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AN UNSCRIPTED FIELD GUIDE FROM DIGITAL CHRISTIAN COLLABORATIVE

# Built to Last

*The Faith-Driven Founder's Playbook for Starting a Business That Reflects Your Values*

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## INTRODUCTION

## Built to Last

Somewhere between the dream and the daily grind, most Christian founders run into the same quiet question: is this business really worth it? You feel a pull to build something good, something that serves people and provides for your family, something that honors God in the ordinary work of invoices and inventory. But then the numbers get tight, the doubts get loud, and you wonder whether you were ever cut out for this. If that is you, take a breath. You are in good company, and you are not alone.

This little book is a field guide, not a lecture. It pulls together hard-won wisdom from real entrepreneurs Jeremy Rivera has interviewed on the Unscripted Small Business podcast, layered with the conviction that a business can be a calling, a form of service, and an act of stewardship all at once. We will look honestly at the odds, because pretending the road is easy helps no one. But we will also keep our eyes on a bigger story, the one where your work matters and your faith is not something you leave at the office door. Let's build something that lasts.

*“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

— John 10:10

## CHAPTER 1

## Chapter 1: The Calling Behind the Business

Before you ever picked a business name or registered an LLC, something stirred in you. Call it a nudge, a burden, a vision you could not shake. In Scripture, work is never an afterthought. God gives Adam a garden to tend before sin ever enters the picture. Work was part of the good world from the beginning. So when you feel drawn to start a business, do not be quick to dismiss it as ambition or restlessness. It may well be a calling, an invitation to steward your gifts in the service of other people.

*“I’m just a farm kid from Idaho. I’m nobody special. This started because some dad in some podunk town wanted to teach his kids something and he got up off the couch. Anybody can do that.”*

— Luke Mickelson, *Unscripted Small Business*

The temptation is to think you need to be somebody special before you begin. You don’t. Some of the most faithful builders are ordinary people who simply refused to stay on the couch. Luke Mickelson started a movement that has built thousands of beds for kids sleeping on the floor, and he is the first to tell you he is nobody remarkable.

That is the heart of a calling. It rarely arrives with fanfare. It usually shows up as a small conviction that someone’s life could be better if you were willing to act. Jeremy’s encouragement here is simple: take your nudge seriously, and take yourself less seriously. The calling is real even when you feel ordinary.

## CHAPTER 2

## Chapter 2: Just Get Started

Here is an uncomfortable truth that mentors repeat for a reason: the biggest threat to your business is not failure, it is never beginning. Perfectionism wears the mask of prudence. We tell ourselves we are waiting for the right time, the right amount of capital, the right level of confidence. Years pass. The idea quietly dies of caution.

*“Just get started. I know a lot more people who are still trying to start and it’s decades after graduating from university. You have to do it.”*

— Marc Pitts, *Unscripted Small Business*

Marc Pitts has watched this happen to capable people for decades, and his counsel is refreshingly blunt. The point is not recklessness. It is movement. Faith, after all, is rarely about certainty up front. It is about taking the first step while trusting God with the outcome. Noah built before it rained. Abraham left before he knew where he was going.

Starting also clarifies things that planning never will. You learn what customers actually want by serving real ones, not imagined ones. You discover your own resilience only when something goes sideways and you keep going. The data backs the urgency too: while roughly one in five new U.S. businesses closes in its first year, the majority survive it, and survival rates only improve from there. The ones who never start have a one hundred percent failure rate.

### CHAPTER 3

## Chapter 3: Ride the Dragon of Passion

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Once you begin, the noise starts. Chase this trend. Add that revenue stream. Copy the competitor who seems to be winning. Before long you can find yourself running a business you no longer recognize, exhausted by goals that were never really yours. The antidote is to remember why you started in the first place.

*“Ride the dragon of passion. Find the thing that you were really passionate about in the first place and just hang on to that. Because everything branches off of that. Fame and fortune are two dragons that are very fast — ride passion instead, and the dragons of fame and fortune follow behind you.”*

— Paul Pape, *Unscripted Small Business*

Paul Pape uses a vivid picture for this. Passion is the thing that sustains you when the fame and the money are slow to arrive, and counterintuitively, it is the thing that eventually draws them to you. Faith reframes this beautifully. The passion God planted in you is not a marketing gimmick, it is part of how you were made. When you build from that place, your work has an integrity that customers can feel.

Practically, this means protecting your original spark. Write down why you started and keep it where you will see it. When a shiny opportunity appears, ask whether it feeds your core passion or just your fear of missing out. Stewardship is not only about money. It is about guarding the calling itself from drift.

### CHAPTER 4

## Chapter 4: Stop Trying to Please Everyone

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New founders often believe that the path to growth is to appeal to as many people as possible. The opposite is true. When you try to be everything to everyone, you become nothing in particular. Your message blurs. Your best customers cannot tell that you were made for them.

*“Stop trying to please everybody. Stop it. Knock it off. As soon as you try to appeal to everyone, you gray yourself out. Stay true to the passion that you have and the customers you are imploring to are going to be like super fans.”*

— Paul Pape, *Unscripted Small Business*

Paul Pape names this trap with characteristic bluntness, and the numbers agree with him. Research highlighted by analysts points to companies that focus on niche markets being significantly more profitable than those chasing a broad, generic audience, in part because a clear focus earns loyalty and lets you serve at a premium. Specialization is not a limitation, it is leverage.

There is something deeply Christian about this kind of clarity too. You were not made to be admired by everyone, you were made to serve someone well. Knowing exactly who you are for is an act of love and an act of discipline. The people you are meant to reach become more than customers. They become, in Paul's words, super fans, because they can tell you built this for them.

## CHAPTER 5

### Chapter 5: Find Your Focus, Find Your Footing

If passion is the fuel, focus is the steering wheel. Many small businesses do not fail from a lack of effort. They fail from a scattered abundance of it, spreading themselves across a dozen priorities until none of them get the attention they need. The fix is rarely to work harder. It is to choose.

*“If you feel like you're constantly living in a reactive state, constantly putting out fires — now is the time to find that accountability partner or coach who is going to help you find some direction.”*

— Kate Hendrickson, *Unscripted Small Business*

Kate Hendrickson sees this pattern constantly, and her advice is to narrow down and then measure. Pick two or three things that truly move the needle, and pay attention to whether they are actually working. Focus without feedback is just guessing. Focus with data becomes momentum. As Kate puts it, 'Small businesses focus on way too many things. If you can narrow your focus to two or three items and have some data to see if you're actually moving in the right direction — that is where things get really good.'

She also names a warning sign worth heeding. If you are always reacting, always firefighting, never building, that is not a season to push through alone. It is a signal to get help and get clarity. Proverbs reminds us that plans succeed with many counselors. There is no shame in needing direction, only in refusing it.

## CHAPTER 6

### Chapter 6: Treat It Like a Business

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A calling and a hobby can look identical from the outside. The difference shows up in the books. Plenty of people with real talent and real heart never gain traction because they treat their work like a side passion rather than a stewardship that has to sustain itself. Loving what you do does not exempt you from running it well.

*“If you really want it to be successful, you need to treat it like a business. It took me three years to figure that out. And then since then it's just exploded.”*

— Cecily North, *Unscripted Small Business*

Cecily North learned this the slow way, and the shift changed everything for her. Treating your work like a real business means honoring the practical things: pricing that reflects your value, systems that do not depend on heroics, and a clear-eyed relationship with your money. Meaghan Wall says it memorably: 'Cash flow is queen and it's also baby — everything you do is in the name of your cash flow.' She is not being greedy, she is being responsible. The hard data agrees, with studies finding that the overwhelming majority of failed businesses cite cash flow problems as a primary cause.

Stewardship is one of the most underrated spiritual disciplines in business. The servant who buried his talent was not condemned for losing money but for failing to steward what he was given. Keeping good books, charging fairly, and watching your margins are not unspiritual concerns. They are how you protect the calling so it can keep serving people for years to come.

## CHAPTER 7

### Chapter 7: Learning Through the Loss

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Every honest founder has a chapter they would rather skip, the month the money went the wrong direction and quitting started to look reasonable. The myth of the overnight success does enormous damage here, because it convinces people that early struggle means they were never meant for this. Usually it means exactly the opposite.

*“My first month in nutra I took a loss. I almost gave up. But I noticed I was actually learning something from that loss. My second month I was already profitable. My third month we went completely skyrocket — from a loss in month one to seven figures in month three.”*

— Thiago Cordeiro, *Unscripted Small Business*

Thiago Cordeiro almost walked away after his first month, until he noticed something most people miss in a loss: the education hidden inside it. What looked like failure was actually tuition. Patience and a willingness to learn turned a discouraging start into a breakthrough. This is the long game faith trains us for. We are people of the harvest, who plant in one season and reap in another, who do not despise small beginnings.

Define success on sustainable terms, not viral ones. Paul Pape offers a grounding reframe: 'A hundred consistent people buying from you will make you successful to a point of comfort. Will you be a millionaire? Probably not. But the vast majority of the world are not millionaires. The vast majority of people are comfortable, and that's really what you're after.' Comfort, provision, and durability are not lesser goals than hype. They are usually the wiser ones.

## CHAPTER 8

### Chapter 8: Serve Well, and Everything Else Follows

If there is one thread running through every guest on *Unscripted Small Business*, it is this: the businesses that last are the ones built to serve. Matt Tyner puts the whole philosophy in five words, 'If you serve well, everything else is go.' Service is not a department or a slogan. It is the orientation of the entire enterprise, and it happens to be where joy lives. Luke Mickelson found that the surest way out of his own problems was to focus on someone else's.

*“I believe true joy comes when you stop thinking about yourself and you start thinking about someone else. Your problems don't go away — but when you look at them after you do service, they shrink into something you can deal with.”*

— Luke Mickelson, *Unscripted Small Business*

This is the John 10:10 life, the full life, and it is rarely found by chasing more for ourselves. Bruce Ashford reminds us that 'you don't have to be a nonprofit to do good in the world.' Your for-profit business, run with integrity and aimed at genuine service, is already a force for good in your community. You are not waiting for permission to make a difference. You are making one every time

you serve a customer well.

You do not have to change the world to matter. Luke says it plainly: 'You might not change the world, but you're going to change someone's world. And that world might just be yours, and that's totally fine. That's why we're here.' And you do not have to do it alone. The data on this is striking, with small businesses that receive mentoring surviving at roughly twice the rate of those that go it solo. Surround yourself with people who have walked the road. Serve well, stay faithful, and keep showing up.

## PUT IT TO WORK

## Your Action Steps

- Name your calling. Write down in one sentence why you started, and keep it where you will see it when the work gets hard.
- Take the first real step this week. Choose one concrete action that moves you from planning to doing, and do it before you feel ready.
- Pick your person. Decide exactly who your business is for, and stop trying to please everyone else.
- Narrow to two or three priorities, and attach a simple number to each so you can tell whether it is actually working.
- Get your money house in order. Know your cash flow, price for your real value, and treat your work like the stewardship it is.
- Find a mentor or accountability partner. Going it alone roughly halves your odds; do not carry the weight by yourself.

### Keep Going With Digital Christian Collaborative

You were not made to build alone, and you do not have to figure this out in isolation. At Digital Christian Collaborative in Cookeville, Tennessee, we gather Christian entrepreneurs for free group training sessions where founders sharpen one another, share what is working, and pray for the businesses God has entrusted to them. Whether you are still on the couch or already in the thick of it, there is a seat for you.

If you want focused help on your own situation, Jeremy Rivera offers one-on-one foundational consulting in 30-minute sessions at \$100 per hour, a straightforward way to get clarity on your next step without a long commitment. Come to a training, book a session, or just reach out. Wherever you are on the road, the next faithful step is closer than you think, and we would be glad to walk it with you.

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

### RESEARCH & SOURCES

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics — 34.7% of business establishments born in 2013 were still operating in 2023, with about half of new businesses surviving their first five years

<https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2024/34-7-percent-of-business-establishments-born-in-2013-were-still-operating-in-2023.htm>

Commerce Institute (2025 data) — roughly 22% of new U.S. businesses close within the first year, and an estimated 82% of failed businesses cite cash flow problems as a primary cause

<https://www.commerceinstitute.com/business-failure-rate/>

U.S. Small Business Administration — 70% of small businesses that receive mentoring survive five years or more, double the rate of non-mentored businesses

<https://www.sba.gov/blog/mentoring-missing-link-small-business-growth-survival>

TalentTru (citing Harvard Business Review research) — companies focusing on niche markets show roughly 33% higher profitability than those serving a broad market

<https://talenttru.substack.com/p/the-power-of-niche-markets-why-specializing>