast interview with Jeff.

Polen, encourages your heart on how to be a better disciple maker

Conversation with Jeff

Josh Yates: Well, it's my pleasure today to have Jeff Polen in the studio digitally coming in and talking through just life and ministry and music and Jeff, it's great to have you on the podcast with us today.

Jeff Polen: Yeah, it's great to be with you. Thanks for.

Josh Yates: Yeah, Jeff. I've, I've really had the chance to know you in a number of ministry context over the years through Dare to Share, but as well as a Sonlife making a conference or D conference and as well as some travel to, to Israel But what I love about you, Jeff, is that you're the real deal.

When I see you on stage, when I see you behind stage, when I see you just, you know, on a bus as we're traveling, or just even in conversations in a coffee shop I have enjoyed knowing you as a real person who loves Jesus. And so Jeff really it's a genuine honor just to have you share a little bit of your heart and your story. With the listeners today.

So Jeff, why don't you give us just a little bit of context of your heart, your passion was one thing we don't have in common is, is running. I am not a

runner. I confess, I like things on two wheels and pedals, but to run just, I don't have that. I don't know if that.

I dunno, it just doesn't come to me. I apologize, but you are an avid runner. So tell us a little bit about this 5k a day and a marathon that you have on your bucket list of marathons.

Jeff Polen: Yes. So it's not normal maybe, but maybe it's Okay,

You know, we're supposed to run with perseverance, the race that the Lord has set before us. So I'm just trying to take that quite literally. No. I do this thing called 5k every day in the month of May. And it's just a little challenge that I set out for myself one year. And I needed it. I needed it because for me, running was a daily activity where I could meet with. Where I could just kind of be alone. I could process my thoughts and I was going through a storm at the time and I, I desperately needed it. Found it to be so helpful. And I will say this too, if I could just back up a moment to say running is not something that I necessarily wanted to get into.

I have a very distinct motivation for getting into running. And that is because I did not grow up in. I grew up next to a church if that counts for anything. But I grew up not going to church. My dad and my two older brothers church was not really a, you know, something that we thought about.

Certainly not something that we necessarily were going to take our time to do. But at the age of 21 I would say I found Jesus, but we all know he found me, man. He was hunting me down and I gave my life to Christ and it transformed everything about me. At the time I was a country music singer. I was traveling around doing 108 shows a year, you know, four-hour gigs in the bars and Jesus totally transformed my life. And actually I got married, got baptized and on our honeymoon, the Lord spoke to us and said, you're going to be missionaries. And that was really exciting to me. Cause I had to, you know, get a dictionary and look it up, figure out what that. But it was just, you know, God was really moving in our hearts and we ended up joining

why wham youth with a mission and a once again, totally transformed our lives, but, you know, God is going to renew our minds.

And that's what happened for me at at YWAM. And I felt like during that time, during our discipleship training school, and then also again, in a school of ministry develop. It's like, he totally gave me a heart transplant. Totally gave me a mind transplant. And I mean, I just fell in love with Jesus and I felt like it was such an honor that he is calling me to do.

And in fact, when we traveled around, we were missionaries in the nations of Turkey and. And how we traveled around, we literally opened up a map of the country and just said, God, where do you want us to go? And he would speak to each member of the team through many different ways, but just make it very clear to us.

You know, Jesus said, I'm the good shepherd. My sheep hear my voice. And I would say that is a true. And he would send us where he wanted us to go and over and over again, we were being used by him. And that's, you know, that's the kind of joy that you can't manufacture. That's the kind of thing that transforms your life.

And so at the end of our time or why we we opened up a map of the world, said, God, where do you want us to go? Cause we will follow you absolutely anywhere as long as it's China or France. But he, he did not send us to either China nor France. He spoke very clearly to us go home. And we cried and we obeyed and we went home and just thought, you know, what, what would it look like to live as missionaries in our hometown?

Because we were just convinced that's what God was calling us to do. And one of the first things that God really put on my heart when we got home, Was that my brothers didn't know the Lord, and that really bothered me because here I am, you know, crossing the ocean, going to all these foreign lands to tell people about Jesus, because I really believe that Jesus is the answer.

I don't know what the question is, but Jesus is the answer for every question. And yet I never really successfully shared the gospel with my family, with my brothers. And so I really started praying, especially for my brother two years older than. That he would come to know the Lord, and then I have an opportunity to share the gospel.

And so I was inviting him to church and, you know, I was inviting him to these Christian concerts, whatever. And of course he was not interested at. And then I was just praying. I was like, Lord, would you please bring my brother to faith? I just really felt like the Lord spoke to me. He said, Jeff, you keep inviting your brother to do what you enjoy doing.

Why don't you go and do what he enjoys doing? And I said, no Lord, anything but that, because my brother is an ultra marathon runner, which means he laces up issues and runs 100 miles or more. Straight like a complete moron. And not only is he an ultra marathon runner, but he's a really good one. At the time.

He was the director of the Akron marathon. He owned his own running shoes store. Uh, Which he still does. It's fantastic. And shoe store, but I knew that if I was going to share the gospel with him, I was going to have to get into his world. And so you know, went out and got a pair of shoes, which I think made me a runner. right.

And I, I called my brother and I said, Hey, I'm a runner now, you know? And he's like, oh really? Yeah.

You want to go for a run? He's like, oh Yeah.

sure. How about eight miles tomorrow morning? I'm like, yeah.

Yeah. Eight miles is what I was thinking too. So I'm thinking. You know, if I can just lace up my shoes, run with him, share the gospel, he'll put his faith in Christ and I can return my shoes or whatever, you know, I can be done with this.

And we went for an eight mile run. I did not share the gospel. All of the prayers that morning were directed towards me. Lord, keep me

Josh Yates: Yeah.

Jeff Polen: ridiculous. Through that I realized, you know, what, if I'm going to do this, I'm going to have to really do this. And that was the part of the inspiration for 5k every day in the month of May was really just getting my own personal endurance going.

And thankfully I did get a chance actually to build up my endurance and kept running with my brother and finally got a chance to share the gospel with him. And we ran a half marathon together from mile seven to 11, man. I unpack the gospel using running language. It's amazing. Cause my brother was probably I'm guessing like 37, 30, 8 years old at the time, you know, grew up in Ohio.

We got Christian radio, TV, churches everywhere. And I shared the gospel and I use running language. I spoke his language really. And when I was done sharing the gospel, he said, I have never heard. Isn't that amazing. Now I don't believe for a moment that he's never been in the presence of a gospel presentation, but I believe him.

I think he never heard it. I think he never actually was involved in a gospel conversation and there's a huge difference. And thanks. You know, my brother did put his faith in Christ, which is awesome. But I also, you know, through that time I got to meet a lot. I got to meet a lot of other people who were running, got to speak into their lives.

And for me running has really become a bit of a fishing hole for me. So now every year I invite people to just join me in the 5k every day in the month of May challenge, it's completely free. You can sign up through my website, Josh. I know that you aren't the signed. I really believe that about you, but if you do it, you can run and, or walk for every day in the month of May.

That's what you're signing up for. And if you do it, it's on the honor system. If you finished it, then I will send you a t-shirt saying you completed the 5k every day of the month may challenge. It's completely free. And the first year that I opened it up to people, we had 18 people join. And I realized something about myself that year.

That was interesting. I realized I was more committed to running 3.1 miles every than I was to reading God's word. And that bothered me. So the next year I added an optional challenge, 3.1 miles every day, plus three chapters of scripture. So the, the scripture was optional. But we, it hasn't taken you through the month through Matthew.

Which is where I always start all the way through acts four, which you know, is kind of an amazing section of good. It's all good. It's all God-breathed but it's an amazing section of scripture. And I realized not a lot of people did it and that's okay. They were pretty busy. So the following year to help people out.

I turned that three chapters of scripture every day into a podcast. So during the podcast, you know, I welcome everybody to the daily podcast. I read the three chapters of scripture offering commentary along the way. And now a ton of people are tuning into this podcast. A lot of people are learning about Jesus for the very first time.

A lot of believers are seeing Jesus through a new lens because, you know, I really believe. That Jesus was not just the Messiah. He was very much the Messiah. He's not just God. He was very much God, but he also was fully man. And he was our model. Like we're actually supposed to walk like Jesus walk. And so I, you know, I try to present that section of scripture in that light.

Like this is who Jesus was. He's calling us to do the same. I think we can do it. And man, last year, Well, the COVID year, we had 750 people sign up for a 5k every day in the month of May, which was pre, you know, going from one person to 18 people to 750 is pretty cool. And even last year, when things

were opening back up, we still had 650 people and a huge percentage of those people.

Not only proved they could do the miles, but they actually did the chapters and I love seeing how God has used that. It's a weird electronic way of making disciples, but welcome to 2000 and twenties, right.

Josh Yates: yeah. I love that backstory because I could never figure out to be honest with you like this 5k in the month of May, but you're like a music artist. You're doing music stuff. So, so now hearing the backstory, it really makes sense. Because I think what you do is you take, whether it be an art and you, you say, how can I take the word of God, put it in music to where people can experience it.

I'm coming in. I'm translating where they will hear it. Maybe for the first time they been. But now you took the gospel and presented it to a language to your brother in running language. And you're translating it to a place where it's not a presentation. It's a conversation. That was that's an aha moment for me.

Jeff, hearing you talk about the kind, the backstory, the running, and why are you using running at really as part of your, another, just ministry outlet. And so thanks. For filling that in for me now I have to kind of not feel convicted

Jeff Polen: I just see the real

Josh Yates: this on a podcast. I now am I going to run it?

So that's the real question

Jeff Polen: it's gotten really working on your heart or not.

Josh Yates: I told you. I'm not a runner. So I guess maybe I'm maybe I'm depending upon my own

Jeff Polen: Yeah, I do wanna put this out there before we move on from this now, Jake, but I mean, we have people who walk in every day. And as a runner, my hat goes off to them. That is a bigger commitment. And man, God uses that time. I've seen couples get closer together because they take that challenge and they just set that hour aside to walk together, maybe to listen to the podcast together.

And so maybe if somebody is listening and they're thinking I'm not a runner, I would challenge you consider doing the 5k every day and let the May challenge and just walk it and see what God will teach you during that 31.

Josh Yates: and I love the fact that you filled it in with some podcasts and other resources, as well as the scripture pieces to say, Hey, what's God saying to you during this time. So it's not just some usually for physical health or to get out there, but actually use it as for spiritual health as well. And so you've kind of tying those two things together.

Yeah, I wasn't planning on that in terms of our conversation today, but Jeff, thanks for filling in the 5k and the month of May heartbeat behind that. So, and the timing of this coming out knowing that you've got a couple of months to prepare this let's continue this conversation with our listeners and throw that challenge out.

So I'm really encouraged by that. I want to get into a little bit of just a little bit of. Really your heartbeat, your passion, maybe the history of Jeff Polen music. It really exists as a nonprofit to produce Christ focused resources. You have done music, but he's also a pastor for a season or youth pastor.

And so, you know, how are you using some of your, your heartbeat for training a local church through music and give us a little of the story of Jeff Polen.

Jeff Polen: Yeah.

So you know, I talked about my wife and I were in Y wham. And when we got back from YWAM we had a church, we were going around doing programs, trying to raise missions awareness. Really. We were just trying to tell about what happened with us overseas, but also invite people, man, I think God might be calling you overseas.

And a church came up to us and asked if we'd be there, youth, pastor, and the music director. And I was like, nah, man, God sending us to China any day now. But in the meantime, we want to be faithful where we were. So we were plugging in at our church as youth sponsors was what we recall, you know, working with high school students, which by the way, if there's a youth pastor, you know, youth leader, youth sponsor, anybody like that, listen.

To this podcast, what you do matters so much. I wish I would've had an adult come up to me, tap me on the shoulder. When I was in high school, man, you could have saved me from so much heartache. God got me eventually. But I think he could have gotten me earlier and I would have been okay with that.

So I want you to know if you're listening to this and you're working with teenagers, may what you do matters. Keep going at it. But that was not my story. I didn't really hear the gospel until I was 20. And you know, when we got back, we were working with high school students and the youth pastor at that church decided that he was being called somewhere else.

And I was like, Oh, man, that's super sad. And so I, I realized that moment you know, I started studying this a little bit. I realized, wow, the typical youth pastor lasts about 18 months at a church. That's insane. And that's exactly how long that youth pastor had lasted. So I started praying God raised at the right place. And felt like God was tapping me on the shoulder and say, well, why don't you apply? And I was like, Lord, no, please no. It's kinda funny. But I, as clear as anything, I felt like the Lord spoke to me. He said, don't worry, you're not going to get the job. And I was like, oh great. So I did apply. And there was like five of us who applied another guy I tapped on the shoulder.

I said, you may, you're gonna be perfect for this. Would you please do it? So I went through the whole process, you know, meeting with the pastoral search committee and this five people got wittled. Yeah. People, just me and the guy that I tapped on the shoulder and I already knew I wasn't gonna get the job.

So when they were asking me questions, it was just fun. I was just answering like, this is just how I feel about that. Instead of playing any of those games, like, what do they want to hear? Like, I don't care what you want to hear. Actually. I'm just going to tell you the answer to the question. And then, you know, the other guy got the job, which was exactly, I knew that was going to happen.

Not. Well, I didn't know who was that God was going to use that season to really kind of mess with my heart and the way that I thought about pastoring and to become more open to the idea. So this other guy got the job, which I was very happy about it. I wasn't upset bitter or anything like that.

But then this other church came back to us again, the one who had originally asked if we'd be a youth pastor, music director, and I realized had months had gone by. The church, we were a part of had five candidates. This other church has zero candidates still. And that felt like an injustice to me. So I went to our pastor and I said, I am considering this.

Would you consider like sending us out as missionaries to this other church? Cause I wouldn't want to leave our church to go do that. That doesn't feel right to me. But what if we were commissioned from this church to go be a resource to that church, and that really resonated with our pastor. So, you know, I accepted the position and I told them, I said, you know, I'll probably only be here about six.

And then God's gonna probably move us on to China. So I'm willing to stare, but you know, he's definitely going to do that. And we were commissioned from our home church. It was a really cool thing, no hard feelings. It was a

beautiful connection there. In fact, the church we were from ended up giving us this amazing coffee table gift that sat in our youth room the whole time we were there as just a reminder of the unity between the churches, which I thought was really cool.

Well that six months turned into 10 years. And during that time man, I just loved it. God was using the ministry, but. I became increasingly frustrated as a youth pastor among many things, but the first thing was I got to that church and I was incredibly honest with them, just like with the church.

I knew I was going to get the job. When I sat down with the church, we did get the job and they asked you to, what do you think. Like I was completely honest because I did not need this job. I wasn't looking for this job. I was willing to do this job. And you know, when they asked, what do you think about youth ministry?

I said, our job is to advance the gospel, make disciples. That's our job. Let's go. If I come and be a youth pastor here, my focus is going to be to advance the gospel and make disciples. And that was always my passion. Um, Never wavered and man, where we good at it, but I had a real frustration and the frustration was, I didn't really know how to do that.

I had a bunch of ideas and some of them were decent, but I didn't have a concise, coherent transferable idea of how to do that and how to train others to do the same until Dare to Share. And Sonlife got on my radar. And for me, the material that Dare to Share and Sonlife offered it wasn't so much that it was new or mindblowing.

It was like, it finally gave language to the cry of my heart to begin with. So when I heard Doug holiday at a dare to share lunch in unpack Four Chair Disciples, My heart was beating out of my chest because it's like, this is exactly what I've been trying to say. But the only thing that would come out is, you know, and and I had some success along the ways, but it just wasn't coherent.

And the same thing, man, when I heard Dare to Share, unpack their Seven Values of a Gospel Advancing Ministry, I'm like this, this is exactly the language of my heart. This is exactly what I've been trying to say. We really just adapt. You know, we adapted those seven values as this is the language that we're going to use, this is what we've been trying to do anyway.

Now it's crystal clear. And when it comes to making disciples, like we're, you know, we're gonna put together a DDP description of a disciplined person. What are we actually trying to make here? Man. I sat under summit. Dann's teaching. I sat under Doug's teach. I sat on her. teaching, you know, that under, when we were leading worship at the D conference the reason I liked it so much is because I got free admission to the teaching baby.

That's what I'm talking about. And, you know, soaking it up, you know, going to Israel and learning about the life of Christ. Ultimately that time at our church has a youth pastor and a worship leader, which was a beautiful, beautiful season, came to an end. And my wife and I really processed that. I spent time processing that with Doug, a man I admire and love and just really am thankful for, and with Greg Steer from dare to share.

And we felt like God was calling us into full-time missionaries. So I'm a full-time musicianary with a

Josh Yates: musician area. I love that term.

Jeff Polen: Yeah.

And so we've got really four aspects. The first one is a classical singing and speaking, you know, I had mentioned earlier, I was a country music singer, and I felt like God has really redeemed the years the locust had eaten.

So while I was in why we have, I actually put down the guitar, I would not lead worship because I did not trust myself. I, I did not, I couldn't use music as anything other than an idol and God totally transformed. In fact, I had like

18 guitars. Some of them were really nice. I gave him all of them. Because it's like, Lord, I don't want anything in my life.

That's greater than you. And then actually it was at a motorcycle rally. They asked me to play music and share the gospel. And I was like, I don't know. And I prayed. I felt like God really released me and said, yes, you're ready. Go do it. And I was like, okay, well, step one, borrow a guitar. Didn't never a guitar. And God has really repaid the years the locusts had eaten. You know, I, I. Invested so much into music, really for the wrong motives. And I feel like God really changed it around. And now, you know, I honestly, I was opening up for national acts like Clint Black, Buddy Juul, Rick Treviño you know, . And a standing on front of stage jumbo-tron, you know, front of thousands of people and laid all that down.

And now sometimes I lead worship for like 10 people or less, and I wouldn't trade it for the world because I'm doing what God has called me to do. And it's a really big. Feeling and, you know, if he wants to put me in front of thousands of people, again, that's totally on him. I'm not saying I wouldn't do it.

But I mean, I'm not going to chase that because just being right where he wants you to be as a beautiful thing. So we do seeing in speaking, I do preach and lead worship, do a lot of youth conferences and stuff like that, which I really liked, but also doing a lot more church wide events, talking about making disciples.

I have my own sound system. So we do provide sound for gospel advancing events, which is pretty great and travel around with a hundred thousand dollars sound system that can be a real blessing. To the right sized events. 2015, I took a sabbatical from my position as a youth pastor. And I took that time and opportunity to learn how to professionally record music.

So now I have my own recording studio where I not only record my own music, but also loved bringing Christian. Who couldn't afford to go to

Nashville. I try to pastor them through the process of releasing music. And then the fourth aspect of the Jeff Polen music ministry is training and resources. So I love training Sonlife material.

I love training on behalf of Dare to Share, and I'm also releasing books. I released a book this last year called weekly worship. It's a 52 chapter devotional, basically for worship teams. And it's a really cool resource for worship teams to all get on the same page and to think about, you know, the biblical aspect, the relational aspect of practical aspect of leading worship.

It's also a great tool for senior pastor. To walk through with their worship leader, because sometimes, you know, if, if the shoe fits wear it, I'm not trying to offend anyone. But sometimes we bring somebody in on church staff, who's got incredible musical talent, but they don't necessarily have spiritual depth.

And I think a lot of times the pastors and the worship leader, worship pastor or whatever, the position title. They kind of miss each other because they're not speaking the same language. And this book really is a great resource to bridge that gap. So it's speaking the, the senior pastors language, it's also speaking the worship leaders language and it's a great resource to bring them together.

So. You know, pick up two copies and it's that Sonlife two by two model. Write the copy for you, a copy for your worship leader and walk with them for a year. You know, unpack, use that as a, as a reason to get together for a year. Talk about the chapter and then, you know, ask your worship leader. Now you go and do likewise.

Now you meet with your worship team and do the same thing. So it's a great disciple-making opportunity. For hundred.

Josh Yates: okay. So 52 weeks. And is that something available online or where would someone grab that

Jeff Polen: Yeah.

Jeff, pull a music.com is probably the best place to get it. I would imagine it's on Amazon and other places like that, but we have worship team packets and on the website too, I also, I made a supplemental video for each chapter. So it's a great resource for a youth pastor. You can send out the YouTube link where there's like a 10 minute video that goes deeper.

It takes another angle at the same stuff. And then there's also five discussion questions at the end of the video. So, you know, you can just sit around those discussion questions and grow together as a team.

Josh Yates: Yeah. And by the way, the artwork on that as beautiful. So I think you have a, a friend of yours who designed it, did those. And so pretty fun on that.

Jeff Polen: Yeah. Thank you.

Josh Yates: But as well as just real quick, before we move on to some of the stop making training pieces, you said something that I wasn't maybe aware of is actually just the whole studio and recording quality music.

And so if there's a listener out there thinking, Hey, how what, tell me a little bit more. So just give me a little bit about the Taylor's Playground and your studio. And then let's, let's kind of get into some nitty gritty stuff and some practical things to, to stop making. So tell us a little about Taylor's.

Jeff Polen: Yeah, So to this playground is the recording studio here. And man, what a, what a privilege and a pleasure. I've got my certificate. I could go work in Nashville, studios and stuff. That's really not. My heart I've recorded in Nashville studios and I've recorded in the same studios is, you know, Steven Curtis, Chapman reliant.

K you know, you name the artist. I probably been in that studio. And I don't know how to say this in a way. That's not going to offend someone, but I'll

just kind of say. In Nashville, it tends to be all about the business. And that has always left me feeling a little empty because, you know, recording in Nashville as a country, artists and recording in Nashville as a Christian artist, shouldn't be the same experience.

It should be different. And so part of what I want to do here is. Open up the studio. So I've got great resources here. We're making some incredible music. I've got probably about every guitar you could want to play. It's a part of my guitar arsenal because the idea is I want people to be able to come and just make music.

I like to disciple them through the process. So, you know, a lot of worship teams, maybe they'll bring a Stratocaster. That's not the best quality. And I can either, you know, put the guitar on the work bench, show you how to set that thing up. So it's intonated so as ringing. Or I can just hand you mine or do both, you know, and then you can be inspired by playing mine which is super fun, but it's meant to be a pastoring process.

And so I'll bring people in, we'll do the pre-production. We'll talk about the song. And we'll make sure that we're excited about what we're recording. And then I typically bring people in for a week of recording and we just hit it, man. It's kind of the nine to five every day to get that project knocked out.

But we start with a devotional time to get it. Why are we doing what we're doing? And the, the studio. I mean, maybe you can even see behind me, like the wall, this wall is green, that one's orange, that one's blue. It's supposed to be fun. This is supposed to be fun. And when it's not fun, we take a mandatory.

Where we just go out to the front porch and you know, we, we have coffee, we have an Izzy or whatever it is, and just talk about Jesus, talk about life, and then we get back to work. And I really through the process, just try to help artists think about like, what is success? You know? And so many times people have these ideas.

It's not sinful. I don't think it's just not realistic. I think people have this idea. They're going to sell a million copies. But man, what if that song is done in such a way that it captures the heart and it captures the attention of one person who's able to actually understand Jesus and you, Hey, what if that person is actually your mom or your dad or your uncle?

Cause they're probably the ones who are going to buy your CD anyway. Right in all reality. But what if, like what if, and, and not only that. Like one of my favorite passages of scripture is when the woman comes in at just dumps the perfume on Jesus's feet. And you know, what, if we just. Absolutely gave God our best.

And it was a time of worship. I mean, I doubt she was able to sell that perfume after I doubt she gathered it up and tried to sell it right.

Oh, the Jesus, the touch or the perfect, the touch Jesus feet. Probably not. But what a beautiful moment of worship. And so what if we could come together and just as an act of worship record, these.

Honoring God and giving him the best. And that's a big win for me. So love to bring people in and hear their heart, capture their heart, package, that heart story, and then give them a space to get that out to as many people as has gotten.

Josh Yates: Yeah, thanks for sharing a little bit more on the, the back story of that heartbeat of using some ordinary tools, such as your worship and even running a studio to train and equip people. I think those two things are coming out to advance the gospel to make disciples whether it be through music or through other avenues that God has positioned you in.

Give me some other words. Practical tools you're thinking through in terms of go teams. I know that's another way you utilizing ministry team, ministry training maybe some other practical tools you're doing in terms of advancing

the gospel, making disciples, helping local church through, through music, their worship teams.

You have so many things your hands are in, but as our kind of final thing here, I'd just love to hear a little bit more kind of squeeze the sponge, so to speak some of the things that you're passing.

Jeff Polen: So a buddy of mine, good friend of mine. And you've met him, Keith Byler, who is the pastor at the church that we attend Fairleigh Mennonite church. He and I, for years, we were both youth pastors at the same time. And we kind of lamented that in order to get kind of a missions experience. You had to leave home you know, you had to go get ministry experience in another context, and then you are often sent home and there was not really a bridge to gap your experience you had away from home and the experience you're having at.

So over and over again, as youth pastors and just, you know, people who love Jesus, who had had that missionary experience ourselves, we were getting frustrated with kids going and having an amazing time. I don't ever want to say anything bad about the YWAM, you know, short-term outreach thing. I don't have bad feelings about.

I bet feelings about the disconnect. And so the students were coming back unable to figure out how to plug into their local church and a really meaningful way. And also, you know, for the people who couldn't afford maybe financially or time-wise to go away and get that experience. And so what we came up with was an idea that we call Go Teams, and it is something that we offer to our entire team. It's seven weeks of training. And so they sign up to do seven weeks of training it's every Sunday night for seven weeks. And the first night is basically just an orientation. And then all of the people who sign up to be a part of it are split up into small groups, which become outreach teams. And the training ends up being a three hour thing from basically five to eight o'clock every Sunday night for seven.

And during outreach or during that orientation night, rather, we just cast the vision of what we're trying to accomplish, which is getting people who are willing to go. Right where they're at, because I'm pretty sure when Jesus said go into all the world, he meant all the world and all the world also means my hometown, not only, but also. So we're trying to help the people who are passionate and really can only have margin for their hometown.

How do we do that? Well and on that orientation, we actually hand them out. Sonlife incredible resource those little booklets in the identity walk, talk feed, and. And we give them two copies of it because the goal is that they walk through it themselves. And we're going to try to you know, 10,000 foot view walk through it with them.

They they're supposed to get more material and deeper into it as a small group, but we want them to walk through the material with the purpose of throughout the course of the next nine months during outreach, leading somebody to Christ and walking them through those books, that is a very clear goal that we have for them.

And so after that first orientation night, then every time that they come back for the next six weeks my job is to give the overview of that identity booklet. And so the hope is that they've walked through it already during the week. that's not the right pace for the book. okay.

I'll give you that.

So they know you know, they're, they're kind of trying to eat an elephant here. But they, their job is to walk through at one section per day. And then when they get there on Sunday night, I'm going to spend an hour really unpacking that. And a while I do it every single time, the first night I give them an overview of four chair.

This is what it looks like to make disciples right now. Let's talk about your identity because that's a huge one. And then the next night you know, they

they've walked through the walk all week long and I'm going to help them understand it a little deeper. We're going to go through the four chair again.

And I start to make the switch during those weeks in the middle where I'm not just training it, but I actually invite them up to train it as well. And so by the last night together, you know, we get through the identity walk, talk feed. They're the ones who are training me. So they get the content. And then on that seventh night, it's really just a commissioning service where we send them their local community.

And again, in those those five middle weeks, really they were going together as a small group for an hour. So I teach for an hour on what it looks like to make disciples. Keith teaches on an hour. How do you practically share the gospel out loud with words? And then they meet in their small groups for an hour.

Planning their nine month outreach to a local ministry, community area, whatever it is. And we've had some really incredible ministry opportunities you know, Christian children's home of Ohio, which works with displace. We've got a a community it's it's a trailer park in our community.

That is really the cops. Are there a lot, you know, it's probably, if you're looking for drugs, that would be a place to find it, apparently according to, you know, the police reports and we, we try to send people in there and really you know, meet the people, meet the needs of the people. We've got a whole area set up now, a rec center at the place where we bring people together for Bible study.

The idea is simple. We want to train people to short term outreach idea, right where they're at. We want to equip them. We want to model it for them. Then we want to send them out and see what God can do in nine months of their lives dedicated to it.

Josh Yates: So seven weeks of training set, setting up for a nine month mission.

Jeff Polen: Yeah, And they can use that however they want, you know, and some, they get to decide like, what is this mission going to look like? And we give them opportunities different. And some of them, you know, it makes the most sense to do it through the summer and then be done. Like, you know, it's sort of give you like a community, Oh,

I don't know, like a baseball program.

You were trying to do sports program, but for that, like the community I'm talking about other, we've got a rec center set up. It makes sense to go through Christmas because Christmas ends up being a great time to bring everybody there and bless them and talk about Jesus. So we let you know the kind of the outreach itself defined how long it's going to.

Josh Yates: Yeah. Yeah. But what I love about that, Jeff is that it's not like, Hey, we're going to do a, an evening, which is great. We should do this, you know, go on evening and serve. But then it's just one night of the week that we did a service project locally, you know but thinking the long-term game, actually building relationships, embedding yourselves into a community and saying, Hey, what are the needs here?

How can we have. Ongoing you know, connection. And so that, that's a powerful idea, and I hope that those, our listeners would, would take the principles behind that and figure out how you can apply that you may have made it do a summer weeks training. You may have to go through all the booklets. We're not selling the booklets.

We're saying, Hey, that's a tool that you're using love that find your tool. It's going to work to train, equip your students to want to communicate the gospel with words, that's some Dare to Share language, use their tools,

resources, figure out how you're going to the process of making disciples. That's some Sonlife language.

That's why. Dare to share relationships. It's kind of peanut butter and jelly make a great sandwich. And so it's, it's a great tools to help you maybe reimagine the salt, making your context. So Jeff, thank you for, for that time sharing your heartbeat, your passion, your stories. And as we kind of wrap up here, I just want to throw just the last question to you.

And my question is just, what does God have on your heart? What's God teaching you in this moment. Is there something here? Cause you're a pastor or you're a leader, your thing. Your songwriters or something here that that God's been saying to you in.

Jeff Polen: There really is a, so I'm super passionate about, in fact, I'm writing a book right now. And it's a message I've been going around with. It's simple, it's so simple and you know, you're going to get this. But Jesus said go into all the world and make disciples that ties in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And I'll be with you always. He said, you're going to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea Samaria to the ends of the year. He said, go and preach the gospel at all the world to every creation at the. He said it at the end. And I think we're really missing this as churches. Because the reality is you don't give college placement tests to kindergartners.

You know, I don't know too many people who are looking to fill the position of CEO by looking at first grade stand outs. You know, you're not going to coaches pitch baseball to find the next major league baseball pitcher. It's just not the reality. There's certain processes that people have to walk through.

And so I've been going around preaching this message. It's a several day, really, as long as you want. Cause I can as we've unfortunately discovered I

can talk forever. But I'm calling it stay and make disciples. It's the precursor to go and make disciples and there were specific, intentional, necessary things that Jesus did to pour into his guys.

So he could get them to the point where he could say, go and make disciples. And they could be like, okay, I get it. I'm going. And I think too many times we just take that huge leap. Oh, you're a believer now. Okay. Go and make disciples. Now. I'm not saying God can't use that. I mean, there are definitely instances where God uses that powerfully, but I think.

By and large as a rule, there's a process. And what I love about what I'm trying to communicate here is that it is something for students. It is something for parents. It is something for grandparents. It is something for lay people. It is something for every believer, get on board with the process, stay and make disciples.

So you're prepared to go and make disciples.

Josh Yates: Wow. That's good. That's really good. Stay and get prepared the process. I think sometimes we skip the process because a process is just as important as the end outcome. And so Jeff, where would we find your latest album? How would we stay connected to you? What's the best way to, to get in touch with.

Jeff Polen: Well, you can find Jeff Polen on anywhere you stream or consume music and go to jeffpolen.com. JefPolenmusic.com. I'm really proud of. Of the latest record I put out is called. *We are loved* and it started during the lockdowns, the COVID lockdowns. I was just sitting at home. We're a homeschool family.

I've got five kids and I thought, well, no, one's going to the studio. So do you guys want to do something? So we turned it into a homeschool project and we decided to record a song together as a family. And you can even see

some of the behind the scenes footage of that first song we wrote called great things you have done.

And my oldest daughter plays violin. My next daughter plays ukulele. My daughter for that plays piano. And then my son and our youngest daughter also sang on the project, my wife saying on the project, I did all the guitars and drums and all that stuff, but it became kind of a family project and. I also have a band Poland Band.

And so you can go to Poland band.com, pole band, music.com, stream all of our music. And I'm very proud of the Polen Band music, but there's something special about the Geoff pole and we are loved project. There's songs that were on my heart. They didn't really fit the vein of Polen Band. I mean, I pulled out a banjo and just went to town for goodness sakes, that's not overly pull the band desk. But there there's songs that were on my heart that I just wanted to say. And I wanted to capture. And so it's nine songs because that's all I wanted. You know, and then I originally recorded like 13 songs and I was like, you know, it's just these nine songs that really are working for me.

Plus it's nine songs. Cause I, I want to turn it into Vinyl. and because of the length of them, it needed to only be nine

Josh Yates: I love it.

Jeff Polen: some songs on there I'm really, really proud of. So Jeff Polen and we are loved Jeff polen.com. And if you do happen to listen to it, man, drop me a little bit of a comment and let me know what you think.

Cause I really do hope that it blesses.

Josh Yates: well, Jeff, you have been today, been a blessing really appreciate your heart and hearing the stories the behind the scenes, look at the 5k and the month of May so hope that you've convicted me and overalls

our listeners, but more than that to stay. And to produce disciple maker. So Jeff, thank you for your time today.

I appreciate it.

Jeff Polen: Thank you, man. I appreciate you. Love you guys and blessings to you.

Closing

Wayne: Josh, that was such a good conversation with Jeff and I loved his enthusiasm. I loved his heart. I loved his willingness to make up words like musician airy. Just so many good things in that. What was one thing that really stuck out to you in your conversation with Jeff?

Josh Yates: Yeah, I think I kind of mentioned that even in our, just the idea of the backstory of the 5k and a month of May. And I love, I love the heartbeat that he's like hearing what his brother's into, and he goes and joins what his brother's into so he can just, you know, be with them, but as well as just, you know, present Christ.

And I think there's an important principle to be able to kind of enter in to someone's point of interest and even an example of that, the youth pastor at our church my son as 14 loves a formal. Loves watching formula one. Races is kind of one of his, one of his things and the youth pastor had no idea what sport that was like, what a formula, a formula one.

So these pastor goes and Googles, it watches a bunch of, of the races. Get to know the drivers and get to know about really the genius of former. And then starts engaging with my son, talking about formula one of my son and all of a sudden my sons respect my son's, now listening to the youth pastor is engaging with him because he took time to find something.

He was a calm, can find that common interest. And I thought that was just a genius thing that Jeff was kind of laying down. And the other thing I'm

always listening for is just something practical. So I'm going to walk away from there's great inspiration, but I need, sometimes I need a tool. I need a fresh idea and the go teams how young pack the go teams for me was a good practical tool that I know I can walk away with and try to learn something what they're doing.

Wayne: Yeah. I mean the, the 5k stuff. That's I think that's a good warning. Don't don't try running if you don't want to get hooked on it. Like I, I run, I don't necessarily enjoy it. I just do it because I like ice cream. I don't want to buy new pants, but there's some, there's a feeling that running gives you.

And so be careful if you don't want to be a runner, don't try it. But yeah. So encouraging that he was willing to say. What can I do with my brother to spend time with him? And in those conversations flowed. For me, he talked about like, it's, it's the difference between a gospel presentation and a gospel conversation?

You know, sometimes we just, we want to train our students to be able to present the gospel. And that's good. We should be able to present the gospel. To people, but just to have those conversations about God, about the kingdom of God, about what God is doing.

in our lives, in the power of those gospel conversations was such just such a good nugget of truth for me to take and to keep with me.

So it was a wonderful conversation. We think Jeff again, Being willing to use his time. Some of his links and stuff will be in the show notes. If you want to check him out, if you have any questions or comments, you can send us an email at podcast at Sonlife dot com and here is our disciple making moment.

Disciple Making Moment

Val O'Brien: Hi everyone. This is Val O'Brien area coordinator in Cleveland, Ohio.

And this is my disciple-making moment. Last weekend, I had just a really, really fun brunch. I had brunch with my parents, which is not at all rare. They live in the area. I see them quite often. Brunch is kind of our thing. My dad cooks. It's a whole, it's a whole situation. But what made this one unique is that a good friend of mine came with me.

She was free. And we were, we were hanging out that day and I'm like, Hey, why don't you just come and join us for brunch now, here's the thing that happened when my friend was with us stories started coming out of my parents that if I've heard them before, it had been a long time, maybe when I was a child. Conversations happen.

That usually don't around our table. My friend is in the business world. You started talking to my dad, my dad starts asking her questions that I'm like, I've never heard you talk about this stuff before. You know, all of this. I am a grown woman thinking this about my own parents. And it just took another person at our table to kind of break up our routine of the things that we talk about and the ways we discuss it and to kind of dip into the, even this.

Aspect in these different experiences of my parents that I hadn't heard in a. And in some ways it really convicted me. I'm like man or not convicted me, but just kind of put me to shame a little bit in terms of my parents had these deep resources, these deep wells of wisdom and knowledge and experiences that so often we just don't get to because we're kind of stuck in our own routine.

And many me think about just the body of Christ as. And it made me think about the people that are older than me and are wiser than me that have been doing ministry way longer than me. And some of them, even that I rubbed shoulders with on a regular basis, I don't even really know their stories. I don't really know how they even came to the Lord.

I don't know how they got started in ministry. I don't know some of the challenges that they faced that have really shaped who they are and why

they do the things that they do. I don't know some of those things about my own parents, much less. The other people that I work in minister alongside of.

So I want to challenge you as ministry leaders. I want to challenge myself who is, who is somebody like that? Maybe you see them all the time. An older woman in your church, an older man, who's been a pastor for a very long time. What would it look like for you to take them out to lunch? Take them out to coffee and to just ask them simple, silly questions.

You know, we've been working together for a long time, but I don't know if I really even know the story of how you came to faith in Christ. What did the early years of ministry look like for you? What were the things that you learned? That have really shaped how you still do ministry today. What are some of the things that you wish you would have done differently or understood earlier?

What were those early years of your marriage looking like? When you were figuring out what marriage was going to look like in the terms of ministry and early on and stuff like that, what types of experiences have you had as a pastor? That's still informed how you pass there. Now, you know, these kinds of basic questions that we tend to ask somebody that we just meet for the first time, but maybe not someone who were just in the habit of being in relationship with.

And I think just like my parents reminded me kinda over brunch, they're deep wells of wisdom in life of following Jesus. And what an amazing resource we quickly just pass over when we don't take the time to do that. So that is my challenge to you. Find somebody, maybe it's someone, you know, really, really well.

Take them out to lunch, ask them some good questions and see what type of wisdom. They might be able to express to you that might be a huge blessing to you as you try to make disciples and sort out ministry yourself.

