
AN UNSCRIPTED FIELD GUIDE FROM DIGITAL CHRISTIAN COLLABORATIVE

AI Without Losing Your Soul

A Christian Business Owner's Field Guide to Using AI With Wisdom

JEREMY RIVERA

Host of Unscripted • 19 Years in SEO & Digital Marketing

INTRODUCTION

AI Without Losing Your Soul

There is a quiet anxiety running underneath a lot of conversations I have with Christian business owners right now. They feel the ground shifting. Everyone is talking about AI, the tools are genuinely impressive, and there is a real fear of being left behind. But there is a second, deeper fear too: the fear of gaining a faster business and losing the thing that made it yours in the first place. The voice. The relationships. The integrity. The soul of the work.

I have spent nineteen years in digital marketing, and I have watched a lot of shiny tools come and go. AI is not one of those passing fads. It is a genuinely powerful instrument, and ignoring it would be poor stewardship. But a powerful tool in the wrong posture can quietly hollow out a business. This field guide is not anti-AI, and it is not hype. It is about discernment. Drawing on real conversations from the Unscripted Small Business podcast, and on Scripture that has guided wiser people than me for thousands of years, this guide is here to help you use AI to save time without outsourcing your conscience, your craft, or the human connection your business was built on.

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”*

— Proverbs 3:5-6

CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1: A Tool Serves People, People Don't Serve a Tool

Let's begin where Scripture begins: with the dignity of the person. You were made in the image of God, and so is every customer, employee, and neighbor you serve. That single conviction should reorder how you think about technology. AI is a tool. A remarkable one, but a tool nonetheless. The moment a tool starts dictating your values instead of serving them, the relationship has inverted, and you have a problem.

"If you're going to use AI, you should use it more. If you're not going to use it, don't use it at all."

— Meaghan Wall, *Unscripted Small Business*

The good news is that the data says you are not behind, and you are not foolish for taking this seriously. Adoption among small firms has roughly doubled in two years, from about 23 percent to 47 percent. This is not a fringe experiment anymore; it is becoming ordinary infrastructure. The question is no longer whether you will use AI, but how, and with what posture of heart.

Meaghan Wall put the practical version of this beautifully on the show. Half-using a tool out of guilt or fear is the worst of both worlds. Either commit to learning it well enough that it genuinely serves your people, or leave it alone and keep doing excellent work the way you always have. What you should not do is dabble anxiously, producing mediocre output you do not even understand.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2: From Driver to Dispatcher

One of the biggest shifts happening right now is the move from AI that assists you to AI that acts for you. The industry calls it agentic AI, and it changes your job description. Mason MacUmbler gave the clearest picture of this I have heard. For years you had a powerful engine, but you still had to keep both hands on the wheel. Now the engine can drive itself, which sounds like freedom until you realize someone still has to give the directions and watch the road.

“For the longest time, you had the engine, but you were the driver. With agentic AI, you don't have to be the driver anymore. You're the dispatcher. Your job is just to say 'go from A to B' and correct it when it drives over someone's grass.”

— Mason MacUmbert, *Unscripted Small Business*

Notice what does not disappear in Mason's picture: you. The dispatcher is not optional. The dispatcher sets the destination, defines what counts as success, and corrects the course when the thing veers off into the neighbor's yard. Agency without oversight is not stewardship; it is negligence with extra steps.

This is why I keep coming back to the phrase human-in-the-loop. Delegation is biblical and healthy; abdication is not. You can hand the AI the steering wheel for a stretch of road, but you never get to stop being responsible for where the vehicle ends up, or for whose grass it drives over along the way.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3: Don't Automate a Broken Process

Here is a hard truth that will save you money and frustration: AI does not fix a mess, it accelerates it. If your sales follow-up is chaotic, your onboarding is improvised, and nobody can quite explain how the good work gets done, then automating those things just gives you chaos at scale. You end up babysitting a fast machine that is reliably doing the wrong thing.

“If they don't have clear processes in their own business, you can't automate it — because then you're just automating a sloppy process, and it becomes more work maintaining it than just doing it manually.”

— Bradley Benner, *Unscripted SEO*

Bradley Benner named this exactly on *Unscripted SEO*. Clear processes have to come first. If you cannot write down how something is supposed to work, the AI cannot follow a path that does not exist, and you will spend more time correcting it than you ever would have spent just doing the task yourself.

Mason MacUmbert adds the antidote: make the AI show its work. Repeatability is what turns a lucky one-time result into a system you can trust and hand off. Ask the model to write down every step it took, so a good outcome can be repeated, audited, and improved, rather than admired once and never reproduced. Wisdom, after all, is largely about building things that hold up over time.

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4: The Soulless Problem, and Why Your Voice Is the Differentiator

Let me say the quiet part out loud. A lot of AI-written content is soulless, and people can feel it. Bruce Ashford said it plainly on the show: when everyone outsources their writing to the same machines, it all blurs into one indistinct gray hum. The reader cannot tell you apart from your competitor down the street, because, in a real sense, the words are no longer yours.

“AI script is soulless. People can tell when something's written by a machine. And now that everybody is doing their writing with machines, it just all blurs together.”

— Bruce Ashford, *Unscripted Small Business*

Customers notice more than we like to admit. Surveys find that around 52 percent of people feel less engaged with content the moment they realize it was AI-generated. The very thing you adopted to scale your voice can quietly erase it. Jessica Malnik framed the economics of this sharply: if a language model, or anyone who is not an expert, can produce the exact same thing you produce, then what you have is commodity content, and AI lets the whole world flood the zone with infinite copies of it.

So what is the way through? It is not to abandon the tool. It is to put your expertise and your voice back at the center. After nineteen years in this field, I am convinced the differentiator was never the words themselves; it was the hard-won judgment, the specific stories, and the relationships behind them. AI can imitate fluency. It cannot manufacture your testimony.

CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5: Brief, Draft, Edit — In That Order

If voice is the asset, then the workflow you choose either protects it or strips it. Nick Eubanks described the order that actually works, and it is the order most people get backwards. Humans write the brief, AI writes the draft, and humans do the editing. The human bookends the machine on both sides: defining the intent up front, and exercising judgment at the finish.

“The best results I’ve seen from a content perspective is where humans are doing the brief, AI writes the draft, and humans do the editing. Most agencies have it exactly backwards.”

— Nick Eubanks, *Unscripted SEO*

Most teams do the reverse. They let AI generate everything, then have a human skim it for typos. That is how you get fast, fluent, forgettable work. Thiago Cordeiro made the same point from the copywriting trenches: trust the machine completely and you will sound like everyone else, repeating the same generic promises and offers as your competitors. Use AI for research and a base structure, then come back in with your expertise to make it true and specific to you.

There is a Christian instinct underneath this workflow that I love. It refuses to let the easy 80 percent become the whole job. Jessica Malnik warned that the first 80 percent comes fast, but the last 20 percent, the part that requires care, taste, and finishing, can take days or weeks. That final stretch is exactly where your craftsmanship lives. Do not let a tool talk you into skipping it.

CHAPTER 6

Chapter 6: Mind the Last Twenty Percent

I want to camp on that last 20 percent for a moment, because it is where most AI projects quietly fall apart. The demo is intoxicating. In an afternoon you can stand up something that looks finished. Then reality arrives: the edge cases, the tone that is almost-but-not-quite right, the factual claim that needs checking, the detail only you would know to add.

“It almost feels like a teenager on steroids. It’s hopped up and ready to go. But at the same time, it’s a teenager at heart — it goes in the wrong places, touches things it’s not supposed to. You’ve got to be on top of it.”

— Mason MacUmbert, *Unscripted Small Business*

This is also where the productivity promise gets real instead of hypothetical. The honest research is encouraging: small business employees report saving roughly 5.6 hours a week with AI tools. That is most of a workday, real time you can pour back into customers, family, and the parts of the craft that only you can do. But notice where that saved time should go. Not into shipping twice as much mediocre output, but into doing the finishing work with more care than you could afford before.

Mason MacUmbert's metaphor is the right warning label to keep on the shelf. The technology is eager, fast, and genuinely capable, and it will also wander into places it should not and touch things it should

not touch. None of that is a reason to fear it. It is simply a reason to supervise it. Treat AI like a gifted, hyperactive intern: tremendous leverage, never left unattended.

CHAPTER 7

Chapter 7: AI Can't Sit Across the Table From You

Here is the line AI cannot cross, and it is the line your whole business stands on: relationship. Kate Hendrickson said she markets through conversations, that she would rather share a meal and explore a real partnership than run a thousand ads. That is not a quaint preference; it is a strategy, and the numbers back her up. Studies keep finding that around 85 percent of consumers still prefer a human over AI when it actually matters to them.

“AI can't replace that people connection. I market through conversations. I would rather sit down and have lunch with you and talk about how we could partner than run a thousand ads.”

— Kate Hendrickson, *Unscripted Small Business*

Cecily North drew the boundary with a travel example everyone can feel. By all means use AI to research and rough out the itinerary. But when something goes wrong at midnight in a foreign airport, the chatbot cannot advocate for you, comfort you, or fix it. A human can. The pattern holds across nearly every trade: AI is a wonderful research and drafting partner, and a terrible substitute for a person who will stand with you when it counts.

This is where the Christian conviction becomes a competitive advantage rather than a constraint. Your business runs on trust, presence, and care, the very things a machine cannot fake. So automate the busywork freely. But guard the table, the phone call, the handshake, and the hard conversation as the holy ground of your work, because that is precisely where you are irreplaceable.

CHAPTER 8

Chapter 8: Keep the Agency Within You

We end where wisdom always lands: with the question of who is in charge. Mark Pearson framed it as a matter of agency. Do not hand the tool full agency over your work. Use the AI to create, so that the agency within you, your God-given capacity to decide, to discern, to take responsibility, is enabled and amplified rather than surrendered. The knowledge of the machine is meant to serve the judgment of the person, not replace it.

“You don't want to give it full agency. Use the AI to create — so the agency within you is enabling you to go out and use the knowledge of the AI.”

— Mark Pearson, *Unscripted Small Business*

Thiago Cordeiro said the same thing from a different angle: do not go straight to AI and trust it completely, or you will sound like everyone else. Combine. Let the tool handle research and structure, then bring your own expertise to bear. The throughline across every guest on this list is identical. The human is not the bottleneck to be removed. The human is the point.

So adopt AI confidently. Use it more, not halfway. Build clean processes before you automate them. Brief it, let it draft, and edit it like the craftsman you are. Save your hours, then spend them on people. Outsource the busywork, and never outsource your voice, your conscience, or your relationships. That is how you use this powerful tool with wisdom, and keep your soul while you do it.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your Action Steps

- Decide and commit: either learn AI well enough that it genuinely serves your people, or set it aside, but stop dabbling anxiously in between.
- Stay the dispatcher. Keep a human in the loop to set the destination, define what success looks like, and correct course when the output drifts.
- Write down your process before you automate it. If you cannot document how the good work gets done, you are not ready to hand it to a machine, and you should make the AI record every step it takes so results can be repeated.
- Use the brief-draft-edit order: you write the brief, let AI write the draft, and you do the editing. Never let AI generate everything and call a quick skim 'review.'
- Budget for the last 20 percent. Reinvest the hours AI saves you into finishing work and customer care, not into shipping more generic output.
- Guard the human moments. Automate busywork freely, but keep the meals, calls, handshakes, and hard conversations firmly in human hands, because that is where your business is irreplaceable.

Keep Going With Digital Christian Collaborative

If this resonated, you do not have to figure it out alone. The Digital Christian Collaborative in Cookeville, Tennessee exists for exactly this: Christian entrepreneurs learning to use modern tools with wisdom and integrity, together. We host free group training sessions where you can ask real questions, see these workflows in action, and think it through alongside people who share your convictions. You are warmly invited to come sit at the table.

And if you would like to work through your own situation one-on-one, I offer focused foundational consulting at 100 dollars an hour in 30-minute sessions. We will look at your business, find where AI can genuinely save you time, and just as importantly, name the places where your human voice and relationships need to stay front and center. No pressure and no hype, just an honest plan. Whenever you are ready, I would be glad to help. Use the tool, keep your soul.

Free group training in Cookeville • 1-on-1 with Jeremy (\$100/30 min) • digitalchristiancollaborative.com

RESEARCH & SOURCES

U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy — Small business AI adoption roughly doubled from about 23% in 2023 to 47% in 2025
https://advocacy.sba.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Research-Spotlight-AI-in-Business-Small-Firms-Closing-In_-092425.pdf

Business.com 2026 Small Business AI Outlook Report — SMB employees save an average of 5.6 hours per week using AI tools

<https://www.business.com/articles/ai-usage-smb-workplace-study/>

Customer Service Manager Magazine — Study finds 85% of consumers still prefer humans over AI

<https://customerservicemanager.com/85-of-consumers-still-prefer-humans-over-ai/>

SurveyMonkey Customer Service Statistics — 52% of consumers feel less engaged with content when they know it is AI-generated

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/curiosity/customer-service-statistics/>