



- Joanna Meyer: [00:34](#) Hey everyone. This is Joanna Meyer. I'm Denver Institute's Director of Events and Sponsorships and I get to run the show solo today. I'm thrilled to be talking to our guest. My guest is Michaela O'Donnell Long who is the senior director of the Dupree Center for Leadership at Fuller Seminary and she's also the owner of Long Winter Media, which is a branding and filmmaking company based in Southern California.
- Joanna Meyer: [00:57](#) I have gotten to know Michaela over the last months and just love her savvy ability to translate timeless theological principles to daily life and she specializes in themes that are near and dear to my heart. Themes like entrepreneurship, vocation and women in the workplace. So it's a privilege to introduce Michaela to this conversation and our community because she's going to be the keynote speaker at our November women working calling event, which we'll talk about later in the podcast.
- Joanna Meyer: [01:22](#) So welcome, Michaela.
- Michaela O.: [01:23](#) Thank you. Thanks for having me.
- Joanna Meyer: [01:25](#) That's awesome. What's going on in Southern California today?
- Michaela O.: [01:28](#) Well, it's hot, no shocker there. So it's hot and also kind of calm here at the office and in life. So hot and calm is a pretty good day.
- Joanna Meyer: [01:39](#) Sounds like a good way to be starting the fall for you guys.
- Michaela O.: [01:43](#) Yeah.
- Joanna Meyer: [01:44](#) So I want to jump in with a few questions for you. I think we could have a wide ranging conversation about your various areas of expertise and your passions. But one thing I wanted to ask you about was something that Fuller Seminary has really specialized in and that's the concept of calling. And you had recently written an article about passion and you make a pretty bold claim.
- Joanna Meyer: [02:05](#) You say that passion isn't the Holy Grail of work. In fact, I want to know a little bit more about that. And here's the context is that at Denver Institute we often refer to a maxim that's become kind of a mantra in modern life. We say that, "Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life." And you have pushed back on that saying that passion shouldn't be the

ultimate goal of our work. And I want to know a little bit more about that.

- Joanna Meyer: [02:29](#) Why shouldn't passion be the ultimate thing we're aiming for?
- Michaela O.: [02:34](#) Yeah, yeah. Thanks. Okay, so starting with the big one, here we go. See if I can do it justice.
- Michaela O.: [02:39](#) Okay, so a little backstory. So I graduated college. Oh goodness, you'll see, a little over a decade ago and like many other graduating seniors was told... Given a really encouraging college commencement speech. And I remember that the sort of the pinnacle advice that our commencement speaker gave us was to basically go and do something you're passionate about and change the world. And that was encouraging, inspiring.
- Michaela O.: [03:12](#) I'm like, "Okay, here we go." And what I have both experienced in my own life and certainly as I have sat with friends and then eventually with students and then even further with many, many people out in the working world who are Christians, I've found that it's actually not so easy to know what you're passionate about. It's not so easy to go and find a job that matches up with that passion. And that having that be the sole aim, particularly so early in our careers, often sets us up for disillusionment, discontentment, heartbreak. We miss even places, you know, to sort of draw it into the like what might God have for us realm.
- Michaela O.: [04:06](#) We even miss places that might teach us about our passion. We might miss places that teach us how to join in and kind of adopt a larger purpose, even if it didn't stem from our own sort of highest ideal of the the thing that we care about.
- Michaela O.: [04:24](#) So it's not that we can never be passionate about our work. It's that that as a primary orientation point for making sense of what we should do and measuring whether our jobs have value is problematic.
- Joanna Meyer: [04:41](#) Yeah. I want to know about your early professional life. You said that out of college, you stumbled into a career not because you loved it, but because you and your husband needed jobs at the tail end of the recession. How did that experience shape your professional journey?
- Michaela O.: [04:58](#) That's a great question. So right after grad school, so my husband and I, we both had masters degrees in theology,

which... And then sort of and graduated in the middle of a recession.

- Joanna Meyer: [05:09](#) So employable, Michaela.
- Michaela O.: [05:13](#) I know, right? I was leading and I'm like, it turned out that zero people want to hire people with theology degrees.
- Joanna Meyer: [05:17](#) Especially in a recession.
- Michaela O.: [05:17](#) [crosstalk 00:05:20]. Right in a recession, it's like we actually put a pause on anybody. Any of those jobs we're sort of hiring freezes or we're letting people go. And it just became very clear to me that like, Oh, this is like, we're not going to go to get jobs in this field, at least not right this moment.
- Michaela O.: [05:35](#) And I come from a family of teachers and entrepreneurs, certainly other people do other things. But I've got these big Irish Catholic families in the Midwest and if you look at the patterns of what we have done, those are the two kind of traits that we continued to gravitate towards. So in this moment, Dan and I, we've been married literally four months at the point.
- Michaela O.: [05:56](#) I was like, "How are we going to pay our rent, what should we do?" And my solution to that was to start a business. I have since learned that [inaudible 00:06:07] is not... It's like natural instincts in needing rent. But it was my instinct and my husband, again looking at both of us, I'm like, "Okay, I don't have any other marketable skills though." And my husband, he has always been an artist, he's always been a storyteller. He has always been a film maker. And I'm like, "Okay there is a skill, something that we actually could leverage and to see if we can sort of help get ourselves by in this season of needing to pay rent."
- Michaela O.: [06:37](#) And so we decided together that we were going to experiment with opening up a business, setting up sort of our proverbial shop through an email, if you will. Right, we didn't have a brick and mortar building. We just had ourselves and computers and so I remember literally opening up Gmail and sending out an announcement to friends and family. They were like, "Okay, we're opening up, we're open for shop. We can do videos, we can even do websites or graphic design." Dan, my husband, generously agreed to learn how to do those things. If I could learn how to sell those things.

- Michaela O.: [07:07](#) And we had just said, "Okay this is just going to be something that would get us by until we know what to do next." And right away we got a couple of small jobs and those couple of small jobs taught us like, "Oh, actually people are eager. Businesses, organizations, even individuals. Certainly nonprofits are eager for communication partners to help build out these tools that I had named." And within three or four months, we found ourselves in full time on this sort of side project that had developed and actually was a full fledged business. And that's what I spent my full time working hours doing for seven years until I came to work full time with the Dupree Center.
- Joanna Meyer: [07:54](#) That's so fascinating. I like how entrepreneurship, just working for the sake of working because you needed to be productively employed, led you into something that revealed passions and new opportunities instead of, like you said, letting passion lead. I'd like to read a quote from some of your writing. Michaela, for our audience, is a great writer and so-
- Michaela O.: [08:14](#) Here we go.
- Joanna Meyer: [08:14](#) Here's some stuff that you have said about this topic and we'll talk a little bit more about how we live in a position of entrepreneurship in our lives. But here's the quote. It says, "Our cultural obsession with passion as a prerequisite for work threatens to cut vocational formation off at the head. In other words, we insist on using passion as a measure for we ought to do, or worse, proverbially prostrate to passion as if it were the Holy Grail of work. We will stunt the rate at which we try things, iterate and reflect. Trying things, iterating and reflecting are some of our greatest tools for learning about how God is forming us and fitting us for this world. In this, we are reminded that vocation is formed, not found through an ongoing and often complicated process of discernment, rooted in context, convictions and communities."
- Joanna Meyer: [09:00](#) And it sounds like what you're recommending for us is an entrepreneurial approach to your own spiritual lives and calling. Can you explain that a little bit? Like how in the world did we get entrepreneurial about discerning our calling?
- Michaela O.: [09:11](#) Hmm. That's really good. Yeah, thanks for reflecting that back to me. So it's even nice just to hear that. I was teaching a class in Florida a few years ago and it was right after we'd had our first kid and I was in like the baby fog. I'm like, "What is my name? What day of the week is it? Why am I in Florida teaching a

class?" And I was trying to find an image for vocation. I was like, "Okay, I'm trying to find a metaphor and how to talk to these students about vocation."

- Michaela O.: [09:42](#) And I looked out the window. We literally were in a classroom overlooking the sand on a beach in Florida and there was a man who had a metal detector in his hand. And he had his head down with big headphones on and he was searching in the sand for what I can only presume were things of value, maybe money. Right? And I thought that's it. Like that's how most of us are treating our vocation. We're treating it like it's something to find and when we find it, we will recognize it as the valuable treasure that it is and we will be able to sort of [inaudible 00:10:22] and spend it wisely.
- Michaela O.: [10:24](#) And in reality if you talk to people who are sort of further down the road in their career who really even have an articulated sense of how God is calling them in all of life, including their work, they usually talk about how they had to discover that along the way. That embedded in series of conversations with people. Embedded in trying some things, having them go well. Trying other things, having them fall flat on their face. That's when they started to learn what they were good at, what they should do, how God maybe had made them in particular.
- Michaela O.: [11:01](#) And when we started getting into that territory, that's when I start to think about entrepreneurs. So entrepreneurs are force or by choice, they're people who have decided to create in the face of risks and oftentimes, they have grown and are quite good at mastering the "iter" of iterative process it takes to create. So you know, really, really valuable things that come out in the world. You know, they'll talk about technological products. If we have a new phone that comes to us, there is a high, high chance that whatever phone that we're getting to us is the 75th version of that phone, not the first version of that phone.
- Michaela O.: [11:50](#) And they were in people, teams of people. Whether it's technology or whether it's really any other industry, were able to iterate and build off of what was working and able to name and be okay with what wasn't working. As they sort of put these things together. Now not all of us are going to go start businesses and certainly not all of us are going to build phones and do technology, but all of us do have work in the world. Whether that's my primary sphere of working really is like as a mother, even if it's not in addition to the work I do at the

Dupree Center or the company that I oversee. I'm certainly on an iterative journey in learning how to be a stronger, more creative, more helpful mother to my children.

- Michaela O.: [12:36](#) Same with my leadership at the Dupree Center and at Fuller and definitely with the products and services we produce it at Long Winter Media. So there's really room for every person, whether they're ever going to start a formal business, whether they would ever adopt the label of an entrepreneur for themselves to adopt and embody some of these entrepreneurial mindsets and practices that can help us all move towards that, a more full discovery of our sense of ongoing vocation rather than in our own way having our heads down towards the sand, looking for our vocation to be something we stumbled upon.
- Joanna Meyer: [13:15](#) Yeah. Or maybe never find it. That man with the metal detector may leave the beach and never have found the treasure that he's hoping to find versus that sense of engagement, of experimentation, the freedom to fail and willingness to try new things that comes with an entrepreneurial attitude. I love that.
- Joanna Meyer: [13:31](#) I wanted to ask a little bit more, I know you're writing a book specifically about these themes. It's based on your PhD research around the formative practices of entrepreneurs. I'd like to know a little bit more about that. What are those kind of key phases in the spiritual journey of entrepreneurs that build resilience and allow them to really fully live out their calling?
- Michaela O.: [13:50](#) Good question. I'm glad you use the word resilience. So I basically make the argument that in a changing world of work, work has changed for all kinds of reasons, whether it be some of the technological advances, whether it be the fact that we recognize that the systems that corporations work really well for some people and don't work at all for other people. And those are sort of getting flipped on their heads to globalization and outsourcing. The world of work is very different and in this world of work, people... The major burdens and sort of sets of responsibilities are shifting from corporations and systems and big entities down to individuals. And that mixed with how we sort of married our theology of calling with our jobs and the economy that's creating personal crisis for many people. They're like, "Okay, what do I do?"
- Michaela O.: [14:44](#) And so when I did all of my research I'm like, "Okay, well who is thriving in this changing world? Who feels like they're kind of a couple of steps ahead that we can look to and learn from?" And

certainly the church could offer something in this, right? Like that was my hope. Certainly the church can be helpful. And so I went and I did a bunch of research and if I were going to distill it all down into the shortest version, I learned a couple of things about the being of entrepreneurs and then a couple of things about the doing.

Michaela O.: [15:11](#) So in the being category, I over and over and over again I saw. Entrepreneurs sort of in the way, whether it's learned, whether it's innate or some combination of two, they are creative and they are resilient. And that was a really encouraging finding because as I think about the story of God, I'm like, "Oh, that's our very first story about God." And in the Christian tradition, our climactic story about Jesus, one of creativity in the very beginning and how God is putting this great sort of vision of the earth and of people into motion.

Michaela O.: [15:50](#) And then certainly resiliency. Like the story that we celebrate and the ongoing eternal life that we have in Jesus is predicated on death and loss. It's predicated on a cross that involved grief and suffering. I'm not sure I'd go as far as to call that a failure. Not certainly in retrospect, but it's definitely a setback. It's definitely loss and resiliency is usually defined as being able to endure setbacks and come out one step ahead. So then I'm like, "Okay, well what can I actually do to become?" If those are first and climactic stories about God, these are qualities not just for entrepreneurs, but for the rest of us too. How can we be more creative? How can we be more resilient? And this is where the practices come into play. So after doing all the data analysis and having in depth conversations, there were four practices that surfaced to the top and those four practices, the things that entrepreneurs did regularly that helped cultivate this deeper ongoing sense of creativity and resiliency.

Michaela O.: [16:59](#) Those four practices were empathy, imagination, risk-taking and reflection. And if I could just link those together a little bit. Empathy in particular, it wasn't that entrepreneurs went and did... Oh, let me tell you a story. So there's one entrepreneur that I had a conversation with in my research and she told me the story of how she started a micro-financing organization and she was over in Africa and she was meeting all sorts of really business-centric minded people who had really incredible ideas for business but did not have the capital to get started. And when she dug a bit deeper, she's like, "Oh, the amount of capital they need is usually in the about US equivalent of \$25." And then she thought about back home. She's like, "Okay, I

have all these friends and family who I think would be eager to lend money and have their giving or their donations, their charity, even if you will be towards business-centric people even over and above like a compassion [inaudible 00:18:13] model of development."

- Michaela O.: [18:15](#) So she started a little experiment. She's like, "What if I took pictures of these people, got their business ideas, send them to my friends and family to see if they wanted to opt in." And so they did. And that went well. And that worked. And she continued to build on that. That person, the person who that is, that's Jessica Jackley, who's one of the cofounders of Kiva. Kiva to this day, has facilitated over \$1.3 billion in loans. I believe it's like 3.3 million entrepreneurs and I might have that backwards. It might be 3.3 million lenders. Let's put it this way. Several million lenders, several million entrepreneurs for a total of \$1.3 billion.
- Joanna Meyer: [18:56](#) Amazing.
- Michaela O.: [18:57](#) And that all started not because Jessica said, "How can I go do a formal listening project?" But because she practiced empathy on the way. She practiced empathy on the way where she already was, and then she, along with those people, converted that empathy into imagination. That's the second practice. And then took a small risk. The third practice and said, "What if we did this?" And built into that along the way were these reflective processes. That's the fourth practice, reflection. To ask, "Did it work? What's working and what's not working and how can we build?"
- Michaela O.: [19:32](#) So empathy, imagination, risk taking and reflection were woven into the patterns of these people's lives and I have come to believe since can be woven into all of our patterns.
- Joanna Meyer: [19:43](#) I love it. I cannot wait for the women and women work in calling to be hearing about this and I'd love to make a little plug. One of the things that we have found is that every year at our annual women's event, we actually have a few men in the room and they're kind of sheepish. They're coming and yet they have a blast. They come away saying, "This is a women's event, but I learned a lot about how my wife thinks. I learned how to consider my colleagues better. And heck, I learned a lot of things that'll actually help me in my own life."



- Joanna Meyer: [20:07](#) And so I think some of these concepts that you're sharing will resonate with people of any gender that are showing up at the women's event. What I want to ask was why do you think some of these themes are so resonant with women? Because you said, of all the people you share these these steps with, there's something that catches the women's hearts. Why do you think that is?
- Michaela O.: [20:26](#) Oh, good question. So I think there's two reasons and these are two things. So that process I just described at the Dupree Center, we've been testing that in small kind of calling labs, these are six week labs we've been running over the course of the last year. So I've gotten a chance to ask people like, "Well how's it going? Like why is it working?" And one of the first things I hear people say is like, "Oh, I've been told before that I'm too empathetic and that in order to be good at my job or good at business or even to be entrepreneurial, I need to set that aside. And what you're telling me and what this process is showing me is that empathy is actually the key to get it all started." So that has been a pretty liberating moment for many of the women in particular that I've encountered.
- Michaela O.: [21:18](#) And then number two, something I alluded to earlier is that some of the systems that we as people have built work really well for some people and not as well for others. And there have certainly been women that I have encountered in this work that have said, "I feel like I've got to make my own way. I feel like the charted paths or the options are not going to do it for me for whatever set of reasons. Whether it doesn't fit my personality, whether I see myself more of an a hybrid career. Whether I go in and out of work because I am caring for family or having other responsibilities." Whatever the reality is. And there's often many factors that lead to it. Women are like, "Those older ways, those more established paths don't work. And I'm finding myself having to navigate my own way."
- Michaela O.: [22:09](#) So giving language to people who can have navigated the way successfully is also really resonate with women. At least has been for the women that we've been encountering through this process.
- Joanna Meyer: [22:22](#) You've also talked about this model being deeply rooted in a Christian belief of loving your neighbor. Work is a way to love your neighbor. Can you tell me more about that?

- Michaela O.: [22:31](#) Yeah, so I told you the story of Jessica Jackley as an entrepreneurial example. The biblical example that I usually run to here is the Good Samaritan. So you know you have the Good Samaritan who is presumably on the way from point A to point B and who is the third in line coming across a man who badly needs help, who is in all kinds of pain on the side of the road. The two people who've passed by before are people who would be either religiously prominent or centered in society, right?
- Michaela O.: [23:07](#) Kind of have societal status, and those are not [inaudible 00:23:13] the Samaritan comes and is not centered in society, is marginalized, is somebody people wouldn't want to be around and certainly not somebody people would want to learn from as an exemplar. Yet he is the person that Jesus points to when he says how to be your neighbor. He is the one that practices empathy on the way. He is the one that has the imagination to literally strap the hurting guy to his donkey. He's the one that takes the risk. I can only imagine the road to Jericho, it was obviously an unsafe road. This is the story we have and he's slowing his pace down even more and attaching himself to someone who's even more marginalized than him. So that is risk. And he also builds in like, "Hey, I'm going to come back in two days and check on this guy."
- Michaela O.: [24:00](#) He literally builds in reflection. And so when we have a model of how to attend to neighbor, there it is. And then for those [inaudible 00:24:11] more centered in society, we want to sort of say, "Yeah, we'd be like the Samaritan, that story." We have to be honest, we might actually be more like the priest or the Levite and we might need the reminder to be looking to the margins of society for our exemplars in practicing empathy. Who's out there practicing empathy on the way that we might learn from?
- Michaela O.: [24:31](#) So all this stuff is deeply rooted in the Christian story, in loving one's neighbor and of course the neighbor's story that's just the most natural to run to is the Good Samaritan.
- Joanna Meyer: [24:42](#) I love it. We've been talking a lot recently at Denver Institute about work as a way of loving our neighbor in so many various forms. And so I love that you're adding more crayons, more colors to our crayon boxes. We think about what does this look like to live this out in the world.

- Joanna Meyer: [24:59](#) I want to wrap up our conversation by directing our thoughts towards women at work because that's how I first got to know you, Michaela.
- Michaela O.: [25:07](#) Yeah.
- Joanna Meyer: [25:07](#) Why do you think it is so important in the Christian community for us to be broadening this conversation around women work and calling?
- Michaela O.: [25:15](#) Hmm, good question. Well, I mean certainly as you know and you would be an expert in it as well, Joanna, that a woman's experience is certainly not monolithic, right? So even if you've got intersectional realities such as race and class and geographical locations. And so the first thing I'd want to say is there is just within this realm of women work and calling, there is just so much that we've got to attend to and get into. And I think that container, that sort of framework if you will, is something that people are aching to do, are aching to get in there. So why is it so important? I really do think that, and this is sort of to use my business language, my business hat, people tell you what they want to talk about. People tell you what they want to do. People tell you the pain they've got.
- Michaela O.: [26:13](#) Another way to say that in the business world is the market talks. So we're seeing issues that I may have even thought were retired 20 years ago bubble back up to the surface in new ways in new people and new realities and those are bubbling. So I feel like what we're doing is we're just listening to a larger conversation and saying, "Yeah, we'll join you in that." So I think it's important because it's happening, it's literally unfolding. And I think when things are unfolding that gives us an opportunity to say as Christians, we trust that God's in that space, so what's the spirit doing? How can we locate and amplify what the Spirit's doing? And so that's why I think it's important. I think it's important because the spirit of God is moving.
- Joanna Meyer: [27:01](#) Yeah, it's really amazing when you create space to acknowledge the very diverse experience that every woman in her different roles and responsibilities for different generational background. When you create space for that and you offer a life-giving vision of how God is calling women to work, to steward their gifts in every stage of life, it's amazing how women's hearts and minds light up. The feedback I get time after time is thank you. It's like water in a dry land for women that have never had affirming, empowering, inspiring message about all of the different ways

they can be using their gifts, both in the home, in the workplace, in our communities. And so that's one of the things that I'm passionate about.

- Joanna Meyer: [27:45](#) I would like to light a fire to every woman, Christian woman's vocational imagination, and so that's why conversations like this are so important.
- Joanna Meyer: [27:52](#) I want to give a little plug for the upcoming women work in calling event because I think it it's exciting. I hope we'll see 200 people turn out for that. Saturday, November 9th and Michaela will be sharing two keynote talks based on these themes that we've been talking about, about how do we embrace an entrepreneurial attitude towards our work in calling and more importantly, I love this language that you've mentioned before in our conversations, Makayla. You asked what if work could be an opportunity for pilgrimage, that the work itself is a holy journey with God and how can we use our daily experiences of work, whether it's humble or glamorous, to be a place where God is shaping our souls, our imagination for him. But we'll also have breakout sessions. They're amazing. We're going to be hearing from Haley Gray Scott, who's a national author and researcher on women's leadership.
- Joanna Meyer: [28:39](#) How do we navigate the challenges of women's leadership in both the mighty things women can accomplish and the mess that comes along the way. We'll be hearing from a couple of key spiritual directors in town talking about prayer practices that can support our callings. Just authentic ways to weave a life of prayer into the daily work as we go about our days. We'll be hearing from one of our civic leaders, Sean Deberry Johnson works in the mayor's office here in the city and County of Denver. She has been a culture shaper for years here in town, talking about a Christian woman's unique role in shaping our city and now I get to chime in, too. I get to lead a breakout on women and work 101, just some of the basic foundational principles for how we think about work.
- Joanna Meyer: [29:19](#) So I think it's going to be an amazing day. Women from across our city, hopefully even across our region joining us and Michaela, you're going to be one of the anchor voices for that day, so I'm thrilled. If you want to be learning more about the event, you can find it in our show notes. We'll also be linking to a number of resources and videos that Michaela's company has produced through Long Winter Media. Also some articles you've



written. So if you want to learn more about Makayla, there'll be plenty of opportunities to do that.

Joanna Meyer: [29:47](#)

But we're thrilled, Michaela. We'll see you in a few weeks and thanks for joining us today.

Michaela O.: [29:52](#)

Can't wait. Thanks for having me.

Joanna Meyer: [29:54](#)

Awesome. We'll see you soon.