

- [Announcer] This is the Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast.

- Well welcome back to another episode of the Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast, where we're very, very passionate about helping you become the leader that other people love to follow. If you're regular with us you may say, wait a minute it's not the first Thursday of the month. The reason is because this is a bonus episode. In fact, in this episode, this will be the first time we've ever done an interview and I'm incredibly honored and excited to interview one of my closest friends, and one of the most innovative leaders that I know anywhere in the world, Bobby Gruenewald.

- Hey, thank you, Craig, it's an honor to be here.

- It's great to have you on. I could tell them a little bit about some of the impressive stuff that you've done. You've been featured in the New York Times, and CNN, NBC, Harvard Review. You're named by Fast Company, this is one of my favorites by Fast Company one of the most 100 innovative and creative business leaders in America, very impressive. We could go through all those kind of things, many of the businesses you built and sold, but to me what is very impressive is your maximum bench press weight which is, how much? Can you tell us?

- You're gonna seriously ask me that?

- I'm gonna 100% ask you, what we're starting with bench press what's your max?

- 345.

- 345. That is impressive. Forget the 100 most top creative innovative people in America.

- I don't know if I could ever do it again though. I think was a one and done thing for me.

- That's pretty impressive. So on a more serious note, in our last episode we talked about the theme of innovation and you've been named and called by people all over the world as truly one of the most innovative minds. Before we talk about innovation can you tell me just a little bit about your background.

- Sure, I was an entrepreneur first. I was actually in school studying finance and I started two different technology companies. The first was back in 1996. It was a web hosting company. I sold it in 1998, had some success with that. Then went on and started another company where we had an online content portal, an online community. And sold that in 1999 to a company that Goldman Sachs took public in early 2000. So I started as an entrepreneur before I then eventually moved into a role at the church.

- So people may not be able to track with you on the dates but, you were in collage starting businesses, and would have barely been out of college before you sold your second tech company.

- That's correct. It was between ages 19 and 23 I think is how old I was back then.

- Most people are just trying to get out of bed and you were building and selling companies. Along the way, that's innovative just to come up with the idea to execute, to

build a company to make it attractive enough where someone else wants to buy it, that's impressive. In the last episode we talked about the four essential qualities of innovative leaders. And I'd like to recap those and then talk through them with you. We talked about every innovative leader needs a problem to solve. A problem is actually just an opportunity if we kinda reframe it. They need limited resources, most people think they need more, but it's actually, fewer resources that spark and drive innovation. The third thing is they need the willingness to fail, when many people aren't, they're playing it safe. And then finally, you need a crazy idea. I can't remember exactly how many years ago. I think it's a little over 10, that you came to me with a crazy idea. That has now impacted millions and millions of lives. Our church was honored to create the YouVersion Bible App which we're celebrating an anniversary you can tell us about. It's now on 330 million devices, all from a local church. It was all your idea. Tell me about the story behind this crazy idea.

- Sure, well the original idea was actually birthed in the Chicago airport in 2006. I was in a long TSA security line at the airport and I'm not sure why God used that moment, but in that security line that day, I was thinking about this question of I wonder if there's a way that we could leverage technology to help people engage with the Bible. Particularly I was thinking about me, because I had struggled to consistently read the Bible even though I had a desire to, I wanted to. I just couldn't quite find the interface with it that fit with kinda the busyness and the travel and the way that my life was at the time. So there in the airport that day this idea came for YouVersion. The original idea was actually for a website. And so that was kinda where the idea was birthed. And then of course I came and talked to you and others on the team about that after I got back from the airport that day.

- Right, so essentially you just said, thought number one is there was a problem to solve, and that is you wanted to engage consistently in scripture and you weren't doing so. And so this problem became an idea of creating a website. Talk to me a little bit about limited resources because everyone has limited resources. We only have so much time in the day. We only have so much access to capital. We've only got so many people we're working with. If you go all the way back to 2006 we were much more limited as a church with resources then. Many people say that's a problem, but it wasn't a problem to you.

- I think I found that limited resources were often times the thing that drive innovative ideas. And we certainly were faced with limited resources. We didn't have a team that was ready to build a website. We pretty quickly realized that we actually didn't even have the right relationships at the time because we didn't realize we needed a license to Bible text to be able to build this website. So I began to try to think creatively about people that I knew, that I thought might have access to the people that could make those types of decisions. There's a person here in our community named Mark Green who had a group of Christian book stores. I thought Mark might know some people, and I didn't really know Mark so trying to work to get in touch with him so we could figure out how to overcome that obstacle. So each step along the way at the beginning we found that we really had very little but my role was to cast vision for this. To really kinda found those people and find the resources that God could use to do it. But if we had started saying hey, we need all this in place before we could begin, we would never have started because we had so little at the time and so much that we needed.

- So Bobby you said that we were gonna create a website which is true. You have to be willing to fail in order to be innovative because sometimes the great idea the breakthrough idea isn't the first idea. Sometimes you have to fail along the way. Talk to me about the willingness to fail and our first attempt. Was it a home run or what happened?

- So we started with that idea for the website in 2007. Launched the website in September of 2007 and just a few months in, really even a couple of months in we realized that it didn't work. I mean in technically worked, but it didn't change how I read the bible. In fact I went to the website to use it only because we created it, not because it naturally was something that worked. And you mention that fear of failure. A lot of times I've heard that used to reference the fear of starting something new because you're afraid you might fail so you don't start it. I've actually found that there's a lot of people that don't have any trouble starting something. But they have trouble acknowledging when it fails. To actually admit that it was a failure. And so that was something that we're not afraid of doing. So just a few months in, after we'd invested all this time and all this energy trying to build the relationships and put everything together to build this website. We knew it wasn't working and so we said it failed. And we were willing to shut it down, planned to shut it down. This was early 2008. But that willingness to say it failed caused us to evaluate why it failed. And in the process of evaluating why it failed we discovered that one of the things we noticed was that we were using our blackberries all the time our smart phones back in 2008. And we were actually using our computer very little naturally during the day. And so we thought what if we redesign the website so that it could be visible on a blackberry on a smart phone. And that failure and the willingness to admit that it failed is actually what led us to the idea that today people know as YouVersion.

- So I think that's brilliant, and I wanna stay there for a minute, because I think a lot of times we do have an idea, and we get emotionally attached to it and we're unwilling to call it what it is, a failure. And if we hang on it too long it may rob us from leveraging whatever we learned from that. Which could be the next idea. So it failed. In fact some of the things that we do today that are most innovative, many of the things were born on the other side of a failure. You came in and you said we should pull the plug on this thing. And we were literally just weeks away from doing it and you came up with the crazy idea of what if...

- Sure. So that failure led to the idea of making it work on a phone. And we did that as very simple, but it actually changed how I was engaging with the bible. You could see the result of it almost instantly you know. I was reading the Bible in places I hadn't before because I had my blackberry with me. And Apple announced that they were gonna make it possible to develop apps for this new phone called the Iphone. And they were gonna create something called an App Store. And so we thought with what we see happening already on the Blackberry, what if we could develop an App. So we moved very quickly. We found a 19 year old on our team, who loved Apple, and we said could you help us build an App. Nobody knew how to build Apps.

- So limited resources. We're not going to Silicon Valley and finding an expert. We're going downstairs and talking to a 19 year old kid.

- Who loved Apple.

- Who loved Apple.
- That was about the only two requirements back then.
- Can you build an App?
- Exactly, nothing about this really makes sense you know, in sense in many ways. When you think about kinda logically what you think it would take to do it. But we were just willing to take a risk and try something because we felt like there was an opportunity we could seize. We just thought if the Bible could be among the first group of apps in the App Store that that might be something that God could use, there might be a lot more people interested in reading it. So we had no idea if Apple was going to approve the App. We had no idea if we could successfully build it. We submitted the App to Apple in June and then on July 10th 2008 the App Store launched and to our surprise the Bible App was among the very first 200 free Apps that were available on the store that day. It was a Thursday in 2008 and the day that this podcast is being released I believe is the 10th anniversary of that day.
- And so part-time 19 year old kid releases the App. The first weekend what did we see?
- So between Thursday night and Sunday morning we saw 83,000 people download and install this on their Iphone. What was even more incredible is that they were actually opening at multiple times a day. We could see from our date and our analytics that people were actually using it, which was huge for us. And that blew our mind. We had absolutely no idea that that was going to happen. And so what was kind of a side project for that 19 year old on Friday when he left, we made that his full-time job on Monday when he came back in.
- Congratulations you now have a full-time job.
- Exactly.
- So fast forward 10 years later. Tell me about, before you tell me what's next but tell me about the organization now. What does the team look like? And then I'm gonna try to track back and see how did we get from here to there.
- Sure, so what of the things about YouVersion is that we've designed it to be non-commercial its completely free. Its supported by our church and our outside donors that give to make it possible. And so the team is built with about 35 full-time people that are on staff. The scope of it has of course grown very significantly over the years. But we have over a thousand volunteers on top of that that are involved in helping to make it work. So, when you see the scale and scope of it no one would rationally think you could have 35 people that would lead that. But we do it because we have so many volunteers and so many people that have stepped up to make that possible.
- I think that might be a word of encouragement to some people as well. Because this is a major organization and yet there's a thousand people around the world volunteering. That's an innovative idea of itself. Just to look for new ways to leverage peoples' ideas, wisdom, time, and capacity. So with that in mind, what do you see coming in the future? You've built one of the strongest apps in the world, it's on hundreds of millions of devices. What's next?

- Well for us, we have several new features that we'd love to add to the app and we've been adding and improving over time. And we're basically trying very hard to make it the best experience possible in whatever language or whatever country that its in. We just are announcing that we have a brand new app that we're launching. It's really pretty amazing technology that the team came up with. And it basically allows you to take a photo of anything, and it will recognize the objects that are in the photo. And then it will find the best and most appropriate verses based on the objects that are in the photo. We did this because we saw so many people taking verses and adding images to them and posting them on social media. We have about half a million people every day that do that. And so we saw the momentum of that and we thought what if we created a tool that makes it easier to see how the Bible connects to their everyday life. Help them rediscover those moments that they have in their life. So we actually make it possible to go backwards through your camera role too. And to take photos that you've already taken and find the best and most appropriate verses. And then create beautiful renderings of those verses on top of the photos and make it possible to share. So we think this will really, help people see connection to scripture all around them. Give almost a different lens of how they see the world. And that's why the name of the app is called Bible Lens.

- Bible Lens, so if someone takes a picture of their hand and they're wearing a wedding ring. A verse might pop up.

- Exactly, it would recognize the wedding ring, recognize they're married. It would pull from a verse that would talk about marriage or talk about loving your wife. Because it would recognize if it's a man's hand or a woman's hand. It's really amazing how the technology works.

- That is amazing. So there's around a half a million or so scripture verses posted today through the YouVersion Bible App. And this could be explosive what happens after this.

- Yeah we believe that we'll see that number go into the millions everyday with a tool like this. But again, we had no idea what to expect when we did the Bible App originally. And similarly we have what we think this can be this incredible on how God will use it, but at the same time we have no idea what it's gonna do.

- So talk to some listeners right now that are stuck. They're facing a problem, they don't have a lot of money, their staff is limited, and they don't know how to get from and idea in a security line to an organization with staff members and volunteers. What would you tell them that might inspire them off center?

- Well for us, each step along the way was a step. If I had known kind of what would become today when were getting started, I probably would've messed it all up. I would've tried to take the short cut to the end and say I need to build a team of 32 people I need to have a thousand volunteers. Instead we kinda took each step one step at a time. Looked at the resources that we did have, which wasn't much. And figure out the best way we could leverage them. A lot of times we relied on partners, on relationships but my role was really to cast vision for this to essentially sell people on the idea. To get great feedback from others, to improve it. I've not written a single line of code for the Bible App. I'm not a developer, most people presume that I am and that I wrote the original app and I didn't. I just found the 19 year old. I found the resources

that I could find, and cast vision for it. And I think a lot of times people feel like they need to have all those things in place before they can begin. We just kinda stepped into it step by step. And each time were evaluating like I said, whether it was working or not and making adjustments if we needed to. And I think as long as you're kinda taking those steps each time, being willing to hold it very loosely and say if this works, it works, if it doesn't, it doesn't. And make those changes I think. That's why I just encourage people to kinda take the next step and not so be focused necessarily on the ending.

- I think that's really really wise. And sometimes the ending is overwhelming, but if you can take the next step then with each progressive step you have the better ability to attract the right people, and the resources start following success. If you just get the ball moving a little bit.

- Absolutely, you know a question I get asked a lot is if I went back in time and told the 20 year old version of me, had some advice, or wanting to say something to the 20 year old version of me, what would I say if I went back in time and did that? I thought about it a lot and thought I'd say absolutely nothing. Because I'm pretty certain that if I had known kinda what the destination would be I woulda messed it all up a long time ago. Instead it's more about being in the moment of recognizing what step God wants you to take today. And making sure that you're just stepping into it, each step along the way.

- It's amazing what little steps of faithfulness sacrifice, trust along the way over a 10 year period can become amazing. So I wanna just tell you congratulations on the 10 year anniversary. What's really fun to me, is that I get to be apart of the organization that gives this Bible App away. It wasn't my idea. To the leaders out there you don't have to have every great idea. You have people around you that have great ideas. What's really fun, I think the Bible Lens is going to be explosive. That wasn't your idea. That was someone on your team's idea. And so as a leader, we don't have to come up with every great idea, we just have to have the wisdom to recognize it and the courage to act on it. We that in mind I'd love to let our listeners know how they can find out more about you, you may not tell them but we can find you in the gym, trying to go for 345 pounds on the bench press. But what are other ways they can find out more?

- You know I've been telling the story about what God's doing through our church and through YouVersion and through technology through social media. And so people can find me and follow me. @Bobbywald on pretty much every social media platform. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and so I'd encourage people if they wanna kinda track what's going on they can certainly find me there.

- And they can see you at the gym. 345 is the goal? Congratulations on the 10 years and thanks for all you've done.

- Craig I just wanna say one more thing about you actually though because I know you wouldn't say this but I certainly can. You're as a leader, a very empowering leader and you talked about the fact that this idea didn't come from you, and yet God used our church to do it. And you created an environment where people like myself can actually thrive. And that's remarkable as a leader. I used to run companies, when I started them and ran them. And I'm more than honored to work under your leadership and it's because you're a very empowering leader and I know that you wouldn't talk about yourself in this way on the podcast but since I have the microphone I wanted to say that about you. So thank you for your leadership. The YouVersion Bible App, Bible Lens, all

those things happen because of the environment that you built. And so thank you for being such a great leader.

- Well thank you that sincerely means a lot and I thought you were gonna tell 'em how much I can bench press, but you didn't so we're good to go. So it's @Bobbygwald and love you to follow him and I'm grateful for all that you've done. In the next episode we're gonna talk about how to inspire people toward action. Great leaders inspire, but we don't just inspire people we inspire them toward actions. So if this is helpful, please share it. Thank you for sharing on social media, invite others to do this with you. Rate this, and subscribe to the podcast if you can that way it'll come to you every single month. What do you need to do? Be yourself as a leader, don't try to be somebody else. Be yourself because people would rather follow a leader who's always real, the one who's always right.

- Thank you for joining us at the Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast. If you're enjoying learning from Craig on this podcast you can show your support by subscribing, rating and reviewing on Itunes and sharing with your friends on social media. In the meantime you can check out Craig's five favorite episodes of this podcast by going to life.church/favoritefive. And we'll send you a leader guide that'll help you discuss concepts and insights from every episode with your team. Until next time thanks for joining us at the Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast.