

Speaker 1 ([00:03](#)):

You know, here's how I feel about it. What are they going to do? Come get the minister. You know what I'm saying?

Speaker 2 ([00:09](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([00:10](#)):

If it closed the doors today, we've ministered for 35 years. They can't take Jesus from me.

Speaker 2 ([00:16](#)):

No, that's good.

Speaker 3 ([00:17](#)):

We realign our resources, our time, our money, whatever we have around what we see God doing.

Speaker 4 ([00:24](#)):

And tell our team when tragedy strikes our grace stays ahead. God's going to use this amputation of finances or staff or reputation or whatever happens. Jesus said in this world you find tribulation, it's hard to do ministry.

Holly Tate ([00:42](#)):

Welcome to the Vanderbloemen Leadership Podcast. I'm your host, Holly Tate, vice president of business development here at Vanderbloemen. Today we bring you our once a month series called The How God Built This, where we talk with Christian leaders to find out the ways that God has moved and their life to build their ministry.

Holly Tate ([00:59](#)):

On today's How God Built This episode of the Vanderbloemen Leadership Podcast, our founder and CEO, William Vanderbloemen, talks with Luis Palau, worldwide evangelist and Kevin Palau, president of the Luis Palau Association. Luis is a dynamic evangelist and teacher living a life of dedicated service and commitment to God as he shares the life changing message of Jesus Christ. His son, Kevin, joined the Palau team in 1985 and began directing the day to day operations of the ministry.

Holly Tate ([01:29](#)):

William, Luis, and Kevin talk about how evangelism has changed since Luis began his journey and his 20s and what lessons they've learned as they've traveled around the world sharing the love of Christ. Tweet your takeaways from today's show, using the hashtag Vandercast and check out today's show notes to join our Facebook group where we post behind the scenes content. We'll post today's show notes there in the Facebook group. Without further ado, here's William's conversation with Luis and Kevin Palau.

Luis Palau ([01:58](#)):

So I was born in Argentina in South America in days when the Bible was hardly known, when the good news gospel was hardly known. And so the dream was that everybody should hear but how do you do

that? And so we started out with a bunch of kids in our local church doing street meetings, people would insult you, call your names, insult your mother. I mean it was quite something.

Luis Palau ([02:30](#)):

And so then we began to publish a little magazine, but we still felt we're not touching the city. It was a city of about a million people in Argentina called Córdoba. And then one day somebody came, I was about 19 or 20, maybe 21 max, a guy came and brought a film about Martin Luther who was banned in Argentina. And a book about a guy called Billy Graham. And he was only 29 years old.

Luis Palau ([02:59](#)):

And he started a campaign in Hollywood, which lasted for nine weeks, and he had a team of about five or six people. And it suddenly dawned on me, that's what it takes. You have to have a team, you can't do it on your own. So one of the first awakenings as far as where we've been with all this the thing that has grown was the concept of you can't do it alone. Not even a local church. You got to have a group of people around you with the same passion, with different gifts who respect each other, can tell each other off if you make mistakes and work together on it, and dream together and go for it. So that's how it started and it was easier said than done.

William Vanderbloemen ([03:46](#)):

You were 19 years old at the time?

Luis Palau ([03:49](#)):

Yes.

William Vanderbloemen ([03:52](#)):

What did your parents think about you making this your life work when you're 19 years old?

Luis Palau ([03:57](#)):

Well, my dad died when I was younger, so he wasn't around. But my mom was actually affined about this. I mean, she really was extremist almost. The only thing in the whole world is tell them about Jesus Christ. Anybody can work, anybody can run a farm, anybody can earn money and make food for the table. But telling about Jesus Christ, only believers, only the church. So she was very pushy in a very quiet way. We owe a lot to her as you was not angry or loud, but she was pushy. One day, for instance, I was working at a bank, I must have been 22 and I was still dreaming and dreaming, we would do weekend things, but it was just sort of smaller stuff.

Luis Palau ([04:43](#)):

And one day she said to me, there's a town called so and so, there's no church there that preaches the Bible. You've got to go. And I said, "Mom, first of all, I got to work. I get money for you and my sisters and I." She said, "The Lord will provide, don't worry about the money, now you go." And then I said, "Mom, I'm waiting for the call." She said, "The call went out 2000 years ago. The Lord's waiting for the answer, forget the call."

Luis Palau ([05:13](#)):

And that convinced me actually. And in two weeks William [inaudible 00:05:17] goes up at the bank, it was a British bank of London that I was working on in Argentina. He was an American from California. And he's talking to me. He finds out I'm a believer and he says to me, "I need somebody to translate the articles from English to Spanish to publish evangelistic magazine. You know Anyone?" I said, "I'm your man."

Luis Palau ([05:37](#)):

And in two weeks from my mom telling me the call I was out of the bank and working for this mission and then the Lord opened further doors as we went along. But my mom had a big influence. She lived for the gospel, so she wasn't eager that I continue working for the bank.

William Vanderbloemen ([05:57](#)):

It sounds like John Wesley might not have been John Wesley were it not for his mother. Huh?

Luis Palau ([06:02](#)):

Well, that's for sure. She was relentless.

William Vanderbloemen ([06:05](#)):

Pushy, but not in a quiet way.

Luis Palau ([06:07](#)):

Yeah, that's right. 18 kids and they have 18 kids.

William Vanderbloemen ([06:11](#)):

Something like that.

Luis Palau ([06:12](#)):

Yeah. Some of them died. Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen ([06:13](#)):

I read that for her quiet time, she just put a sheet over her head so she could be alone for a minute.

Luis Palau ([06:20](#)):

Yeah. She was a character and Wesley trusted her more than his dad. Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen ([06:29](#)):

So you're 19, 20 and in 22 and you've done this campaign. Tell me the story of how you decided, I'm not going to do any other kind of work anymore. No more banks.

Luis Palau ([06:39](#)):

Well, when we decided the Lord will provide, the Lord will open a door, two Americans showed up in town. And at that point I was probably 23, 24 maybe maximum. Two Americans showed up, one was a pastor and the other one was an ex-prisoner of the Communist in China in the days of Mao Zedong. And they came to town and we began to talk and they said we need young guys like you that have a passion

to lead people to Christ. We need you and we perhaps are going to help you. So I said, wow, this is amazing.

Luis Palau ([07:19](#)):

They began to open doors and I went to work with them. And then one day an American shows up, another American called Ray Stedman. He was a pastor from Palo Alto, California. And he worked at Stanford University and he started a big, very manly church, lots of guys and students and so women too. But I mean it was a very man oriented thing.

William Vanderbloemen ([07:46](#)):

We've actually done search work for Peninsula Bible. It's a great church.

Luis Palau ([07:49](#)):

Oh wow. It's one of the best.

William Vanderbloemen ([07:54](#)):

A whole network of them now around.

Kevin Palau ([07:56](#)):

Yeah, that's right.

Luis Palau ([07:57](#)):

Yeah. And Ray wrote a book that was called A Body Life and that book became a very powerful bestseller.

William Vanderbloemen ([08:05](#)):

Yeah, that's right, [crosstalk 00:08:07] absolutely.

Luis Palau ([08:08](#)):

Of the one that saw the body. And anyway, so these two Americans come and one of them, Ray Stedman said to me, "I think the Lord wants you to come to the USA to have a seminary course." And I said, "Well, if it's the Lord's will someday, maybe I will." He said, "No, the Lord is going to will." He said. And I thought, oh wow, who is this guy? To me, a pastor, he doesn't have a penny. And I didn't know anything about foundations. And he was on the foundation of a guy who discovered the microwave oven, a fellow who's now in heaven, and he had cash and he had a foundation. I didn't know anything about it.

Luis Palau ([08:48](#)):

So he leaves Argentina and sends me a letter and he says, start getting a passport ready, get the paperwork. You're going to come to the USA. And I said to my mom, "Mom, how can I do this? I've got to support you guys." As she said, "The Lord will provide, the Lord will provide." And Ray Stedman said, "Don't worry, there'll be money for your mother and your sisters."

Luis Palau ([09:11](#)):

I couldn't figure it out, but the Lord worked it out. I came to the States, he wanted me to go to a four year seminary called Dallas Theological Seminary. And I thought, that's too long. I mean, too many people are going to hell and they're going to be sitting there and reading Greek and Hebrew. I said, I'll take a one year course at the Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon. And that's what did it for me. And I was pleased with that. I could see that I had a degree in theology and a wife that I met there and that's how things began to pop up. But it was the businessman and Ray Stedman bringing me over to the USA.

William Vanderbloemen ([09:51](#)):

And that's how you end up in the Portland area. That's crazy.

Luis Palau ([09:53](#)):

Yes, sir. That's right. It is crazy. Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen ([09:57](#)):

This is the most entrepreneurial story. I think the real quick startup entrepreneurs of the kingdom are the Green Berets called the evangelists. I'm guessing sitting still was not your top gift.

Kevin Palau ([10:13](#)):

Well, it's not the same as starting a church in a way. Yeah. It can be a little more entrepreneurial than starting a local church.

Luis Palau ([10:20](#)):

It's true. Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen ([10:21](#)):

Well, I would think it's more risk filled, like from how am I going to provide for my family?

Kevin Palau ([10:28](#)):

True.

Luis Palau ([10:29](#)):

Oh yeah.

William Vanderbloemen ([10:29](#)):

Okay. Mom said the Lord's going to provide, but mom's down in Argentina now and I'm up here, what am I going to do? So did you have times where it's okay, I'm going to trust the Lord, but man, he better provide.

Luis Palau ([10:42](#)):

Yeah. Well, what happened the first year Christmas was coming after the first fall term. And I was running out of cash and I came back from Thanksgiving holidays up in Washington doing the military. It was during the Vietnam days. We went to visit the military up in Fort Lewis, Washington. And when I got back, I went to my post office box at the seminary and there was letter anonymous and it said, we've

been watching you, what you're doing and your studies and your commitment. We're going to provide you the money for the rest of your studies, but we're not going to tell you who gave it so that every American you meet, you'll be grateful that they provided the money for your studies. So I never found out who paid for the rest of my studies. Some guy's, businessmen. I suspect I know who they were, but I have no guarantee that I really know who they were.

Luis Palau ([11:37](#)):

But it was a great, amazing opportunity and it's been that way all my life. Because Billy Graham shows up in our life and when he knew that we wanted to do the same thing he was doing, he said, okay, I'll give you... How much was it?

William Vanderbloemen ([11:54](#)):

I think it's \$100,000, way back in the 70s that was a lot of money.

Kevin Palau ([11:59](#)):

That was real money. Yeah.

Luis Palau ([12:00](#)):

Yeah, like a million today I would think for a young guy. And Billy said, I'll give you that in full segments. We'll put one of our guys on your board of trustees. I became all excited and you could see things happening. But first we went as missionaries though. My wife had to learn Spanish. She's an Anglo. We went to Costa Rica, then Columbia, then Mexico. Our sons were born, the twins who are now middle aged gentleman, they were born in Palo Alto, California, Kevin and Keith at... What do you call it?

Kevin Palau ([12:33](#)):

Stanford.

Luis Palau ([12:33](#)):

Stanford University Hospital. Then Andrew in Columbia and Steven in Mexico. So we've got an international team right there to prove that God called us.

William Vanderbloemen ([12:45](#)):

How long were you on the mission field?

Luis Palau ([12:47](#)):

We were there about 10 years total.

William Vanderbloemen ([12:53](#)):

And where you doing crusade events then or?

Luis Palau ([12:55](#)):

We started small, when I left Columbia in 1966 you weren't even born. We went to our big Plaza in downtown Bogota and we had 20,000 people, the local papers had 33,000. But we have 20, to me it was the beginning of the dream that I had to shake up cities, shake them up, speak to the government, speak

to the media, the business people, ordinary people. And it became a big vision. I just want to shake the cities up and if possible, the country.

Luis Palau ([13:28](#)):

So we started very small in local churches and then suddenly one day that explosion happened in Bogota where we had so many people and it was days of persecution. I got to tell you it wasn't easy. And we did a parade, Downtown's Sixth Avenue in Bogota. And we had only about 8,000 kids, but it looked like 80,000 because we spread them out so much. We made it look like it was a big deal, bigger than it was just by spreading the parade. And the president, we lined up in front of the presidential palace, the president came out and he asked a young fellow that was standing around, he happened to be a campus crusade guy, and he says, "What is this?" And he said, "Oh, I don't know Mr. President." He was afraid to tell him because there was persecution. But I think it's evangelicals having one of their campaign, and he said, "Man, you could put a president in power if you could gather these kinds of crowds here?" And so that's how it started out, then the big events.

William Vanderbloemen ([14:29](#)):

Wow. And did you... Like I'm terrible at inventing the wheel. I can find somebody who's doing it, so tell me how you met Billy Graham and then did he show you a model for how to do things or how did that work?

Luis Palau ([14:45](#)):

Well, by the way, I think you're smarter than you put yourself up to believe. Yeah. I've known you for a while, you're pretty smart. You've got good creative ideas. Anyway, yeah, Billy Graham, I read his book the book, The First Revival as they called it, it was a 1949 in Hollywood, California. And he was a young guy. He was only 29 years old himself. And when I saw that, I saw the method, a team, they were young guys fired up and Billy preached like screening in those days.

Luis Palau ([15:17](#)):

I mean, when you watch him today, it's sort of embarrassing because he really streamed his head off. If you look at him in his New York crusade of 1957, I sometimes watch it to get inspired. And it's amazing the way he shouted and waved his arms around. Nowadays we're all much more subdued but it was very catchy in those days. And so we learned everything we could. People in the early days used to make fun of me and say, "Oh, you're imitating Billy Graham." And I said, "Yeah, we imitate the winners, not losers." If you want to be a loser, go and imitate somebody else. But I want to imitate the winners. And he was a winner. And his spiritual life was commendable, his walk with God.

Luis Palau ([16:01](#)):

Even as a kid I met a guy who wanted to write a book to expose Billy Graham. He never found anything to expose. The only thing he found was at once when Billy was still in high school, he took a girl out for a date. And when he dropped her off at the house, he gave her a quick kiss and he always felt guilty for the rest of his days. But he kissed the girl one kiss on the lips that he felt he committed a sin. And the guy put it in the book.

William Vanderbloemen ([16:29](#)):

That's the shortest tell all book in history.

Kevin Palau ([16:31](#)):

Yeah, that's right, I can find.

Luis Palau ([16:34](#)):

Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen ([16:35](#)):

So when you set up a crusade event, did you lean into Billy or his organization to say, how many should we expect? How big should the choir be? How many churches should we get involved? Or did you just have to learn that as you went?

Luis Palau ([16:51](#)):

We had to learn it, but also, I got to admit something to you. I don't think I've ever admitted in public. In those days, president John F. Kennedy was running for president and there was a book written, I don't know if you saw William called The Making of the President 1960. And it was a description by a journalist with Time Magazine. I forget his name right now, but he described in detail the whole organization of president Kennedy's campaign. Now, organizing an evangelistic campaign mechanically is almost the same as organizing a political campaign as far as gathering crowds, getting attention, media interest, motivating people, getting... What'd you call it? People to volunteer, to donate. The principles are the same as an evangelistic campaign. I mean, it sounds for some people that may be offensive or something, but the mechanics of human nature don't change.

Luis Palau ([17:52](#)):

And to me, I still think I have the book somewhere in my files. I've got an underlying every line and we learned how to organize committees. And so you have communications committee, counseling committee, prayer committee, women's committee, young people, children, adults, politicians, fundraising committee, I mean, every committee and how you select first [inaudible 00:18:15]. Frankly, I'm embarrassed to tell you, but it's true. I learned that from Kennedy's campaign more than Billy Graham's campaign. Yeah, it's the truth.

William Vanderbloemen ([18:25](#)):

Joe Kennedy taught the evangelists. That's a point.

Luis Palau ([18:29](#)):

You make me lose all my support if you publish one like that. But it was in fact, very useful to realize and of course Kennedy was like really Graham, a very winsome guy. He didn't profess to be necessarily anything very seriously spiritual. But as far as personality, he was very winsome. America in those days was going through a confrontation with the Soviet Union. And he was a young man. He was the youngest president at that point. He was only 42, I think when I became president, or 44. And I thought, man, we got to do this to shake up nations and cities with the good news of Jesus Christ that it can be done. And it really worked out very well and churches were ready, people were ready. You do have to convince pastors that you're not replacing them, you're not competing with them. You're here to help the local church, not to take away people and so on. So it's a lot of work behind the scenes as you were indicating in your introduction.



William Vanderbloemen ([19:28](#)):

Yeah. Well, a little bit of a side note, but funny that JFK, his daddy Joe kind of ran the show and probably was the architect behind the map you had. So he helped train you whether he knew it or not. He also owned the first cold storage building in Washington, DC, trains would come in, he made all his money on liquor.

Kevin Palau ([19:49](#)):

That's right.

William Vanderbloemen ([19:50](#)):

All his money was in scotch. So that's the building that the green family bought.

Kevin Palau ([19:56](#)):

Right from the museum of the Bible, that's right.

William Vanderbloemen ([19:59](#)):

His scotch shipping is now the museum of the Bible. And his campaign strategy is now Luis Palau's strategy.

Kevin Palau ([20:05](#)):

Wow, there you go.

Luis Palau ([20:07](#)):

Man, you're secularizing the whole thing.

William Vanderbloemen ([20:11](#)):

That's awesome. The crusade events become kind of the backbone of what you're doing, I assume. So when did you start to see momentum and like what size crowds are you talking about? I know you preach to just get one more in heaven, but what were we thinking of with scale?

Luis Palau ([20:29](#)):

Okay. The truth is I would read all the criticisms of mass evangelism. In fact, just half hour ago before it came out and your program here, a guy was asking me does that work anymore? And I said, that's what they've always asked. The thing is my feeling was okay, people criticize crowds, but in fact, who do they listen to? Who do we read about? Who do we learn from? John Wesley, George Whitfield, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham, St. Paul, other preachers in the middle ages. And I thought if we're going to be listened to by the nonbelievers and even by young people inside the church, you've got to prove yourself by having big crowds. And so therefore I've never apologized for the big crowds, all the publicity and that kind of a thing, which some people think it's not spiritual. I think it's your motive that makes us spiritual or not spiritual.

Luis Palau ([21:23](#)):

So to my mind, we had a sing in those days, which is you cannot change a nation with timid methods. Timid methods will never change a nation, and so you've got to work on it with wise people with a lot of

dedication. You've got to put a lot of effort into it, but it works. God uses it for his glory. I want to write a book that is called mass evangelism doesn't work. But God works through mass evangelism. I keep threatening when I go to do it one of these days. Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen ([21:54](#)):

Was most of your work, like how did your work break out with geographically? Was it South America mainly?

Kevin Palau ([22:01](#)):

Yeah, started there, but-

Luis Palau ([22:04](#)):

We started in South America, which is all that I knew in Spanish. But then in my heart, I began to dream bigger dreams. And in fact, Ray Stedman, who was a pastor at [inaudible 00:22:15] he always put me down in a nice loving way, like an adoptive father because he would say, you always publicize yourself too much, always talking about numbers. You're going to get cocky, you're going to get arrogant, humble yourself, and all that. And then one day I'm rooming with him in Guatemala to do a pastoral conference and in the middle of the night and the darkness of the room he says to me, well, what are your dreams now? And I said, well, I'd like to do Argentina and maybe South America.

Luis Palau ([22:46](#)):

He says, "Is that all." I said, "Well it'd be nice to go to Spain because they speak Spanish over there." And he said, "Is that all?" I said, well, in England, too because they speak English and my parents were from Scotland, and at the end they was saying, I want you to think of the whole world?

Luis Palau ([23:05](#)):

So he was encouraging. He was very encouraging. Even though he kicked me on the pants because he thought I was cocky and I was doing self publicity. At the same time, he realized that we were doing it for the kingdom of God and for the good of people.

William Vanderbloemen ([23:19](#)):

There is a good lesson there. I think everybody I've interviewed that God's used to build something big has someone in their life that expands their thinking and expands their vision the way he did that for you?

Luis Palau ([23:31](#)):

Yes. Yeah. Mr. Graham also said big cities are like high mountains. It's an old state but that Buddhi used also, but if it rains up on the hills, the water comes down to the valley. You go to the big cities and the water will spill into the smaller towns, go for the big cities. And that one I really paid attention when Mr. Graham said that, that was kind of a bit of a new idea for me. The idea that the big cities are like high mountains.

William Vanderbloemen ([23:59](#)):

And so as the ministry progressed, just because I'm ignorant, what would be like the largest crowd you've preached in front of?

Luis Palau ([24:09](#)):

Well, there was one, I guess the biggest one was in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2008. I think in two days we had a million people and it was big and in your own country, that's quite a big deal. In Guatemala, it was hard to estimate, there was a massive field. We estimated 600,000, 700,000 people. You talk about the organizing, we had to bring them in from all over the country of Guatemala into this big military marching field, there was kind of a little risky. There was a revolution in the air and so, but it was amazing. So those are some of the biggest ones. New York was pretty good though.

William Vanderbloemen ([24:51](#)):

Yeah. New York as far as stadiums, I remember, yes. Singapore that festival packed out the 80,000 seat stadium, and when there was mission to London, we'd go to soccer stadium. So yeah, certainly those were the unusual ones. It wouldn't be unusual in the bigger Latin American ones or African ones with my brother Andrew to see 30,000, 40,000, 50,000 people a day. Whereas in the US the West is a bit more challenging. You'd be thrilled to get 15,000, 20,000 people a day in a US festival. And then Latin America, Africa, a little bit more explosive. What was that like, Kevin, you're growing up, and you talked to the other kids on the school playground. What does your dad do? He's a doctor, mine is an evangelist. What is that like?

Kevin Palau ([25:47](#)):

Yeah, it is. It's a little different. We loved being able to travel and to see, it was a little odd. You'd see your dad's picture on billboards and buses and things like that. But we loved the opportunity to travel and go to stadiums and arenas in Aberdeen Scotland, or Cardiff Wales or Guatemala city, et cetera. And just you kind of grew up in an environment where the church is working together to share the good news. It kind of becomes just part of who you are. We felt blessed rather than it being a pain or people will say you're growing up with parents that traveled a lot, was that hard? We traveled a lot as a family. We felt it was far more of a blessing than a problem.

William Vanderbloemen ([26:41](#)):

I'm curious now. So preacher's kids talk to each other. Missionary kids talk to each other. Do evangelists kids talk to each other.

Kevin Palau ([26:48](#)):

To some degree, certainly Franklin Graham and Will Graham, Franklin's son and latent Ford's kids. Yeah. There's a certain amount of talking among yourselves, but thankfully the ones that I ended up talking to are ones that love the Lord and love what they do and aren't so much the cynical types, I guess.

William Vanderbloemen ([27:11](#)):

So. Well, so one of the things that I think is so remarkable about your ministry, Luis and Kevin as well is it looks from the outside, and I'd love for you to tell me whether I'm wrong or if I'm right, tell me how. It looks from the outside, like you guys noticed somewhere in the crusade and evangelism events that things needed to shift.

Kevin Palau ([27:36](#)):

Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen ([27:39](#)):

It felt like maybe the culture pivoted and so pivoted with. Walk me through that because it's so easy when you start a successful business to say, well, this is what's always worked, so [crosstalk 00:27:49].

Kevin Palau ([27:50](#)):

You're right. I think that's a principle that you see. And if you just read business books in general the person that was the biggest manufacturer of Buggy Whip probably realized pretty quickly. Like, wow, we've got to do something differently because this cars are taking over. People aren't driving carriage, so how we mobilize the church has got to keep changing.

Kevin Palau ([28:11](#)):

So for us we've talked earlier about Portland, Oregon being kind of almost a random place. Dad and mom found each other at Multnomah School of the Bible. Dad found himself in Portland, not by strategic design, but just because that's where he got sent for this one year Bible school.

Kevin Palau ([28:29](#)):

But now we feel like it was really strategic that we were planted in a place like Portland, Oregon. That's very radically unchurched because it did force us to think more deeply about how are we going to get unchurched people under the sound of the gospel. Is it going to simply be by renting an arena and having a, what we used to call a crusade. Portland was a place where we went away from the traditional Billy Graham style crusade to an outdoor music festival. That that doesn't seem like that, at the time it felt like a big deal to go from a fixed seat arena to an outdoor festival, but at the time it really fit with the idea of friendship or relational evangelism, like what is actually going to get a believer feeling more comfortable inviting an unchurched person to a place where they can hear the gospel.

Kevin Palau ([29:20](#)):

It used to be in the 50s you could say, come here Billy Graham. The vast majority of people would at least consider going because they grew up churched generally. Now, the majority of Americans would not necessarily consider themselves churched, certainly in a place like Portland, Oregon. So how do you create an environment that's easier for a believer to bring their friend. A free outdoor music festival come and go as you please, bring your kids, action sports area, corporate sponsors. We just tried a lot of new things that drew a lot more people.

William Vanderbloemen ([29:53](#)):

Well, so I want to give you guys a little credit. I mean, Billy is amazing. I hope I get to someday visit the part of heaven that he's in. But I do think God used him at a point in time where it wasn't just a generation that grew up in church. It was a generation that grew up in a depression where they didn't know if they'd have money. And then in a war where they didn't know if the world would be good or evil. And with friends dying left and right. So talking about what's going to happen after this life was probably a little bit more received than it was at the time of peace and prosperity. Did you notice that you had to shift the message a little bit, Lewis, with a different backdrop?

Luis Palau ([30:36](#)):

The fact is you're right. I always made fun of in Latin America, they're more conservative in those days. And I would announce, for instance come and hear Luis Palau, sex and youth. How to get down to

choose a mate to get married? How to face corruption in government? And they started calling me the sex evangelist because I publicity said that, and it was considered a bad word to even use the word sex? But we got a lot of attention from it. We got tons of young people who were desperate to hear our stuff. And those days nobody said anything. Not only from the pulpit, not even books, so anything? And so yeah, we changed and put a lot of emphasis, of course, the cross, the blood of Christ, that never changes.

Luis Palau ([31:19](#)):

But we began to talk about how to live a life of victory over temptation, how to choose a wife well. How to get along with your wife. How to bring up your kids in this situation today. So yeah, we adopted the same old message that never changes, but adapting it to daily life. And there was definitely an emphasis on Christ lives in me. I used to hung my home, that verse in Galatians, if Christ lives in me, Christ lives in me, I would make them repeat it and it caught on. And I think it helped a lot of people and that's why I think we got quite well known because we adopted the same old message of the cross, but with a daily application on how to live a joyful holy life.

William Vanderbloemen ([32:02](#)):

That's good. And so Kevin, when you guys switched to this outdoor music festival, give me a year when that started?

Kevin Palau ([32:10](#)):

In '99, so in a sense, ancient history, 20 years ago feels like but at the time it felt revolutionary for probably 10 years it felt, it was kind of setting a new model more and more evangelist basically everyone started using the word festival. Everyone started saying, let's do a music festival because the building block is the same, invitation from local churches. The whole mobilization process, dad talked about. That part didn't change that radically. It just at the end product became, don't let get a babysitter and go to a religious service. Come to an outdoor music festival that in that first festival is sponsored by the Portland Trailblazers and Wells Fargo bank and Pacific Power. And so we thought if those kinds of companies were willing to be linked to it, maybe that would make the invitation a little bit easier.

Kevin Palau ([33:01](#)):

And then of course we began saying if the church could be known equally for loving and serving the community, would that also build a lot of bridges, open doors, build credibility. So those were the various things we began experimenting with. And now that's a big part of what we do is help cities, groups of churches in the city say even if you're not ready and don't want to do a big evangelistic event like a festival, you could still partner together with other churches, build favor with your city leaders. Tell a better story of the impact of the church, serving the community, and use that stronger platform as a way to share the good news.

William Vanderbloemen ([33:45](#)):

Now, if I go back to '99 in my mind and what's going on in churches then we're on an audio podcast. But if you could see me, I'm adopting currently the Presbyterian worship posture.

Kevin Palau ([33:57](#)):

Yes, that's right. His arms folded and kind of-

William Vanderbloemen ([33:59](#)):

Folded. And if you-

Kevin Palau ([34:00](#)):

Contemplative.

William Vanderbloemen ([34:02](#)):

... And if you're a charismatic Presbyterian, you do this.

Kevin Palau ([34:04](#)):

That's right. The little hand goes up just a bit.

William Vanderbloemen ([34:08](#)):

In 99 you had worship wars going on in churches, you had contemporaries... So did you have a harder time selling this idea to local churches?

Kevin Palau ([34:18](#)):

I think maybe surprisingly we didn't because I think there was such a clear desire and an emphasis on we want to actually do a better job reaching unchurched people and not only gather believers and there's a value to gathering believers. There really is a value to in the city square, so to speak, demonstrate the unity in the body of Christ. There's a certain value to that. Now we would say though that we've kind of sees three values of the large gathering. It's a celebration or we say kind of good news in the city.

Kevin Palau ([34:51](#)):

There's good news that the church can unite and be together across denominational ethnic lines. Jeremiah 29:7 we want to re-earn the right to be heard, so there's good news. We can celebrate the impact that the church has as it serves the community, the hungry, the homes, our public schools, the foster care system, refugee care, and then of course it's a message of good news that's transformative to the individual life.

Kevin Palau ([35:13](#)):

And so we see all those three things coming together. Back then it was a bit of that worship wars. 10 years later we took this formal shift toward a more holistic ministry because in that season there was a whole age of the missional church. Let's not only be attractional, there's a limit as cultures change and people are less likely to be interested in, oh, we're going to go to that church because it has the greatest worship band.

Kevin Palau ([35:39](#)):

People in Portland would stay. I'm not interested in going to any church. The whole concept means nothing to me. We realized we had to get more on mission and say, how do we get, rather than being the focus primarily be how do I get people to come to my church to say, how do we unleash this force of the church into the community to work for the common good. So that was a bit of a game changer because it opened up a lot of new doors and a lot of churches, it might not have been as interested in the big evangelistic event. We're very interested in how did you build trust and favor with the LGBTQ community? How did you get the mayor of Portland who was the first openly gay mayor of a top 25 city?

Why did he get involved? Why was he there on the stage at the festival thanking the crowd for serving and challenging this movement to continue?

Kevin Palau ([36:28](#)):

So that was 10 years ago we made that shift toward a more holistic kind of a festival. Again, always though with the goal of we just want to get as many churches around the table and we want to earn favor with people and get believers more confident in sharing their faith and these days it makes a big difference if the church can be seen as actually caring about common good kinds of issues and not primarily be about culture wars.

William Vanderbloemen ([36:56](#)):

Huge movement going on right now for this city. I don't even see this hashtag for Austin. I saw for Dubai today.

Kevin Palau ([37:05](#)):

That's right.

William Vanderbloemen ([37:07](#)):

A friend of ours started this book, the for book and it's campaigns.

Kevin Palau ([37:11](#)):

Everywhere there's this vision of city, kind of a Tim Keller phrase as a city gospel movement. I would define that as a united holistic sustainable effort of the churches.

Kevin Palau ([37:22](#)):

We're tracking more than 600 examples around the world on our citygospelmovements.org website. And we didn't start this, we're just identifying the fact that as culture has shifted really globally, the church is realizing we need each other and we need to be working for the common good as a way to also be very bold and clear in our gospel witness.

William Vanderbloemen ([37:46](#)):

So Kevin and Luis, it'd be really easy for this to be an organization that it's centered around you, Luis. I have a company that's named after me. I kind of regret that from time to time. So it'd be easy to just focus on the here and now. But you guys have by choice and force been thinking forward. Talk to me about that and particularly talk to the people that are starting a church, starting a ministry. Like what are you doing now and why, talk us about future oriented?

Luis Palau ([38:18](#)):

Yeah. Well, about 50 years ago we began to think I'm getting old. The new generation has new ideas, a new approach to reaching the community, to communicating the good news, to showing the love of God. And so we began to think with a board of directors how do we transfer it. And we've seem like Kevin, our son had the gift of administration and guidance and leadership and so that the Lord had prepared him, not because he was our son, but should be a fact. His heart was in it. He's got the brains, he had the studies, he has the connections through Wheaton College and all the other relationships that have evolved from that.

Luis Palau ([39:01](#)):

And so we were beginning to move quite vigorously in that direction. He became president. And then suddenly, not long afterwards, they find out that I've got lung cancer and I felt that the Lord allowed that so that we could once and for all quickly transfer the leadership of the organization, the same basic principles, but the way of guiding it. And it stood out to me amazing.

Luis Palau ([39:28](#)):

And in many ways, I honestly wanted to get out of the way and let Kevin lead and Andrew be the public speaker and so on. But at the same time, consciously, you keep a foot in the door. That you love it too much. It's your baby, it's your family and so on. But suddenly when the cancer came, it became a very quick cut it. I mean, out of the way, you could be in heaven next Christmas. So get out of the way and let the younger generation dig it and it's turned out to be fantastic. First of all, I'm still here and so that's been good to the privilege of seeing Kevin and Andrew and the rest of the younger leadership leading the way beautifully, opening new doors, using new approaches, new language, adopting to the culture as it is now.

Luis Palau ([40:14](#)):

And you suddenly realize I'm past this, my heart is right, but the language is past it. But essentially you've got to learn to get out of the way and let the new generation take over. And it's turned out to me fabulous honestly.

Kevin Palau ([40:29](#)):

And to give dad the credit he deserves. I mean, very few founders are as open and leading the way on succession as dad has been. We could all, if we sat here and talk, we could think of a number of other similarly aged organizations that haven't handled transition well. And some of them the shadow of their former selves that don't even exist anymore because they couldn't even manage that first succession.

Kevin Palau ([40:54](#)):

And so we've had to be much more intentional here at the Palau Association to really be eagerly cording and finding wonderful leaders in their 20s and 30s and frankly giving them positions of authority much sooner. We don't want to wait until they're in their 50s. One, why would they hang around if they feel like they have to put in an apprenticeship of 30 years and they want to give their input immediately? I mean, maybe to a fault at times. I mean it's a different generation now.

Kevin Palau ([41:20](#)):

People expect, one, not necessarily to be in the same place for their life. They may expect to bounce. Not bounce, I shouldn't say that in a negative way, but to have a lot of different experiences. So giving people the right people, not every young person is a leader, but giving the younger leaders genuine opportunity to be involved in decision making and help shape things. We've been working on that even as [inaudible 00:41:42] in the early years of taking over. We're trying to be much more intentional about that and even working on issues of culture. But, anyways, back to dad, he's really made it easy and not every founder can do that. Even if they mean well, they don't do it well.

William Vanderbloemen ([42:01](#)):



We do a ton of work with succession. And the raw fact is the success of the succession rests on the shoulders of the outgoing founder.

Kevin Palau ([42:13](#)):

Yep. That's right.

William Vanderbloemen ([42:14](#)):

It's just the way it is. And I don't know that anybody spends their life building an organization or a church or a ministry and then gets to the final lap and says, now I think I want to blow it up. But it happens so many times did you get it right.

William Vanderbloemen ([42:29](#)):

What you've done Luis is rare and I'm excited. We got a chance to get a glimpse of what you're doing in gathering all these young evangelists around the world. And I'd love for you to share just a minute or two about that. That's a pretty exiting.

Kevin Palau ([42:42](#)):

Yeah. In fact, yeah we're very grateful William to you and the Vanderbloemen group for helping us find a wonderful young 35 year old PhD from South Africa. And dad mentioned the influence of Billy Graham on him and the what he learned, but it was because his dad was pushy enough and aggressive enough in a good way to go and seek out that relationship and learn. We had a lot of younger evangelists 20 sub plus years ago. They would naturally come and want to kind of hang out and just learn. Finally it dawned on us that rather than having it be random, we could put a little bit of energy and inform a little five, six person team that exists only to serve others with the gift of evangelism. So we now have something called our next generation Alliance with about 800 younger, mostly North American evangelists.

Kevin Palau ([43:36](#)):

That's been going for almost 20 years now. But just in this last year, and again, Vanderbloemen group helped us find this person. We're now looking to launch a similar kind of a movement of evangelists in every country possible. Our cope would be in the next 10 years to have 150 countries of the world. They would have their own Paraguayan or Bolivian or Estonian or Burmese, network of evangelists where those with the gift not only are they not in competition, they genuinely have each other's backs. They're learning from each other. We want to take everything we've learned in our 50 plus years of ministry and just make it absolutely available. Plus we need the fresh ideas and creativity of younger evangelists that God is raising up. We don't give someone the gift of the evangelists. We just try to identify those that have it and try to come alongside and make life a little bit easier for them. So that's an exciting part of what we hope to do in the future.

William Vanderbloemen ([44:30](#)):

That's great. I think it's more than a mirror image of Dr. Graham's gift to you all on the front.

Luis Palau ([44:38](#)):

Yeah.

Kevin Palau ([44:38](#)):

Yes.

William Vanderbloemen ([44:39](#)):

It gives me great hope for the future because I tend to agree with you and maybe it's because I like doing sales. That's what evangelism is really is, it works, and it's needed. So thank you Luis for such a great legacy and for the future you have in front of you and just really appreciate you taking time to share and encourage some of the younger listeners out there. If you could say a final word to people that are going to starting a church or a ministry or an evangelism, what would be your word of encouragement to them?

Luis Palau ([45:14](#)):

Well, I would say if the vision comes from God stick with it through thick and thin, stay focused, build a good team around you and keep the vision clear. I think a leader has to keep reinforcing the vision repeatedly so that we're all in the same page and we all think alike and we go to win. So with the power of Christ, aim to be a winner for the glory of God, for the good of people working together. That's the biggest emphasis I would say. And stick close to the Bible because you're safe that way.

William Vanderbloemen ([45:50](#)):

That's good. Thanks Kevin. Thank you Luis.

Luis Palau ([45:53](#)):

Thank you so much William.

Kevin Palau ([45:54](#)):

Thank you so much William, appreciate the opportunity.

Luis Palau ([45:55](#)):

Thank you William, must good to see you again.

William Vanderbloemen ([45:57](#)):

And thanks for joining us today for How God Built This. We'll see you again next month. We've got some really great guests coming up and I hope you'll join us.

Holly Tate ([46:05](#)):

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Holly Tate ([46:27](#)):

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