

- Joe White: [00:00](#) You know, I tell our team, when tragedy strikes, whatever it is, losing a leg or whatever, that our greatest days are ahead. God's going to use this amputation of whatever, finances, or staff, or reputation, or whatever happens. Things happen. Jesus said, in this role, you'll find tribulation. And it is. It's hard to do ministry. Darn, it's hard to do ministry. But your greatest days are ahead. When there's a tragedy, you never quit. You never quit. Your greatest days are ahead.
- Holly Tate: [00:47](#) Welcome to the Vanderbloemen Leadership Podcast. I'm your host, Holly Tate, Vice President of Business Development here at Vanderbloemen. Today, we're bringing you our once a month series called How God Built This, where we talk with Christian leaders, and simply found out the ways that God has moved in their life to build their ministry.
- Holly Tate: [01:06](#) But before we get too far along, we want to give a big shout-out, today's sponsor of the Vanderbloemen leadership Podcast, Remodel Health. Remodel Health is the benefits platform that takes care of your team, using innovative technology, their team of insurance experts, they walk alongside you and your staff to help you navigate the complex healthcare world, and provide a benefit solution that serves your team's unique ministry needs. Get a free quote today at remodelhealth.com/vanderbloemen. That's remodelhealth.com/vanderbloemen.
- Holly Tate: [01:38](#) We also want to thank the team at Twelve:Thirty Media who produced today's episode. Twelve:Thirty Media can help you transform the worship experiences at your church, so check them out today at twelvethirty.media.
- Holly Tate: [01:50](#) Now, on today's How God Built This episode of the Vanderbloemen Leadership Podcast, William Vanderbloemen, our founder and CEO talks with Joe White, who is the President and CEO of Kanakuk Ministries. William and Joe talk about the early days of Kanakuk, and the formation of the camp. Joe shares his insight on leadership, how the Lord led them through difficult challenges in the early years of the camp, and the importance of finding the balance between work and family.
- Holly Tate: [02:18](#) So Tweet your takeaways from today's show using the #vandercast, and make sure you check out today's show notes to join our Facebook group, where we post behind the scenes content. We'll even post today's show notes in the Facebook group so you can learn there about how you can sponsor a scholarship for a child to attend Camp Kanakuk.

- Holly Tate: [02:37](#) Without further ado, here's William's conversation with Joe White.
- William V.: [02:46](#) Well, thank you everybody for coming back and joining us again for another episode of How God Built This. If you've been with us, you were with us when we heard Beth Moore tell her story of how God built Living Proof Ministries, and you're going to hear great things, like how God built this new app called YouVersion, that's the Bible that everyone on the planet, including the Pope, uses. And today, we're talking to arguably the best Christian camp in the country, Kanakuk, and Joe White, who is just a legend, at least in my house he's a legend, and I think our whole office wants to sit in on this call, Joe, thank you so much for being a part of this and being willing to visit with us.
- Joe White: [03:21](#) I appreciate it, William, and it's humbling, and I'm grateful to be a part of your ministry, and I'm thankful for every listener here, and pray that just one little tidbit of something that we might talk about would encourage somebody who is listening today.
- William V.: [03:42](#) Well, thank you so much. And for those who don't know, Kanakuk is a camp that is many locations now, but it really started in 1926, and that wasn't Joe that started it, but your family got involved after a number of years. Walk us through how that all started.
- Joe White: [04:01](#) Yes, sir. Our home flagship little spot here, we call it K1 now, was founded actually by a Dallas man named C.L. Ford in 1926. He found this very remote 30 acre patch of land on Lake Taneycomo in Southwest Missouri, which is now Branson, Missouri, which is a large tourist area. At that time, it was just a place in the woods. But he would put his Dallas kids on a train, and he would train them, and we're talking maybe 30 or 40 kids, to Hollister, Missouri, which is where Missouri Pacific Railroad ended, and it was just a little spot next to Branson. The kids would get off the train, and walk to the river, which was Lake Taneycomo, and they would ride a riverboat down to this remote property. And the boys would spend eight weeks hiking, and fishing, and swimming in the lake. Very remote.
- Joe White: [05:19](#) Then in 1932, a visionary named Bill Lance, who was a pied piper, indeed, took the camp, and he built it for the next 20 years. And in those 20 years of Uncle Bill, we called him Uncle Bill, in the years of C.L. Ford, we grew so fast that we got up to 80 boys in 30 years. That's how fast we grew.
- William V.: [05:51](#) That's good work.

Joe White: [05:52](#) You go to Kanakuk today, and they're like, "Wow! 30,000 kids and staff, that's a lot of folks and kids." Different adventures, [inaudible 00:06:02], and travel camps, and all this stuff. But we grew up with very, very, very humble beginnings. It was in those humble beginnings that I was able to grow up. Uncle Bill selected my dad to succeed him, and daddy, we had nothing, and daddy bought the camp over 30 years for I think \$60,000.

William V.: [06:31](#) Wow.

Joe White: [06:31](#) It was over 30 years because we had nothing, and Uncle Bill had nothing, and nobody cared in those days. So daddy built the camp from '56 until the mid-70s, and he thought he was going to retire, but anyway, Debbie-Jo and I began to buy the camp over a long period from mom and dad, because [inaudible 00:06:58]. So we began to kind of vision of the camps running. That was, what, 40 years ago, I guess.

William V.: [07:11](#) Wow.

Joe White: [07:11](#) And by the grace of God, daddy stayed on board to build, because the Lord willing, reach every kid in the world, and we were just so passionate about kids. I just hate seeing lost kids. Lost kids break my heart, they literally ... every lost kid I see breaks my heart. I want to take them in, begin to disciple them, and train them, and raise them. I just want to adopt the all, literally. So the Lord blessed our hunger for lost kids, so today, we have 2400 summer staff, and the precious people from 330-something colleges around the country, then we have 25,000-or-so kids. Several thousands are inner city kids, hundreds are kids whose fathers have been hurt or lost in service for our country, local folks, and we've got really very wealthy people, and very, very, very poor people, and nobody cares. When you got [inaudible 00:08:19], nobody who cares who's got money or not, there's just a bunch of kids getting to know Jesus.

William V.: [08:27](#) Let me back up just a second. So in '26, the camp starts, in '76, you and Debbie-Jo start to purchase the camp over a long period of time. About how many kids, I mean, just rough guess, were there in 1976 that were coming?

Joe White: [08:43](#) We had one camp, and we were probably working with, I'm going to guess we were probably working with 800 or 900 kids at that time, I think.

William V.: [08:56](#) So the first 50 years, you go from zero to 800 or 900?

Joe White: [09:02](#) Yes.

William V.: [09:03](#) And the last 40, it's gone a little fast. I think that, see, to me, as a guy who started a small business, when it was just me, when I just hoped somebody would hire me to help them find their pastor, and it was me and my dog, it took a long time to get momentum, and I was really discouraged by that. But it seems like the more I talk to people where God has built something really great, you ask them, "How did you get to be the overnight success?" And they say, "Well, it was the first 30 years." Like, it moves slower than we want.

Joe White: [09:35](#) You've got to appreciate beans and cornbread if you're going to appreciate steak. Those of us who grew up with beans and cornbread, and still to this day it's my favorite meal, it is, pinto beans and corn bread is my favorite meal [crosstalk 00:09:51]-

William V.: [09:51](#) That's our New Year's Day every year. Black eyed peas.

Joe White: [09:55](#) But we're thankful that we had beans and cornbread. But you know, Jesus has ... I guess, the statement of Jesus' heart for vision-builders, and I'm thinking the Book of Luke Chapter 9, I may be wrong, but He laid down a principle for vision-builders, and He said, "If you want to do bigger things, then do well in the small things." And He said it in various ways throughout His ministry. But guys come to me all the time, and you know, "I want to get big, and I want to speak to 1000 people, and I want to have this giant camp, and this giant ... " And I'm like, "Great. Who are you discipling today?"

William V.: [10:42](#) Wow.

Joe White: [10:44](#) "Who'd you share Christ with today?"

William V.: [10:46](#) Wow.

Joe White: [10:47](#) And usually it's nobody. "What poor, helpless person on the side of the road did you feed today?" Their eyes grow vacant 99% of the time, and you know that they're not going anywhere. But you find the woman or the man who does the little things really well, I mean, they get on an elevator, and they're sharing Christ with that person, or at least they're sharing the love of Christ with that person, that person, God's going to bless with more talents, and they're going to accomplish much.

William V.: [11:26](#) Don't despise the small things, right?
HOW GOD BUILT THIS (Completed 11/01/19)
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- Joe White: [11:30](#) Absolutely. Absolutely. One starving person has got to be vitally important to a person who wants to create a vision, whether starving for the gospel or starving for food. It's got to matter greatly.
- William V.: [11:45](#) That's so good. I'm sure you know, our friend Amy Stanley says, "Do for one what you wish you could do for everyone."
- Joe White: [11:57](#) Yeah, that's a good play [inaudible 00:11:57].
- William V.: [11:57](#) Yeah. So you take the thing in 1976, you and Debbie-Jo, about where were y'all in your life stage? How old were y'all? And were there kids? What was going on in '76?
- Joe White: [12:09](#) Well, what was going on was a bunch of crazy young fools that knew nothing about ... My daddy made the greatest comment towards me when I was 23, because I felt like the camps needed to become a lot more evangelical in nature, and the culture was beginning to change from the old traditional church on Sunday, which those people were fabulous people, fabulous people of the faith in the days of my dad, but they just didn't talk about their faith very much, most folks didn't. And that was great in that day, but as the challenges of growing up had increased, so has the need for deeper roots in your faith.
- Joe White: [13:02](#) So we were changing staff, we were changing where we were going, we were changing the mindset of the folks, and daddy, my daddy was the greatest guy. He was a World War II Navy man, and he taught hand-to-hand combat. He was just the greatest guy. He was very tough on the outside, and very soft on the inside. But he looked at me one day with those steely green eyes, and he said, "Boy," he said, "you got a lot more confidence than you have skill." And it was so well-said. I didn't resent it, and I don't now.
- Joe White: [13:40](#) But anyway, when God has a vision in you, it doesn't matter who's there, God's going to accomplish His vision. And Debbie-Jo and I just happened to be there. We were young, and dumb, in our early 20s, and it was a 40 year hurricane that followed.
- William V.: [14:01](#) Did you guys have kids at the time?
- Joe White: [14:04](#) Well, we didn't when we started, but then one, two, three, four kids came along. And my wife was thinking two children, and she looked at me when number four became a reality, and she said, "It's your fault!" Yeah, and she was right. I mean, we were going so hard, 12, 16 hours a day, and then some days longer,

but we were going so hard, and not because we wanted to, but we were drowning. We were always in debt, we were always drowning. But there were so many kids that wanted to go to our camps, and we had this vision for inner city camps, which we were building at the same time, which was just a whole nother wonderful story.

Joe White: [15:04](#) But we were drowning, we were failing all the time, and we were the marketing team, and we were the IT team, although we didn't have any IT, it was all on paper in those days. My mom would help with accounting, she was great with staying on board and helping with accounting. Daddy was out building. It was just kind of a home, mom-and-pop shop. But we were killing ourselves.

Joe White: [15:33](#) For about a third of the year, our kids got leftovers, and that was not good.

William V.: [15:42](#) Wow.

Joe White: [15:43](#) Honestly, that was not good. It was hard for us, it was hard for the kids. But two thirds of the year, we learned how to make time valuable with the kids. I look back, and there's regrets that we didn't have more time, but I'm thankful that we set some real clear specific spiritual goals, and clear quality time goals. That's the only way a person in ministry can survive, if they develop goals for their children. [crosstalk 00:16:19]

William V.: [16:21](#) I think that's particularly true among people who are trying to build a new ministry, or a new church, or a new camp. Because from the outside looking it, it looks like, "Oh, Kanakuk Camp, that must have been so fun to build." But man, people ask me all the time, "Would you like to go back to the early days of your company?" And I said, "About as much as I'd like to go back to being a middle-schooler. I mean, not really. It's a lot of work."

William V.: [16:50](#) Adrienne and I got out of balance. How much do I spend on the road? And I know camp people have to go out on the road, not during the summer. What did you learn in terms of those clear parameters for time management that maybe a young person who's trying to start something now could learn?

Joe White: [17:08](#) Well, you know, a man or woman who is going to invest in anything has got to have clear cut goals, and they've got to be written, and they've got to be specific, and they've got to be timely. Dr. Hendricks is one of my mentors, Howard Hendricks, Dallas Theological Seminary. He said, "A family that fails to plan,

plans to fail." And I had a goal that every single night, and if young men and young women are listening, you can write down the word every, wherever you are, it's just five letters, it's easy to write down, and then you can tether anything to that word you want to, but I will tell you, that word will shape your future, especially if you want to be a family man or a family woman.

Joe White: [18:00](#) But I wrote down a goal, and thank God that I did, because life was so crazy in those days. Still is, actually. But I said, by the grace of God, every single night, and there were virtually no exceptions, that I would lay by the kids, tuck them in bed, spend whatever time they needed, and we'd memorize scripture together. You know, I'm not an academic guy, and my kids weren't, but memorizing scripture with your kids in a relational way, because those late night times were completely their time, and it was completely listening to their hearts.

Joe White: [18:49](#) I never corrected them, I never criticized them in the late night times. It was all, "How you doing? Tell me how your day was, buddy. How can I pray for you? I just want you to know how much I love you, and how proud I am to be your dad." I mean, it was all relational time, because the relationship in parenting is everything.

Joe White: [19:13](#) But then, before we'd say goodnight, I would memorize the next Bible verse with them. And over the years, they'd memorize chapters of books in the Bible. Not to boast about, but that would be the guard over their hearts, and it gave us a base for a great friendship. My two boys are my best friends, to this day. Then the next morning, if I was home, and about 236 nights a year I was home, so I had 236 opportunities to lay by the kids, and I took all of them. Then the next morning, I wasn't traveling, I wasn't camping, I'd cook breakfast for the kids, and I would take a devotional out of the Proverbs, and we would end up going through the Proverbs several times, just a few verses at a time. We would have devotionals at the breakfast table. And no matter what would happen throughout the ... Go ahead.

William V.: [20:20](#) No, I was just going to say, I'm doing the math in my head, that means there were probably 130 nights a year, or somewhere around that, 129, that you aren't able to be near family. What did you and your wife learn over the years to do to stay close during those times you were apart? Because that hits everybody who's building a ministry.

Joe White: [20:40](#) Well, it was horrible. I hated it.

- William V.: [20:42](#) Well, you didn't just FaceTime.
- Joe White: [20:46](#) Honestly. Yeah, we didn't have FaceTime. It was horrible. One night, I came home, and I had been on the road for three weeks or so, recruiting staff, and my little girl, she was probably, I don't know, four, she walked in the bedroom the next morning, and she looked at me in horror, and she was like, "Who's in bed with Mommy?"
- William V.: [21:09](#) Oh wow.
- Joe White: [21:11](#) I think back about it, and it was horrible. When I'd leave home, I'd look in the rear-view mirror in my car, and I'd just weep, and I wouldn't be able to see them for a week, or two, or three. But we were drowning, drowning in a dream, and drowning in debt. There was no looking back.
- William V.: [21:40](#) Was there a time in there during the drowning times where you wondered if it would make it?
- Joe White: [21:47](#) Oh boy, we had been praying to get out of debt. You know, the camping ministry, in the summer, you're rich, in the winter, you're at the bank for larger amounts of money than the bank even wants to look at you to talk about. So in the middle of the winter, we're like farmers. You know, you buy the seed in the winter and you harvest in the summertime. But oh my gosh, yeah, we started off in debt. The first thing we did was borrow money. And I don't necessarily recommend that, it's just a way of life for us, so we were paying back for the next 40 years. It was crazy.
- William V.: [22:32](#) I imagine that along that time, there's got to be more than a couple stories of the Lord providing a ram in the thicket at the last minute.
- Joe White: [22:42](#) Let me tell you.
- William V.: [22:43](#) Can you tell us one of those stories? Is there one that comes to mind?
- Joe White: [22:45](#) Well, the first camp we built was the most challenging, because we didn't have any people resources. We didn't have any money to pay anybody. Our first year-round staff was one person. It was us, and one person. We were hanging paper with one arm on the walls. Then we built this camp, and we had to have 900-something kids go up, and we had to double our

population in one year to survive, then we had to double our staff in one year to survive.

Joe White: [23:25](#) As the buses rolled in the gate, I was out in the football field picking rocks with an axe, with a rock axe, and then I was painting the trash barrels.

William V.: [23:36](#) Oh wow.

Joe White: [23:37](#) I saw the buses roll in the gate, and we had three leadership guys that summer, we were the dock daddies, the waterfront directors, the sports camp directors, we were program directors, we were special program directors, we were party managers. The three of us had to do the whole thing.

William V.: [23:59](#) Yeah, other duties as necessary.

Joe White: [24:01](#) The planning, scheduling all night, it was insane. Yeah, so we were just fighting a war. By the grace of kid, like the camp, we started an inner city ministry. We had our first group of city kids come in, then we had a retreat ministry the day that ended. And honestly, we were seeing blood in our eyes. It was just crazy.

William V.: [24:31](#) But did you get the 900 campers that year?

Joe White: [24:34](#) You know, we did. I mean, we traveled a good share of the winter, and talking to anybody who had ears to listen. In those days, there wasn't a social media advantage, it was all face-to-face. My poor wife, the day we got married, we left on a 45-day recruiting trip, two on Saturday, two on Sunday, seven nights a week.

William V.: [25:03](#) Wow.

Joe White: [25:03](#) Literally, the next day after we said, "I do," we start off recruiting.

William V.: [25:07](#) What kept y'all going in the middle of that? I mean, that's crazy.

Joe White: [25:12](#) Well, she was just a woman of her word. I'm sure she wanted to kill me. [inaudible 00:25:18] one time if she ever wanted to divorce me, and she said, "Divorce, no. Murder, yes." There was nothing but love for each other, and she's called to the mission as I am.

William V.: [25:36](#) Wow. And a lot of cornbread and beans.

- Joe White: [25:40](#) We enjoy our cornbread.
- William V.: [25:42](#) So you set out to reach every kid on the plant, which I love that kind of goal. Only a Texan can come up with that big a goal. That's awesome. So you start purchasing the camp in 1976, looks to me, just looking at your timeline, like you started to get some traction. When did things start to pick up? And what were some of the unforeseen challenges you saw as momentum started to build?
- Joe White: [26:08](#) Well, consistently hiring quality staff, I mean, when it takes 2400 young men and women to run a ministry that cares deeply, deeply, deeply about every child and every staff member that comes. Obviously there's flaws along the way, that many people, there's going to be flaws along the way, which is horrible when there's a flaw. It's horrible. But just doing all the background checks, and all the face to face interviews, and all the ... you know, we knew more about our staff than their mother knows about them. But just digging deeply. I guess we've had 75,000 staff now-
- William V.: [27:01](#) Oh my goodness.
- Joe White: [27:01](#) ... over the years, and 99.9% of them you would select for your best friends, by the grace of God. But you know, one-tenth of 1%, or 1%, measure it, but they'll almost sink the ship.
- William V.: [27:24](#) Well, a little leaven will leaven the whole lump when you're talking about kids' ministries.
- Joe White: [27:29](#) Yes, sir. Yes, sir. [crosstalk 00:27:31] over the years.
- William V.: [27:33](#) So I mean, every camp owner director I know who's been at it any amount of time has had ... I mean, because you can't keep sinners from being sinners, and you can't keep ... it doesn't matter how many background checks you do, there's going to be, until Jesus returns, there's going to be a mess-up every now and then. Have y'all had to deal with that? And how have you dealt with it? More importantly, what can people learn from what you've learned?
- Joe White: [27:59](#) Well, you cannot do enough about people's safety. We just had a meeting with our safety team, our safety team is about 20 full-time men and women that are devoted to safety, in addition to the other jobs they do. Some of them, all they do is safety. They were talking about the grace of God that camps, and this camp's

in the top 2% of safety of all institutions in America, and that's from the insurance company's perspective.

William V.: [28:41](#) Wow.

Joe White: [28:43](#) There's no pride in that, but if a ministry will devote a chunk of their resources to nothing but safety, and if a ministry will do whatever it takes, whatever it takes to make sure that staff members are safe, and the kids you work with are safe, and the church members are safe, and the pastor's team is safe, and whoever you're working with is safe, there's still occasionally going to be a leak in the barrel, and you've got to make the hard call.

Joe White: [29:28](#) But like by the grace of God, our safety team goes out and trains camps all over America, and churches all over America in how to make camps safe for kids. It's just learning over the decades, a tip here, a tip there. Then every day in the staff meetings, every day, our staff has to go through exhaustive safety training, and then every day, literally every day, we have a piece of safety training all summer long. You just can't do enough for safety, you can't.

William V.: [30:10](#) Let me ... I may be poking a little bit too deep here, but I know when my son went there, we heard about Kanakuk through word of mouth, and I would imagine like churches or anything else, no matter how much marketing you do or social media, it's still word of mouth is the number one way people end up at your camp. So what do you do when a bad piece of press comes out? You know, you have the nightmare PR issue? Because we have churches left and right, I think it might be worse now that there's instant connectivity and social media and such, where the scandals, or the things that break that are just a nightmare from a PR standpoint, they're more magnified than ever. I'm constantly trying to learn from people who have had to be down that road. Like, surely you've had to face a PR nightmare. What have you learned that you would tell other leaders about, when you find out something's gone wrong, you need to do x, y, and z? Does that make sense?

Joe White: [31:04](#) Well, like a surgeon, you have to cut out the cancer, whatever it is, and you have to cut it out completely. Then, there's so many principles in scripture about how to use trials, and how to bounce back from trials, and my favorite is 2 Corinthians 1:4, where scripture says that God will give you bravery in your affliction so that you can go give bravery to others who are afflicted by the same affliction you've been afflicted. So our

flaws have become our passion. And obviously, we have 75,000 staff over the years, there have been flaws, but our flaws have become our passion. Creating a zone for camper safety across America has been our passion. It's just God's grace.

Joe White: [32:13](#) The other thing besides making your flaws your passions for the good of others, is if a ministry of any kind that has a challenge of any kind, like I just got my leg amputated, and I consider it a great stepping stone into the future.

William V.: [32:39](#) Wow.

Joe White: [32:39](#) You know, as hard as it is to be a one-legged man, it's incredible to know that God is going to use this loss of a leg to step into whatever future has for us. David said in Psalms 118:5, I believe, he said, "In my distress, I cried out to the Lord, and He answered me, and He set me in a very large place." William, I don't know what David's large place was, but for us, losing a leg, the Lord's place is to be able to be more intimately, and more warmly connected to people in crisis.

William V.: [33:29](#) Wow.

Joe White: [33:30](#) I mean, it's been a great avenue, great new avenue. So there's no affliction, as Bethany Hamilton says, "I wouldn't take my arm back if I could, because God turns our trials into adventures."

William V.: [33:45](#) What happened to your leg?

Joe White: [33:49](#) Oh, it was a circulation issue, and then an infection, that eventually ended up in an amputation.

William V.: [33:50](#) So totally-

Joe White: [33:55](#) But I haven't been ... I mean, there's been pain, but I've not been sad once. I mean, I've cried from the pain, a lot. There's been months of pain. But I've not been sad or despaired, or, "Why God," or any of that stuff. I just ... And it goes back into your question, what happens when tragedy strikes in ministry? My advice is to stick to your mission. You know, I tell our team, when tragedy strikes, whatever it is, losing a leg or whatever, that our greatest days are ahead. God's going to use this amputation of whatever, finances, or staff, or reputation, or whatever happens. Things happen. Jesus said, in this role, you'll find tribulation. And it is. It's hard to ministry. Darn, it's hard to do ministry. But your greatest days are ahead. When there's a

tragedy, never quit. You never quit; your greatest days are ahead, whatever happens to you.

William V.: [35:04](#) So good. That is so good. And I'll be praying that God uses that amputation to put you in an even bigger place than you can see right now. So the ministry grew. I mean, was there a time in the ministry of the camp where things really took off? Was it in the 70s or the 80s? Or was it just steady momentum all the way through?

Joe White: [35:31](#) Yeah, you know, as soon as I finished college, I started a Young Life Club in College Station, Texas, which is where I lived and coached football for [inaudible 00:35:42] for a short period of time.

William V.: [35:44](#) Somebody told me, our COO told me that Jesus is coming to Israel first, and then to College Station.

Joe White: [35:53](#) There are those who believe that. He's probably not. But we started Young Life Club, and there was one girl, I'll never forget her, I don't even know her name, she was lost as she could be in the hallways of that small high school where we started this young life club, and she broke my heart every day when I'd be doing work in kids, and bringing the club, and going to football games. I'd see this girl, and she was so lost, and she was not living well. That broken heart has prevailed through this day. My heart is still broken in two for a lost kid.

Joe White: [36:45](#) So it doesn't matter, if your heart's broken for a lost child, or a hurt child, it doesn't matter if there's 30,000 or one.

William V.: [36:57](#) Wow.

Joe White: [36:57](#) It doesn't matter.

William V.: [36:59](#) Wow.

Joe White: [36:59](#) You're still doing everything you can for that child, or those children, and all you can is all you can do. You're filling your cup. I love Psalm 16, you know, "Your lines have fallen on me in pleasant places; indeed, Lord, you support my lot." So if my lot is one kid, and there have been times that our clubs, ministries that we do might have a handful of kids, and that's it, and man, we do everything we can to make those handful of kids feel like the most important kids in the world. Again, it took us 30-something years to get past 80 kids in our ministry, so the size is for hats, it just doesn't matter.

- William V.: [37:54](#) Wow, wow. Well, that is gold for somebody that's sitting out there worried about the numbers. It just reminds me of the heart of Jesus, and the shepherd that would leave the 99 for the one. That's so good. As the ministry grew, though, I do know you're a visionary, God's used you to see before others see, and to believe before others believed about the camp, and if you go to the Kanakuk website and just look at the history, it's pretty amazing. So entrepreneurs who see before others see sometimes commit to crazy ideas before everybody else is onboard, like, "Yeah, we can do that," and the rest of the staff says, "Oh my gosh, is he crazy?" I mean, my staff does that to me all the time. Does that ever happen to you? I'd love to hear a story if there is one.
- Joe White: [38:50](#) Well, most recently, as a matter of fact, you know, it's more difficult to turn a big ship than a small boat, but every employee in this organization full-time for sure, because I know them all, are thrilled to have the job they have, and we're all thrilled to be a part of each other's lives. So even there, turning a large ship is difficult. But I decided, and it's not me, it never has been me, it's always been the inspiration from the Lord, but through His inspiration, I decided ... and you know, when you're CEO, or chairman, or whatever, there's things you've got to decide. If you know they're right, Biblically correct, then you know you have to stand for what you're called to do.
- Joe White: [39:58](#) I decided that we were going to disciple every kid year-round.
- William V.: [40:02](#) Oh, wow.
- Joe White: [40:06](#) It began with one young man that I was counseling who was involved in porn, and he was 15 years old, and I said, "Can I get on the phone with you every single night this year?" And he said, "Would you?" And I said, "Absolutely." So I found five other guys, and they were all in need of a mentor, a shepherd in their lives. Various stories, fatherlessness, and difficulties.
- Joe White: [40:33](#) So we started a conference call once a week, and I've written Bible studies for discipleship stuff, and so we started doing discipleship studies. And there were multiplication studies, not just that I discipled my men, but that my men would disciple me one day. It was so rich, and so wonderful, and the Lord was saying, clearly, every camper needs to be in this kind of a setting, all year long. You can't have the camp high, and let them go home and fail.

Joe White: [41:05](#) So right now, there are thousands, I mean thousands, there's thousands of kids signed up, and probably, I'm just totally guessing now, a thousand staff, 600, 800 staff on who are signed up to lead these groups. Well, it's taken five very challenging years, with some difficult conversations along the way to get the whole company to buy in. Well, ow the company's bought in, because disciple-making is the Lord's heart. It's what Jesus did, it's what He died for, that men would become disciples of men, and women become disciples of women, that would make disciples, that'd make disciples, who'd make disciples. It was His heart. And it was the Great Commission, by the way.

Joe White: [41:53](#) So yes, William, that was a challenging [inaudible 00:41:57] to do, but it was the right thing to do.

William V.: [41:59](#) Yeah, and that was just-

Joe White: [42:01](#) So we're in full swing right now.

William V.: [42:03](#) That's awesome. And that was just five years ago.

Joe White: [42:06](#) Yes, yes.

William V.: [42:07](#) That's amazing. And there's a-

Joe White: [42:08](#) We had one group; we have hundreds of groups now.

William V.: [42:13](#) Wow, wow. That's awesome. An immediate takeaway for me, as a guy who's still trying to figure out how to lead a company is the days of crazy ideas from God don't go away. At least you hope they don't. It doesn't matter if it's five years into your run, you ought to still, if God's telling you to do it, just run with it. I mean, is that a fair ... Have you seen that over the years in the way God's spoken to you?

Joe White: [42:41](#) Truly. And Dr. Hendricks also said, "You get one good idea out of 99, well that means you got to ... " No, no, he said one out of 20. I think he said one out of 20. But whether it's 99 or 20, if you're only going to get one, you've got to try a lot of stuff to make something that works.

Joe White: [43:02](#) But William, it's not only my vision, but what I love, what I love, is when men and women on our team vision, and sometimes it's a 20-something, sometimes it's a 30-something, doesn't matter their age, in fact God often spoke to younger folks more than the older folks, actually, and so when a younger person on our

team comes to me with a vision, I turn the green light on immediately. I'm like, "Let's figure out how to do that." So we'll run together, until we run into a wall, or until the door is opened. Then that person enjoys being a visionary, and watching their vision come true, and I'm behind that 100,000%.

Joe White: [43:51](#) I think a lot of visionaries are very self-focused that they have to be the visionary, and that's really, really sad.

William V.: [44:00](#) Wow. Well, it limits. It just limits.

Joe White: [44:08](#) It does, it does. And it causes divisiveness on the team.

William V.: [44:10](#) Absolutely, absolutely. You know, Joe, if we're sitting here, we're living in an age right now in America where, even outside the church, there's a startup fever, a lot of people want to go start a company. A lot of people that would've done student ministry 15 years ago want to go plant a church. It's a cool thing to watch. But you got a lot of people sitting around saying, "Maybe I'll start something," or maybe they've just started something, so I'd love for you to speak to one person right now, and that's the person, young woman or man that God has called to start a ministry, and they've gotten going, and they're not sure if it's going to happen or not. Speak from your experience, and what you wish you's have known when you were older. What would you say to that person right now?

Joe White: [44:55](#) Well, you know, I really hate to be a broken record, but going back to the heart of our savior, if you're doing well completing whatever your on now, if you have one young man in your life, and you're doing a thorough job discipling that young man ... and by the way, folks, paradise is anywhere on earth that you are, and you've got a Bible, and you've got some younger women or younger men with you, and you're discipling them, it's paradise.

Joe White: [45:40](#) My Sunday night phone call, now we're on year six with these five young men, now they're in college.

William V.: [45:47](#) You're still doing-

Joe White: [45:48](#) Paradise. Absolutely.

William V.: [45:51](#) Wow.

Joe White: [45:52](#) Absolutely. Yeah, we've taken on a couple others. To get in our group, you have to have a little bit of a history behind you of

difficulties. I won't go into details, but our group of guys have all had challenges in their life, and now they're just the biggest followers of Christ, givers in your life.

Joe White: [46:13](#) But if you're doing well what you're doing now, it's like looking at an archery target, which is what a visionary has got to do. And that center circle is yellow, it's worth nine points. If an arrow hits it, it's worth nine points. Well, that's Judea, and that's Jerusalem of Acts 1:8, and you've got to do that nine point well. If it's one child or if it's six. Then if you do it well and the Lord opens up the red space that's worth seven points, which is a little bit larger, then complete that well. Don't dream about the blue, it's worth five points, until the red is going exceedingly well. And if the red's going well, then dream the blue, and then the black, and then the white, and then the off-target.

Joe White: [47:13](#) But the visionary who goes out there and does crazy things in those outer circles, and who's really not taking care of the home base, then he's probably destined to fail.

William V.: [47:23](#) Wow. That's worth the whole podcast right there. Amazing advice. Tell us, Joe, you've been so kind with your time. I'd love to hear just a second or two, you're not stopping. God's still speaking, God's still giving you ideas. It appears to me like you're not very good at sitting still. So what's God leading you to? What's the future for Kanakuk? And if you would, tell us a little, how do you figure out what happens for 50 years at Kanakuk? Tell us about the future that you see.

Joe White: [47:58](#) Well, you know, the Lord never did it that way with me. It was always the next step. He probably thought I couldn't handle a bigger vision, and probably thought it would've scared me to death, which it would have, literally. So it was always the next step, taking care of kids, taking care of kids, taking care of kids, finding the lost, discipling the saints. But yeah, fortunately, and I'm so blessed, even though one leg is a lot shorter than the other one, if I tried to walk, I'd fall over, I still love this team, and the team still loves me, and we're still dreaming dreams together, and really bringing exciting fun dreams together.

Joe White: [48:48](#) We started camp in Lebanon a couple years ago, and are working with a camping outreach in Cairo, and working in the Caribbean with some folks. And man, just the world is large, and lost kids are everywhere. Billy Graham said, "I read nothing in scripture about retirement." And I completely agree. And I'm not trying to continue to own it and run it, I want these younger

men and women to just excel, and to lead, and to grow, and to climb their own mountains, and to help them climb the mountains. That's what I want.

- Joe White: [49:44](#) But whether they're taking the lead rope, or I'm assisting them, it doesn't matter. The lost are everywhere, we've got to reach them.
- William V.: [49:56](#) Wow. Wow, so good. I so appreciate you taking time for us, Joe. We'll be praying for you, and for Kanakuk, and that one more kid gets reached this year. Thank you so much for taking the time.
- Joe White: [50:12](#) Yeah, thank you. One more kid, that's our goal.
- William V.: [50:15](#) Well, thank you for tuning in, and if you would like to get the show notes, or if you'd like to hear more about Kanakuk, if you've got a kid, you need to know about Kanakuk, if you know a lost kid, you need to scholarship them to Kanakuk, and so we're going to send you notes. If you go to vanderblast.com and give us your email address, we will make sure that you get not only the notes from today, but also a sneak preview of some of the people that are coming up on the show in the months to come.
- William V.: [50:39](#) So Joe, God bless you, thank you so much for making time.
- Joe White: [50:44](#) Yeah, truly. And with that plug, I just want you to know that over 1000 of our kids come on scholarships, and all 7000 of these inner city kids come on scholarship, so we don't turn people away because of finances.
- William V.: [50:59](#) Wow, so good. Thanks so much, and thank you to everybody for listening.
- Holly Tate: [51:06](#) Thanks for listening to today's episode. The Vanderbloemen Leadership Podcast is produced by our friends at Twelve:Thirty Media. From ready to use worship media content, to custom media built from scratch for your church, to training for your staff and volunteers, Twelve:Thirty Media can help you transform the worship experiences at your church. Check them out today at twelvethirty.media. That's twelvethirty.media.
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