

Speaker 1 ([00:01](#)):

Come 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 how God built this, where we talk with Christian leaders to find out the ways God moved and their life to build their ministry on. Today is how God built this episode of the Vanderbloemen leadership podcast. Our founder and CEO William Vanderbloemen, talks with max Lucado, teaching minister at Oak Hills church in San Antonio, Texas, and a bestselling author. His books have sold over 100 million copies across 54 languages worldwide. Max has served at Oak Hills church for over 30 years as he teaches and ministers to the congregation. We're excited for you to hear how God has moved in Max's life as a minister and author over the years to where his ministry is today. Reaching people all over the world. Tweet your takeaways from today's show, using the hashtag Vander cast and check out today's show notes to join our Facebook group where we post behind the scenes content and giveaways. Here's William's conversation with max Lucado.

Speaker 2 ([01:12](#)):

Well, Hey everybody, we're glad to have you here today. And on one of my favorite days of the month when I get to record how God built this, and I said, it's a look at some of the things God has done all over the world in building his church in a way that you never could have thought. If you'd have told me I get to do what I'll do today, I would have said what? And, uh, you know, to think that I got to pastor, that was an amazing time. And we've got to hear from guests from all over that are just sort of, uh, unlikely, uh, people to be used by God that have a story that they never would've dreamt growing up. What happened. And, and I'm so looking forward to you getting to hear from my friend max with keto and then straight out of the gate we probably ought to straighten up, uh, you know, you say tomato and I say tomato and I don't want to call the whole thing off.

Speaker 2 ([02:03](#)):

Max. Let's, I think you should work on your singing. That's max. Welcome. Thanks for coming. And, uh, it is my honor. It's really a treat really, or, you know, I love you William, uh, love what you do. I think you're such an essential, you and your team are such an essential cog in the whole kingdom of God and fill such a really unique need and, and I'm grateful you've been a friend to me and your organization has blessed us. So, um, it's, it's, um, it's a joy to be with you. Well, thanks. Thanks. I'd love to hear a little bit of your story. The, you know, the whole world I think knows that you write books and pastor a church, but I'm guessing like when you were in third grade and they had career day, uh, you, you probably didn't go to the booth. That was, I'd like to be pastor of a big and write a lot of books

Speaker 3 ([03:03](#)):

growing up. What'd you think you were going to do with your life? Did you know what were your dreams? Yeah, if I had any, I wanted to be a coach. Uh, just cause I love athletics. Uh, I, um, I, I was reflecting on this very question though earlier in the week because I'm surprise the surprise is finishing a book. And this book, uh, is about the power and the presence of the Holy spirit. And I talk about as a youngster. Um, I grew up in a home we know in a church that talked very little, if at all about the Holy spirit. And so I thought it was all up to me and I was reflecting in the book about, uh, if a person could have spiritual burnout at the age of 15. Uh, I did. I mean, I just, I tried so hard, William, but I just finally decided that my hormones were too raging and my temptations for too strong and the lists of rules and regulations for two.

Speaker 3 ([04:06](#)):

Great. And so I chucked it, I chucked it and, um, really didn't think Christ would have a place for someone like me. My parents sent me to Abilene Christian college back in the mid seventies, small West Texas, a school, small school in West Texas, just because they knew that I was, uh, I was going to drink myself into an early grave. I was a mess. And, um, uh, they, they insisted that I go to a school that would teach Bible lessons. If I didn't, I had to pay my own tuition. Well, I may be done, but I'm not stupid. So I, I took for the free tuition route and that's where I met some people that to this day have had a lasting influence in my life. One of whom was a Bible professor, another whom of whom is a retired pastor today in our church. Uh, and the two of them through their teaching convinced me that God's grace was big enough for someone like me.

Speaker 3 ([05:04](#)):

So that's really how it all happened. I kind of, I became a Christian at that early age. I walked away, uh, became very acquainted with the product goals, pig pen. And then, uh, I think the reason that grace has meant so much to me, uh, in my life as an experience and as a doctrine, it's just cause I need it so much. I really did need it. I, I you would not William have wanted your daughters to go out with me. I was, uh, I was a womanizer. I was a drunk, I was a brawler. Uh, I was self centered. I was arrogant, I was self promoting and I was, I was on a road to disaster. And so, um, that's, that's not just, you know, testimony, hyperbole. For me, it's, it's really the truth. And for that, I've always been great, greatly grateful to God's grace. Did you win your brawls?

Speaker 3 ([06:01](#)):

Oh man. I'd say I'd get myself 50, 50. I've got a sore, this is not a joke. After a football game, I got into a fight and a guy landed one rat on my jaw. And to this day my jaw pops, Oh, I'm so embarrassed when I eat steak cause it pops. So he left his Mark on me. I don't know who he is. It was in the middle of the football field and everybody's helmets were off and we were swinging at each other. And, uh, so I have no clue who he is. But if you're listening, buddy, I'm still thinking of you.

Speaker 3 ([06:38](#)):

So, so you left on Abilene Christian, which is a church of Christ school, correct? Yes, sir. Yup. So that's, that's not like a, uh, the first church to adopt rock and roll. Right. Uh, that's hilarious. You know, I mean, our listeners may not know. I didn't know, uh, tell him, gosh, probably seminary church of Christ has a somewhat of a tradition of no instruments, right? Yeah. The, the, the churches of Christ, our cousins, spiritual cousins with their conservative Christian Church and the disciples of Christ, they come out of a movement called the restoration movement, uh, largely born in the late 17 hundreds, early 1800. And, um, um, the churches of Christ, uh, became, uh, a back to the Bible movement on the F on the American frontier. And, uh, somehow my father, uh, my father was led to Christ through a member of the church of Christ. And for that reason, we, we attended, uh, the church of Christ.

Speaker 3 ([07:52](#)):

I'll forever be grateful, uh, to that heritage. Our heritage, uh, they taught me so much, so much, and, um, respect for God's word, a love for the church, uh, happy people, happy people. Uh, they, they, uh, are very mission-oriented. Churches of Christ are autonomous. Each congregation is fiercely independent. Um, so some, some pretty unique characteristics is one of which is acappella music. Uh, uh, some of many churches of Christ are now and mixture of instrumental and acappella, but it's a, it's a, it is a curiosity. Curious feature, a weekly communion, uh, water baptism, um, um, high regard for

scripture. So a pretty conservative group, pretty conservative group. And, uh, they had, uh, they had a huge impact on me. You know, I, I, uh, I do, uh, recognize that I was raised in, in what I now understand to be a very legalistic, uh, movement. That's why I burned out so soon. Uh, but that's to say I owned a Bible. I could have read about God's grace. I could have read about it. God's Holy spirit. So I do not, uh, hold anything against the church that led me to Christ. And, uh, and it's just all part of rounding out my faith over the years.

Speaker 2 ([09:17](#)):

My, uh, my introduction to the church, Christ, I was at Princeton at seminary and I grew up in North Carolina. There's not a huge church, Christ presence there. And the old Testament for a professor that I had, uh, Jimmy Jack Roberts, who was from Texas and Jack would wear his cowboy hat around in New Jersey, which was hilarious. Uh, but when the faculty would preach at chapel daily chapel, uh, they designed the service. And so first time Dr. Roberts preached, I went and chaplain, I thought, well, this would be interesting and I didn't know anything about acappella. And then we all started singing acapella and present company excluded. There were a lot of good singers at seminary and it was amazing hearing people sing in parts with no a compliment at all. It was just, wow. And then, then I thought, man, if they had done that at my home church, you did driven people away from Jesus, not toward up here. The singing that me and my family had got out. But uh, you know,

Speaker 3 ([10:15](#)):

but wonder why, why, why did they have an acappella service that day? Because of,

Speaker 2 ([10:20](#)):

cause he was pretty requested. Yeah, yeah. He, Jimmy Jack was preaching and he wanted it done his way. He wanted to church of Christ and, Oh, so he was from the church of Christ. I guess that would be that important detail. But yeah, he was from church of Christ and in that interest, just preach, preach straight like a good standard church of Christ preacher. And it was an amazing scholar, but that insisted that there'd be no instrumentation.

Speaker 3 ([10:41](#)):

I love that name, Jimmy Jack,

Speaker 2 ([10:43](#)):

and, and go figure. You're from Texas. So max, I, you know, I think of all the guys that I get to work with that are, I mean, there's so many amazing pastures. I, I don't know, I don't want to presume, but I'm guessing you didn't like set out to be a pastor of a big church. Can you, can you,

Speaker 3 ([11:06](#)):

well again, these are great questions, William. Thank you. I, um, so, so I was about 20 years old when I, uh, returned to faith. I, uh, needed to change peer groups. My buddies, uh, would influence me more than I would influence them. Uh, the church where I began attending had a group of, uh, uh, men from the campus and, uh, that were all students that were all training to be missionaries. Um, and so I started hanging out with them within about a year. Uh, I had decided I wanted to become a missionary too. I was inspired by them, good men, steer their dear friends to this day. Well, by then I was already a junior in college, really toward the end of junior year and I had a degree in communications all but finished.

And so I decided to stay and complete that degree and then get a seminary degree that would better equip me to, to do mission work.

Speaker 3 ([12:07](#)):

And the, uh, uh, college there, Abilene Christian, uh, it was Abilene Christian college when I started it became Abilene Christian university. While I was there, they had a wonderful seminary program. So I stayed there and did a seminary degree and uh, joined a missionary team that was going to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Never intending that I would be a longterm in ministry long term, but I did sign up for this mission effort to plant a church in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. And we did make a minimum commitment of five years. Well, by the time I finished degree, my studies and all the other guys that finished their studies, it was 1983. So fast forward several years, we all moved to Brazil. By then we were married, some were having kids and um, uh, in route to go to Brazil, I got the seminary degree. I found a church that would provide my salary.

Speaker 3 ([13:07](#)):

I had to live in Miami, Florida, and serve at that church for two years. So I preached a lot while I was there. I studied preaching while I was in seminary. And so I began to discover a love for preaching and a love for church. Well, by the time I ended up in Brazil, I knew that at the end of my time in Brazil, I wanted to pastor somewhere, whether it be longterm in Brazil or whether somewhere in the U S I did not know. So, um, I N that, that's, that's how I got interested. I had no intention. I do think, I do recall thinking that, um, I would like to pastor a small neighborhood church because that way you can just stay in touch with people. The church that sent me to Brazil was a 300 member church and I thought that was the ideal size.

Speaker 3 ([13:58](#)):

And, um, when our time after, after five years, when our time was up in Brazil, my father had passed away and I wanted to get back closer to my mom and I, I heard about a church in San Antonio, Texas, uh, church of Christ that was looking for a pastor. And, uh, they were at the time about a 400 member church. And I said, well, it's a little big, but I think, I think we could do it. And so I sent in an application, I think you could probably get them down to 300 pretty pack. Give me some time. I can get them back to a hundred. So that's how we ended up in San Antonio.

Speaker 3 ([14:36](#)):

So I, you know, I'm always amazed at how, um, people want to do William, you talk to church leaders all the time. What's the best plan for building a big church was this blueprint that works over and over and over. I talked to guys knowing I couldn't have drawn this up. Ah, I've done this. I, you know, God gets the credit and then when they start telling the stories of it got bad. I mean, we didn't, we didn't realize how much we didn't know what we were doing. Are there stories that come to mind where God just surprised you? Is that as the church grew? Cause it's not 400 anymore. No, and I've been here since 1988. Uh, we've had some really good years. We've had some very challenging years. Uh, I, there's some decisions that I feel that we made were very good. There are some I would do differently in a heartbeat.

Speaker 3 ([15:25](#)):

Um, the, the course that we went out on, uh, churches of Christ are not large churches. Uh, 400 was at the top of the, I mean, there may have been eight or 900 member church back in those days. So we weren't like, um, belonging to the Southern Baptist conference where when you go to a gathering of

pastors, you're with people who've had lots of experience building large teams. So we were trying to, what's that old line? Tried to build the plane while we're taking off? Uh, we, we immediately began, uh, to see an increase in attendance, but we just didn't, uh, what, we didn't have any kind of host ministry, for example, visitors who came, we didn't have anybody meeting them at the door. In fact, the guy who was in charge of the, uh, information booth was one of the crankiest man I've ever met in my life.

Speaker 3 ([16:26](#)):

I don't know how we did that. Uh, God bless him. He's long since gone to heaven. Forgive me sir. But, uh, we, we were just clueless. Um, we were a staff of, uh, three people. I was a third minister on staff. And then about six months after I arrived, uh, the youth pastor left. So we were down to two. We had two, three ladies on the secretarial pool. So five of us with what made on is trying to figure out what to do. And um, but, but, but there was a lot of energy. Uh, the, the, what I told the leaders when I came, I said, I know how, uh, what I learned in Brazil is that if we pray and preach Jesus, I think the church will grow. If we pray a lot. And we preached Jesus a lot. I really think the church would grow.

Speaker 3 ([17:18](#)):

So we did not have the mechanics that would fly out and attend Rick Warren's seminar. I'd fly to Chicago and I attended several Willowcreek seminars back in all this back in the early nineties. As they're teaching us the baseball diamond is, they're teaching us that, uh, the, the secret sensitive and secret driven church mom. I mean, I was just absorbing it. And I was just absorbing it and I'd bring it back and I'd share it with our leaders. Some of it would work, some of it, uh, but uh, but we kinda hobbled along and uh, and, and never had any major, uh, challenges. Um, except about 10 years in, we decided we need to change the name. We were really not reflective of a typical church of Christ. And that was a hard decision in many churches were going through that, you know, whether it be assemblies of God or bad dis churches, many churches were realizing that to reach out into the community, it'd be better not to be pegged out of a certain, uh, group, especially if your, your, your population didn't really reflect that group.

Speaker 3 ([18:28](#)):

And we were about 70% non church of Christ members by that point. We, we, that was a pretty tough one. Uh, people were very upset about that, but I felt a deep, deep conviction that that was, I think that was a decision I would do again in a heartbeat. It was just time. It was just time. Um, there were some, the struggle for me was hiring staff and leading staff to this day, as you know, you and I've talked about it. I just, I feel like I get a B minus rep there. I want to hire everybody. I don't want to fire anybody. I love everyone. I have a hard time discerning, you know, the right person. Uh, I get very bored at the discussion of job descriptions. Um, Oh, I'm naive. I'm, I confess it, I'm naive. I say, you just do what you like to do.

Speaker 3 ([19:23](#)):

I'll do it. I like to do and we're good enough somehow limp along. And that's not the way to run a church. Maybe if they're three or 400 members, but, uh, but I've gotten myself in, in, in the corner because I made the wrong decision or a hasty decision or let somebody else make the decision for me. So if I could do one thing over again, I would immediately hire a strong XP immediately. I didn't have one the first 18 years I was the on skin. You believe that 18 years, we were three and 4,000 member church before I ever hired an X and an executive pastor. Again coming out of the church across background, that position was just not there. So I didn't know what that person did and I didn't have the end of, I

don't know the business sense, the savvy to think we need to go find out how other churches do this. So I would, I would immediately have done that. But, but once we, did I say that to S we did make some great hires too. God bless them, some great friends, but I would like to have had a done better at that part of ministry.

Speaker 2 ([20:28](#)):

So, so you go from 400 up to 4,000. What was God using to build the church? I mean, okay, we pray and we preach Jesus, but lots of people do that. Where did you see him moving and how, how did you sense he was growing this place? Yeah,

Speaker 3 ([20:48](#)):

what a great question that is. Um, in the early nineties, um, I personally, uh, had to, they had two things happen that were very significant to me. Uh, told you I had spiritual burnout when I was 15. I had spiritual burnout when I was like, uh, I came to this church at age 33, so about the age 35, um, I, I still was rooted in legalism and I still had no understanding of the Holy spirit. And so I began to, um, uh, burnout to fizzle out because I thought it all depended upon me and no, I came speaking a good game, you know, that I was going to pray and preach Jesus. Uh, I still felt like if the church succeeded, it was up to me and if it failed, eh, I was to blame. Uh, and so I, I F I just bought him down. I bottomed out.

Speaker 3 ([21:45](#)):

And for me that came in the form of severe insomnia. Um, w when I was 35 years old, 36 years old, I can remember to this day, um, trying to sleep at night and everybody else in the whole wide world was asleep. Even my goldfish was asleep, but I couldn't sleep and I couldn't figure out what was going on. Um, I would go downstairs and I would sit there and my pajamas on my couch and I just shake my head and I'd say, Lord, I got asleep. You know, I've got all these things I gotta do. We've got to grow in church. By then, I was writing books. I said, I've got deadlines everywhere. I've got people counting on me. I'm about to come on done. Lord helped me, and I'm forgive me for sounding mystical, William. But the Holy spirit met me there. Um, I can't say I found the Holy spirit, but I can say he found me.

Speaker 3 ([22:40](#)):

And, um, he began to heal me, uh, began to sleep again. Uh, he began to give me wisdom. He began to heal people. Through my prayers. We had several significant healings. Um, the, uh, joy came back to my ministry also. He led me to begin teaching through the book of Romans. And, um, that changed me forever. You know, I've still got John Stotts commentary and, and dr Stott taught me Romans. I would, I would open it on Monday and study three or four verses all week long goes deepest. My little brain would allow and then I'd get up and preach it on Sunday. And uh, little by little, our little church of Christ, uh, began to lose its identity as a legalistic were saved by doing the right things to become more and more grace based fellowship per se, by trusting the route Lord. And I think those two things, the Holy spirit, uh, baptizing me, uh, strengthening me.

Speaker 3 ([23:43](#)):

And then also, uh, uh, I was so excited to teach grace. I didn't realize I was doing something contrary to my heritage. Remember I was a drunk growing up in high school. I wasn't paying attention what they were teaching in the church of Christ. And I, I guess I was just oblivious to it. I thought I was preaching gospel and I was, and our elders bless them, uh, would say, this sounds a little different than what we've been hearing. You may were say just about trust in Christ. We're saved just by belief. I said, that's what

it says right here. It was almost that simple. William and the church began to, you know, the Holy spirit and the, and the, and the beauty of grace. Uh, there was a, there was an authentic sense of Jolie in the church. W again, we didn't manage it well.

Speaker 3 ([24:30](#)):

We outgrew our facility, but we had some good, good elders who had real vision and they've, you've been to our, our, our property purchased 36 acres in a primary of town. And the Lord blessed us with, with money and the church grew again. This, when we changed the name of the church, we grew some more. And so, um, it's, it's kind of a inspire to me instead of Bokassa may not, I'm really not saying that, uh, insincerely it's, it's the last thing we expected. Had you preach through Romans before? Never really. Well, remember I was in Brazil for five years. I moved to San Antonio and I preach through the gospel of Matthew and that took two years. And then I thought, okay, I need to go to the epistles. So I thought, why not Romans? And, uh, yeah, they'll align, you know, if you get Romans, God gets you.

Speaker 3 ([25:23](#)):

It, it, it did, it didn't let me go either. A book I wrote out of that sermon series called in the grip of grace in the grip of grace is still really well received today. One of the first ones I ever had. Where did writing ministry come in and how did God, I mean, God had to open doors there cause it's not something used go fabricate. He really did. And I, uh, began writing when I was in Brazil. I would, uh, I, I, you know, studying Portuguese that first year, uh, literally four or five hours a day, you know, as a missionary trying to learn Portuguese. And so, uh, in my downtime I would journal, I would do some creative writing, I'd write stories and I shared it with some folks and they said, you ought to try to get to take all this that you'd been writing. And it was basically a collection of 30 or 40 pieces, a scrapbook, top devotional pieces. And, uh, I w I thought, I'm going to try to get them published. And, uh, so I compile them into a manuscript, uh, called it on the envelope and uh, mailed it out to 15 publishers. You've got 14 rejections and the 15th one said yes, that was Tyndale house publishers and that's, that's what opened the door. Uh, and I've been publishing ever since.

Speaker 2 ([26:47](#)):

I wonder if the other 14 ever think that back through cause you've been with tin mill for a while. Right?

Speaker 3 ([26:53](#)):

Well that I've, I've been, that book is still in press, but uh, my second book was with Multnomah. Okay. Out of Portland. I did three or four books with them. And then, uh, very good friends, two very good friends, uh, moved up into the leadership of, uh, what, what was then called word publishing. You remember word out of Waco and uh, they, they really, uh, asked me to consider moving over to word publishing. So, and I'm still with them to this day. They have changed names as you know, several times a word became Thomas Nelson. Now they're Harper Collins Christian publishing. But I'm basically with the same team that I was back in the early 1991 or two. I moved over to word homeless. What's changed in the publishing world since then to now? What a great question. What a great question. Oh my. Um, your book by the way, has really been helpful to me. I headed down off the shelf again the other day and, uh, it's so, especially in my age 65, you know, you were speaking right to me. I hope you am. Anyway, that book needs to be required reading for every, every pastor.

Speaker 2 ([28:06](#)):

Well, I will, I'll selfishly say, uh, I, I was in your office one of the first times we met and anything I can do for you before I leave max, can you sit, will you sign my copy of your book? And I'm like, now this is a Viv role reversal. This is not how this is supposed to go. It's supposed to be the other way around, but I'm glad it helped yourself, but

Speaker 3 ([28:30](#)):

Oh, you didn't help me some. I guess maybe we'll talk about retirement, but, uh, you're, you're, you set me free. You set me free. Uh, I was one of these guys that labored under the false assumption that a good pastor never retires. Right. I learned that from Billy Graham and, uh, but, uh, well maybe we'll talk about that now. I understand that really we don't, but we do move into different chapters or stages of ministry.

Speaker 2 ([28:58](#)):

Hmm. We can, we can certainly go there. Uh, I, uh, sometimes feel like all I have is a hammer, so everything looks like nail. But I, uh,

Speaker 3 ([29:08](#)):

it's huge. It's huge for where many of my contemporaries are. Uh, it's huge for a younger pastors moving and looking ahead in the future. Uh, they need to know that, uh, we're living longer. Uh, we're, we're able to preach for more years. Uh, the, the idea that we will stay and do the same thing over a 40 year period or a 50 year period is a wonderful thought. But we need to be freed, uh, to, to recognize that even the priests in the old Testament, uh, you know, were released from service after, what was it, 20 years. Somehow learned that in your boat, you know, and it's okay. It's okay to move into the next chapter of life. Uh, and so that was a very freeing, uh, discovery that I made through your book.

Speaker 2 ([30:04](#)):

What, uh, as you, as you think about publishing now, when you think about what you've learned? I mean, my goodness, the way the landscape's changed, what really has, what, what's changed and what advice did you give a young author?

Speaker 3 ([30:17](#)):

Well, um, it's harder to get published by a publisher these days, but it's easier to get published. Anybody can self publish. I have a, I'm kind of a mixed mixed feelings about self-publishing. I think it's a wonderful thing, uh, in the sense that, uh, if somebody wants to write a book, they can write a book. Uh, I think it's, I think the downside is it may not be as good of a book. Uh, when a book goes to a publisher, as you know, the publisher, uh, takes the editorial phase very seriously. And when someone self-publishes, even if they hire a publisher, it's not going to be to the same intensity. So, so the quality of the book could suffer, could suffer. But if, if somebody has written a book and they want to get it out fast and they want to self-distribute, it's a wonderful option, you know? And uh, I would urge them to hire a publisher, I mean hiring editor and tell that lead editor to go hard on me because they don't want a book out there that 10 years from now they're going to read and say, man, did I not know how to conjugate a verb? Come on. So, you know, that's the blessing of, of, uh, of being published because my editors and any good editorial team is gonna. It's gonna not, they're not gonna let you release a book if it's not passed through the hoops correctly.

Speaker 2 ([31:53](#)):

Well, I don't think we could talk about how God built this with max without saying how did he build your publishing? I mean,

Speaker 3 ([32:02](#)):

you sold 85 bajillion books, I think was the number I read on. How does that happen? Walk me through that story. Yeah, that it is in it and I just shake my head and a lot of times it's okay, I'll give you the kind of, the spiritual answer. And then the practical answer, the spiritual answer is it really is my calling. It really is. I get books, I'm always writing a book. You can see me on the video. I know your listeners cannot. But here it is. This is what I'm working on right now. I always have a notebook in hand that contains the manuscript. I'm relentless. I'm always writing. You know, you're always planning, you're always leading, you're always strategizing. Uh, I'm always thinking about the next book. I can't not write is that simple. I can't not write. There are many things I can stop in a heartbeat.

Speaker 3 ([32:58](#)):

And I have stopped and I'm very grateful to have stopped. But, uh, but I'll always write. I'll always write books. That's just w it's just my calling. Okay. So there's this kind of a spiritual answer, but it's very legit. It's very legit. Uh, the practical answer is, uh, I, I entered the writing world at a good season. Back in the days when bookstores were flourishing and Christian books especially were very, very popular. Publishers were, uh, investing a lot of money in, in developing young authors. And so I just entered in the, I rode the coattails. So Chuck Swindell, Jim Dobson, uh, David, Jeremiah, Tim LaHaye, men like that, who, who led the way back in the mid eighties, creating this desire for good quality, attractive marketed, well marketed books. And I just by God's grace, got on a good team. Uh, and they encircled me and created now what, what we call brand leadership.

Speaker 3 ([34:07](#)):

We created the LA keto brand. Uh, we were the very first publishing. I was the first author in Christian publishing to have a brand team. And that's not because I thought that up. The guys on my team said, you know what? We need to figure out what your brand is. I said, what does a brand a? So they had to tell me, that's your heart message. And so we're going to hold you to that message. And then we're going to build calendar events around your release of a book a year. And then we're going to do children's books. We're going to line them up, and then gifts books. We're gonna line them up and then we're going to get Bibles. Well had you told me that all at once, I would have collapsed like Humpty Dumpty button since we did it gradually and deliberately, we were able to create a calendar whereby we stayed loyal to the brand.

Speaker 3 ([34:57](#)):

And my brand is I write books for people who don't read books. That's it. I write books for people who don't read books, inspirational books and, and we, we create one book a year, one major trade book a year, maybe two children's books a year or at least one and then a couple of, uh, special gift products a year. So it's just like a machine. It's just like a machine every year doing the same thing, running the same play over and over. Same people, same team. And by God's grace, uh, as long as I don't do something stupid, you know, like, well we don't want to imagine it. As long as I don't do something stupid and I just stay faithful to writing what he gives me then, then I think we can continue at this pace for the foreseeable future. Well, it's a

Speaker 2 ([35:46](#)):

clearly a gift and it, it is a book that your books are ones that people read, uh, from all walks. I think. I think my brand, I might write books for people that don't read my, my mother said, okay, I wrote a book on pastoral succession. You're running a book on what I think she thought she's got all 12 copies. What's your, your, your, the favor you've seen, I mean, how many, how many different kinds of churches do you think you've preached in denominational and tribe?

Speaker 3 ([36:24](#)):

That's a great question. I think there's likely not one I've not preached in.

Speaker 2 ([36:30](#)):

Well, I mean, a little known fact. I got a text from max. I live here in Houston and you know, I mean maybe it was a couple of days before Christmas and said, Hey, you want to come to church with me? I'm preaching in your neighborhood and where are you preaching Mac's church of Christ, pastor. Well, I'm preaching at Lakewood. Like probably the only time at church of Christ, an industry was preached at Lakeland. But, but the favor guys put on you through that writing ministry is just amazing. I mean, how it's opened a lot of doors. It's opened a lot of doors. So that does lead to the question. Like, what do you do when you, you know, how do we find the next max look keto for Oak Hills? How does it, how does that work?

Speaker 3 ([37:15](#)):

Well, we call, uh, William Vanderbloemen for one thing.

Speaker 2 ([37:18](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 3 ([37:21](#)):

After I'd been here about 20 years, um, I knew I couldn't continue at the pace of being a senior minister of a church our size, plus write a book a year. And so at that point, um, we found Randy Frazy, who was at that time at Willow Creek in Chicago, and, uh, Randy was very open to the idea of moving to San Antonio and assuming leadership for the church staff. And then he and I would split the preaching. And, uh, so that was my solution to staying at the church. I didn't want to leave preaching, so that was my solution. Randy and I worked great. We did, we had a great partnership for many years. Uh, he, uh, as you know, is now in Kansas city. So when he returned, uh, when he moved back to when he moved to Kansas city, uh, I stepped back in for about two, almost, almost two years.

Speaker 3 ([38:18](#)):

And during those two years is when you and I had many long conversations. Uh, by that point we were, uh, a multisite church of seven campuses. One of them was international. I was 62 at the time. And, uh, what I had to decide was do I want to stay longterm and be senior pastor again over a multi site strategy or is it time for me to, to move in a different direction. You came and you met with leaders from all of our campuses and, um, you gave us some very good advice. Um, you said, I think you would be better served by turning these campuses into churches. And, um, that really resonated with me. Uh, I did not feel like I had the seven or 10 years of ministry in me to, uh, that were, that were needed to take the church into the, the, as it then existed to the next place.

Speaker 3 ([39:19](#)):

Uh, and I did want to keep writing books. Uh, and so we went to our elders and, and said, how does everybody feel about terming these churches? We called it releasing them to independence. And there was unanimous support. We went to the leaders of each campus. It was a long process, but eventually each one of them said, that's the right choice. And so now I'm happy to report what a year and a half, two years into it that, uh, we've gone from seven campuses down to one main church of two campuses. We have a release to independence four campuses, and they're all doing well. They're all doing well. It's really a blessing. In fact, they're, I think they're doing better. Uh, and they, it was time, it was time they cut. I've been 45 instead of 63, I might've said, okay, let's just keep doing this.

Speaker 3 ([40:16](#)):

But, but it was time. And so, uh, that, uh, I don't, I can't quite remember what your question was. Wait, no, no, no, no. This is good. I, you know, we, we've had the chance, you know, I'll do a little bit of training with our new people now and I hope nobody listening has just written that down and said, okay, there's our plan and max did it. So it's a good plan because honestly, it's not the right plan for everybody knew. And, and I think, uh, you know, I was talking to some of our new employees recently and I said, look, 1500 times we've done this, uh, and after 1500 different, uh, situations, you, you know, you've seen one thing, you've seen it all. Let me tell you something, 1500 churches, let me just tell you, if you've seen one church, you've seen about one church, cause they're all different. There's no, if anybody tells you there's a cookie cutter, you need to run away from them. That absolutely is just not the case. There are so many variables. There are, there are. So many of you look at somebody like a Craig Rochelle, the guy's a brilliant leader, just brilliant. Uh, he and max LA keto could not be more different in terms of their skill sets. And so I would never say that every church needs to do what we did or we need to do what Craig's

Speaker 2 ([41:34](#)):

done. So effectively, you know. [inaudible] yeah, that's what you're so good at, William. You come into an environment and you help people assess their story, their, their strengths, their unique makeup. And, uh, and sometimes you just need somebody from the outside giving you some fresh, fresh set of eyes, your way to condom learning as I go. But I'll tell you a verse. The guy keeps calling the mind. The more I do, this is when David said, I am fearfully and wonderfully made. And you know, every single pastors may look different and they grow. I mean, let's go back to your ideal sized church. Just 300 different people thrown together into a family. It's a very different, every single church, very different equation. But, uh, and, and from where we come is very, you know, you heard me say that churches of Christ are fiercely autonomous. Yes.

Speaker 2 ([42:27](#)):

Right? And so it, it, when, when, uh, when I went to our elders and said, Hey, let's become autonomous churches, we get that. We may get that language, make sense, a Methodist background or even Southern bad dismount say no, why would we do that? So, you know, every situation is different. And I think God sovereignties over all of it. And so, uh, understanding the, the, the recipe there, there's not one recipe, there's a variety of ingredients and wise is the, is the leader who comes and looks at what God has given and does his best with them. Well, you've shown that wisdom of friend and uh, I, I so appreciate you taking time to talk to us and tell us a little story of what God did and Oak Hills church. I'm guessing that I had the chance to meet some of the dear people that were there all way back at your beginning time.

Speaker 2 ([43:22](#)):

And I remember asking him, did you ever think you'd see something like this? Oh my goodness. Never know. Didn't ever think gotta to do something like this. And just, and just to clarify, I'm still here. As you know, I'm still on the church staff. I preached about 20 or 22 times a year, but I don't run anything. And so I am one happy camper. Well we have some, we have a great succession plan. I've turned the leadership but the main campus over to Travis seeds, he's just doing a masterful job. A lot more energy, 42 years old, wide eyed, bushy tailed, ready to take the world. And so it's, it's, it's, these are good days for us. That's great. Well max, thanks for making time. I really appreciate you helping us clear up that it's likedo and thank you for what you've done just for more people than you know who read your books.

Speaker 2 ([44:16](#)):

And I mean my kids knew when. So I'm going to see max Lee. Oh, you're going to see Mexico. I read a book, but Mexico. So, but thank you so much for all you've done and uh, I don't think you'll know this side of the river, just how much of a difference you've made. Appreciate. Great. It's a great honor and God bless you and keep up the great work. Thank you. Thanks to all of you for listening. Today we're going to include in the show notes, links to Max's latest work and ways you can read more about him and more things from him. If you're not on that list, go to vendor casts.com and I'll just leave your email address. We won't bug you with other emails, but we'll keep you up to date and I do hope you'll tune in for the regular podcast and then again next month for another episode of how God built it.

Speaker 4 ([45:01](#)):

Yes,

Speaker 1 ([45:03](#)):

at Vanderbloemen, we help churches, schools, nonprofits, and values based businesses build their best teams by helping them find their key staff. If you're looking to hire your next team member or build a succession plan, email me@hollyatvanderbloemen.com or give me a call at (713) 300-9665 we look forward to serving you.