



THE PASTOR'S VOICE

Insights from Church Leaders

The Pastor's Voice Podcast: Episode 14

Transcript: Just One Chapter A Day

Reuel Sample: Tom Vander Well, welcome to The Pastor's Voice. Good to have you here.

Tom Vander Well: Reuel it's so great to be here. Thanks so much for reaching out to me.

Reuel Sample: Tell us about your ministry, both your daily podcasts and your local gathering of Jesus followers as you call them.

Tom Vander Well: Yes. It started, actually, oh gosh, 20 years ago, right around the turn of the century. I had a friend and we were both in leadership among the church that I was going to at that point in Waukee, Iowa. And he just in conversation that Sunday morning, he mentioned to me that, you know what? I don't I just I'm not in the word enough. I don't read my Bible like I should, and I feel bad about it. I just haven't troubling. I'm having trouble with discipline. So I looked to him and I said, You know what cellular plan are you on? Because in those days it mattered. If you were on the same plan, you could talk free. But if you're a different plans, it costs you money. And he was like named it, and it was happened to be the same plan that I was on. And I said, Look, I know you're a sales guy who got a lot of windshield time. I'm on the road for business a lot. I get a lot of windshield time. So let's do this. I'll pick one chapter. We'll take a book of the Bible, take one chapter and we'll each just read the chapter every day at some point. It'll only take us a couple of minutes and then you call me or I

call you. We just let's keep it loose and informal whenever it works. And we'll just talk about what did we get out of the chapter that day? Well, we started doing that, and pretty soon he and I were talking for hours when we were on business trips and we became best of friends. But it really became a way for both of us to spend some time in God's word and grow our relationship in 2006.

Reuel Sample: Did you do you still do that today? Do you still call him every day with that?

Tom Vander Well: You know what? We still do talk literally almost every day unless one of us, you know, is busy or something. So we're going to try and have a lot of grace with it. But what has happened is in 2006, I said, Well, this gosh, this whole blogging thing is kind of new. So what I'll do is I'll just I'll write down and blog my thoughts on the chapter. And then my buddy Kevin can either add his thoughts or we can chat about it when we talk during the day. But what's kind of happened is the blog has kind of been the space that we talk about the scripture. We talk about things related to the chapter every day. And then we still talk every day. But we develop such a deep relationship that we tend to go a deep dive immediately into each other's lives. And that's kind of so. The blog has continued since 2006, every day, every weekday. I try and blog a chapter and I've been through. I think I've been through the Old Testament twice, and I think we're on the fourth or fifth time through the New Testament.

Reuel Sample: What has been your favorite book, if you've had one, what has been your favorite one to to talk about through all these years?

Tom Vander Well: That is a really hard question. I would say that the gospel of John is probably still my all time favorite, though. One of the things that I've really loved doing is trying to make the Old Testament books understandable and interesting to those who the many of people who kind of go, Oh, the Old Testament is boring. I don't get it. I don't understand it. So I'm always writing my post. And a couple of years ago, I turned my post into a podcast, as you know, in which I just kind of read the post for that day and post it as a podcast. And so I try to be very mindful that a lot of people don't don't understand the Old Testament. And so I try and make it interesting and palatable and meaningful for their lives.

Reuel Sample: I have always said that God gave the book of numbers to insomniacs, but you're right, it is. It is. It is a challenge to make those relevant and exciting today.

Tom Vander Well: Well, it is. And yet when you really begin to see, you know, how the whole story fits together and when people say, Oh, well, you know, it's not really coherent, it's not cohesive, it's like, No, no, no, you actually you actually haven't read it and you haven't studied it because there is a great story from Genesis to Revelation that is cohesive and coherent if you know how to connect the dots. And so the more you do that and the more you understand it. The better you understand who Jesus was and how the whole thing fits together, the New Testament doesn't really come together. I don't think in a person's mind and spirit until you understand all of the Old Testament stuff that led to it.

Reuel Sample: Exactly the entire gospel is found in the Old Testament, and the entire Old Testament is found in what we call the New Testament. So there's an interlinked there. There's a heresy that that keeps coming up that people just say, we're New Testament Christians. You can't be just a New Testament, Christian.

Tom Vander Well: Oh, absolutely. You know, we're doing our advent series like we do every year within within our local gathering of Jesus followers and the I just talked about that when John says that Jesus came. And made his dwelling among us, the Greek word that John used was to to spread it literally means spread your tent out. Well, if you don't understand that in the Old Testament through Moses, God said, I want you to make this tent. And in this tent, I'm going to dwell among you. Um, you're missing the point that Jesus was really the fulfillment of what God was doing back in the Book of Exodus and implementing. And when you understand that God basically made this progression from tent to temple, and then Jesus came to tear down the temple and to dwell among us as flesh and blood and spirit again, you don't understand the fullness of what Jesus was actually doing.

Reuel Sample: It's not just about reading a few verses from Isaiah at this time of year, it's it's about understanding and inhaling the entire book that we have.

Tom Vander Well: Absolutely. And yet most of us. And I think most followers of Christ. How about, you know, it's like my life is busy. I don't have time to go to seminary and

understand all of these things. So what I think the chapter they sort of paradigm that I've tried to foster here has been helpful for people like, look, my podcast average is about six minutes. So if you can listen to one the podcast every weekday and follow along with one chapter of scripture, they over time, hopefully I can really help bring more understanding insight to the whole thing.

Reuel Sample: I'm going to put links to your podcast here on the podcast broadcast page, and you're on Apple, you're on Spotify, you're across all the board. Yes, what you're talking about is a great segue into my next question for you is that your podcast is all about a daily chapter from scripture, and the Bible by far is the best all time bestseller. And I would imagine that most people have a Bible in their house someplace, but it is often left unopened, even for churchgoers. Why do you think? Why do you think that's the case?

Tom Vander Well: I think that it. I think because it is. Difficult. To quickly understand just how important, how powerful this is. In a modern era where everything has been reduced to, you know, however many characters you get in a tweet or everything is just spoon fed through a three minute video on YouTube. It really requires being open and adventurous. From a mental perspective, from a spiritual perspective, and it requires a little bit of discipline on the part of a person to to get into it and so. What has happened? I'm afraid to say from my my perspective and my observation is people go to church on Sunday and now after COVID, many of them have not gone back to church. They're just attending church on video at home, in their pajamas, which I get it, I love. I love sitting in my pajamas and going to church during COVID, too. But basically what they said is, OK, the pastor's message on Sunday is going to be basically my spiritual podcast for the week, and I don't need the Bible. I don't need to read it myself. I'll just take that in and go on with my, with my life and with my day. And if you do that, man, you're just missing out, just missing out on so much that can be transformational in your life.

Reuel Sample: So what do you think the role of scripture should be in the everyday life of Christians?

Tom Vander Well: Well, I think it should be, you know? Jesus even quoted it when he was tempted by saying, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God and God's word really should be digested. It should

be daily sustenance. It should be from a spiritual perspective. It is the food, the fuel, the the daily nutrients, vitamins, minerals that we need to live spiritually. And if you don't have that, there is a point to which you will always be spiritually starved.

Reuel Sample: Or you'll start gettin your sustenance from things that are not good for you. Yes, and because you need you need to fill that space up with something, we're intended to fill it up with the word of God. But if we don't attend to it, it's going to get filled up with something else.

Tom Vander Well: Well, absolutely. And even well-meaning people will go, well, I'll just watch, you know, this televangelist or I'll just listen to this pastor's podcast. And hey, you know, hopefully my podcast is is helpful, too. That's why I've got it out there. But my real desire is for people to listen to the podcast or read my blog posts and kind of go, You know what? I'd kind of like to read the whole chapter and see what's in there. For me, that's the key. I really want people that, you know, say, Hey, there's this guy out there that does this chapter today thing. Why don't you talk to a friend of yours or you talk to your spouse or you say, Hey, why don't we do that? We'll just read the chapter. Both of us and we'll talk about what we think. And then if you want to listen to Tom or read Tom's thoughts on it, great. That's where I'm trying to help people get into it.

Reuel Sample: We're going to talk about your role as a CEO of a major company here in a bit, but I bring that up right now because you are an amazingly busy person, as are many people, and they will often say, I just don't have time to read the scripture. I've got to get up. I've got to feed the kids, I've got to take care of the chores around the house. I got to get to work, I got to get to school, I got to come back, I got to feed the family, I got to clean up the house and then it just starts all over. What are some of the practical things that you can give to folks who really want to read the scripture but are just so tired and they're just they're just pressed on time to do it?

Tom Vander Well: Well, a couple of things I would say that. People create in their minds some sort of narrative that says that reading a chapter of scripture is going to be some kind of timely burden on my day. When the reality is, it usually takes me depending, you know, unless you're doing so my team, which is the longest chapter in the book, you know, I would say most days I read the chapter in less than five minutes. And with technology today, you can pull up Bible Gateway and and have somebody

read it to you. So you can listen to it while you're driving the way you would any other podcast there. There's really no excuse from a timing perspective in that regard. Just to listen to it or read it very quickly and have your heart open to whatever God might have to say to you. If you take it, a chapter a day is very, very simple. The other thing for me, number one, I developed, I would say, sort of a discipline and a routine in my life very early on when I was when I was a young man, a teenager, and I'm a morning person anyway. So that helps me. It's it's easy for me to get up in the morning and do it because I'm a morning person and I developed that habit. My wife is a night person and, you know, so it might be easy for her to. When I've knocked off for the night and I fall asleep in 30 seconds, she's laying in there. Bed might be easier for her to just go ahead and read it and have that quiet time in the evening because that works better for her bio rhythm and and her day. So you find the place in your schedule where you can you can make it happen.

Reuel Sample: Let's say it doesn't really matter what version of the Bible. A lot of people will say, Well, I just I can't, I can't get through those these vows. And it's that that the new that the King James version puts in. So just finally, just just find just find a we have never been blessed with more versions of the Bible than we have today.

Tom Vander Well: Absolutely. And, you know, pick one that's good for you. When I first started blogging, or at least it was maybe early on, at one point, I think I went through and blogged through the whole Bible in the message paraphrased by Eugene Peterson. Just because I wanted, Hey, I've read it in multiple versions over my lifetime and I just thought, I want to try it. And I found Eugene Peterson's paraphrase to be transformational in some places because he was so good at picking up some of the metaphors and the nuances of the Hebrew and Greek, and and translating that into into English in a way that none of the other translations do. And it's just brilliant. So pick that one, pick the living Bible, pick one of the easier translations for paraphrases to read.

Reuel Sample: One of the things that seemed to help you was that you also had an accountability partner. You had your friend that you called every single day.

Tom Vander Well: Yeah, that's true. And it was. So I think, you know, even at that point in my life, I had developed an ongoing habit. But in recognizing that my friend Kevin came to me and said, Hey, I haven't built this habit, I don't know how to do it, I haven't

been successful in making it a part of my life. What I really did was just extend what I was already doing in a way that allowed allowed him to become part of it and for the two of us to become accountable to one another. And it again, we we just talk about all the time because now our wives are friends. We travel together. What started as a Hey, let's just try this. It's turned into the fact that we are now David and Jonathan. We are, you know, we're connected and both as friends and and as couples. And we, we we're walking life together spiritually been transformational.

Reuel Sample: I think that's a New Testament model of friendship and accountability.

Tom Vander Well: Absolutely. And you know, for those again, you know, I for those who are listening to this, it I don't want to pretend like I'm some sort of spiritual pinnacle of spirituality morality. The reality is a few years after we started doing this, I went through a divorce and then went through a remarriage. And we have walked together not only through the good times in life, but we have walked through some really crappy stuff and our own flaws. And we've we've had problems with family, with children, with, you name it. It's just it's not been perfect, but that's what friendship and accountability with Christian brothers and sisters is supposed to be about.

Reuel Sample: And I think that's really important, especially for men today to have those one or two people that are in our inner circle who are let in, who we can call on and who can call on us to get through difficult times, everyday times, through the boredom and through the highlights.

Tom Vander Well: Right. I mean, it's that question and it's been used a lot. But you know, do you have that person that you can call it 2:00 a.m. When the the fecal matter hits the electric rotary oscillator and you and know that they will answer and they will drop everything and be there for you. And if you don't have that, it's really something you should start seeking. Why not? And how do I do it? Because we all need that.