Andy Crouch (00:03):

All of us, we know in our heart of hearts, what are the things we've had too much of, or have been tempted to grab too much of? And I'm sure those things come to mind for anyone listening to this, but I actually wonder if an invitation might be, what is the good you have not actually taken enough of?

Joanna Meyer (00:27):

You're listening to The Faith & Work Podcast where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor, and society through our daily work. Hi and welcome to The Faith & Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, Denver Institute's Director of Public Engagement, and I'm joined today by Jeff Hoffmeyer, our Vice President of Advancement. Hi Hoff. Have you been staying busy this fall?

Jeff Hoffmeyer (00:50):

Busy, yes, but fall's also the best time in Colorado, Jo, so appropriate amounts of Sabbath, and being in the mountains and riding my bike and fishing. And life is good here in Colorado in the fall.

Joanna Meyer (01:05):

I think you savor the Colorado lifestyle more than other members serve our team. You certainly do more so than I do.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (01:11):

Thanks. I get the award. Thank you.

Joanna Meyer (01:13):

Well, I could aspire to be a bit more like you. Today we're continuing with the Virtue and Vice series, which is a compliment to a book we're producing here at Denver Institute called Virtue And Vice at Work, how the gospel redeems our souls, reshapes our work, and restores our relationships. And the book explores five historic vices of the Christian faith. Themes that are as alluring as lust, pride, and sloth. And the podcast is doing the opposite. We're exploring five virtues that have historically trained the Christian life, and we're talking about that with top thinkers and leaders. You may have caught a previous episode that we did on celebrity and humility with Katelyn Beaty, the author. And today we're exploring the theme of temperance with author, Andy Crouch. And Hoff, before we get started, what comes to mind for you when you think of the word temperance?

Jeff Hoffmeyer (01:59):

It's not a positive connotation, Joanna. Of course, I think about prohibition. I think I couldn't have lived in the era. You know Joanna, I'm a lover of craft cocktails. It's this very negative connotation for me. And what's going to be helpful for our listeners is Andy reframes that, and actually shows this is a positive virtue that actually can influence the whole of our Christian life.

Joanna Meyer (02:29):

When I think of... Hold on, I'm going to hit pause because it's like the Blair Witch Project.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (02:36):

Blair Witch Project.

Joanna Meyer (02:41):

We're going to have so few edits to do with the actual audio with Andy, but we have a few outtakes. That was so weird. I was like, "I can do it." I'm like, "No, I can't even see my notes." That was so weird. Okay, here we go. You had finished your thought enough, right? Yeah.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (03:01):

Yeah, I had finished my thought just about it. Negative connotation, and Andy's going to reframe it for us.

Joanna Meyer (03:05):

Yeah. Oh yeah, I totally agree with you Hoff. In fact, we intentionally let this conversation with Andy go a little bit longer because every second of it is gold. Andy's so thoughtful in thinking about life, and faith, and the way that we engage modern life. I think a lot of our listeners may associate temperance with the temperance movement over the early 20th century, which promoted complete abstinence of alcohol. It was a response to some social trends towards alcoholism and domestic abuse back in the early 20th century, which led to prohibition. And we know how that turned out in American history. That's why we really need to expose this concept. It actually has been a very, very good thing. A foundational virtue of the Christian faith. So, it's time to reframe how we think about this. Hoff, would you introduce us to Andy Crouch?

Jeff Hoffmeyer (03:53):

Yeah, so grateful for Andy. He's currently a partner for theology and culture at our good friends with Praxis. That's an organization that works as a creative engine for redemptive entrepreneurship. He's written a lot. He explores faith, culture, and the image of God in the domains of technology, power, leadership, and the arts. Some of this is what we're talking about with him today. He's the author of five

books, including The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World, the Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place. By the way, we'll link to all of these in the show notes. Also, a book called Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk and True Flourishing. And finally, Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power. And Culture Making, of course, Recovering Our Creative Calling. Andy's written a lot, and so grateful for his leadership, and influence. Andy, welcome. We're so glad you're here and thanks for joining our podcast.

Andy Crouch (04:57):

Thank you very much. Thrilled to be here.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (05:01):

We have an interesting topic today, temperance, but before we jump into that, we have all kinds of questions. Just catch us up on what you're doing currently. Tell us about Praxis, what you're doing with Praxis, and also, I think you're working on a new book, The Life We're looking for. Just give us some life updates.

Andy Crouch (05:21):

Yes. I'm realizing since we're talking about temperance, I should not say I'm thrilled to be here. I am appropriately happy to be in your presence. Neither too happy, nor unhappy. Well, let's see. For four plus years now, I've been Partner for Theology & Culture at Praxis we work to advance what we call redemptive entrepreneurship in the world. Lots of overlap with the work that the Denver Institute does and a lot of, I think, shared values there. And it's just an amazing journey that we get to take with people who are taking the huge risk of starting things from scratch, and are discovering how vulnerable that is, how possibility filled that is, how hard it is, but also how fruitful it is. I get to be a friend, and teacher, and counselor to those folks as we join them in the work they're doing. And in the midst of that, I'm a writer when I have to be. I do not love writing.

(06:22)

And I think the most incomprehensible thing anyone has ever said to me is when I mentioned I was a writer, they said, "Oh, that must be so relaxing to just sit and write." No, that's not how it feels. But, every once in a while I feel like, well, I need to work out my thoughts. And the latest set of thoughts I felt like I needed to work out were a really about technology and personhood. What it is to be a person in a world that feels sometimes I think very impersonal for us as human beings. And I actually think that's connected to the story of technology. So, this book, The Life we're looking for, which just came out recently is my attempt to think that through. That's some of the recent preoccupations.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (07:05):

Well, grateful for the influence you have. And grateful also for Praxis, which really a like-minded organization to Denver Institute.

Joanna Meyer (07:15):

Andy, your writing has had a very formative impact in my own life and thinking. And this new book challenged and helped frame some of the ways I've been thinking about how I engage modern life. And to frame our conversation today about temperance, I wanted to take a look at some of the themes that you address in the book, The Life We're Looking For. And you really speak to starting the conversation with understanding who God has made us to be. And you use a phrase that really resonated with me, but I wanted you to flesh it out a little bit more for our listeners. You describe humans as heart, soul, mind, strength, complexes designed for love. I'll say that again. Heart, soul, mind, strength complexes designed for love. Can you elaborate on this? What are the implications for our life and work?

Andy Crouch (07:57):

Yeah. Well, where does that come from? I suppose it comes from this part of the Hebrew Bible that we call the Shema Yisrael. But, the maybe most notable text in Jewish life in some ways is this commandment, Hear, O Israel. Shama Israel. The Lord has God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. Or, at least that's how Jesus represents it, and claims it himself as the greatest commandment. There's something here for us. The idea of heart, soul, mind, and strength. And it occurred to me that it's actually a beautiful way of summarizing what it is you could say to be a human being at our best, or to be a person at our best. That we are all of these different dimensions. I don't know, what do you want to call them? Different capacities, different angles on what it is to be human, and we can't be reduced to any of them.

(08:56)

If heart is your kind of capacity for emotion, and care, and the desire to be part of the good and the beautiful, if that's heart. If mind is our sort of rational capability to really think carefully, analytically about the world. If strength is our bodily constitution. And if soul, which is the most mysterious certainly of the four, is something about depth of self, and uniqueness of identity. Such that even if you have the same DNA as an identical twin, you have separate souls. Each of you has your own self story in relationship with others or with God. I think the challenge of life is developing all of those. The commandment says, "Love the Lord your God." And then Jesus says, "Love your neighbor," but love the Lord your God with all your heart. So, what would it mean for me to live with all my heart? Well, that implies I'm going to need to develop emotional capacity, I suppose. To love with all my mind. Am I really stretching my mind? To love with all my strength.

(10:06)

I actually think for many of us in the modern world, this is one of the most challenged areas because for honestly the work that I do on a daily basis, there's very little of it that I need a body to do. The body is this kind of background support structure for my brain and my fingers basically as I type and move a mouse. Little millimeters of movement. And that wasn't true for most of human history. It's not true for many jobs today. But the question I need to ask, if I want to be a full human being who can love with all my strength, what does that require of me? How much do I need to pay attention to my own body, and its needs, and its needs for growth and development. And then, to love with all your soul, what would that mean?

(10:54)

This came to seem to me, to just be an incredibly compact summary of what we're meant to be at our best, but also a kind of diagnosis that so much of our life and our work treats us... It basically pays attention to maybe one or two of these, but rarely all four. And I think great work in the world actually involves us in all four. I actually think not just great work, but great play or great leisure. The things we really love to do at our best involve all four, but much of our lives does not involve all four. That's why I find it helpful to say, hey, if we're heart, soul, mind, strength, complex is designed for love, how well are we doing at being that? And how well are we doing it? Creating a world where everybody has the chance to be that? Does that make sense, Joanne, as a framing?

Joanna Meyer (11:41):

Yeah, absolutely. It's fascinating, and I want to just sit with that. I think that's a concept that I will be reflecting on over the next few days. Well, probably for the next few months. But, it's really... It's thought-provoking. It's a wonderful invitation to think more about our purpose in the world.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (11:56):

And it's all of it at once. It's that Hebrew word, nephesh, which is usually translated soul. But, actually it's all of those things all the time.

Andy Crouch (12:05):

It's all those things, right?

Jeff Hoffmeyer (12:06):

Yeah.

Andy Crouch (12:08):

Exactly, and we are all those things all the time. And you can't separate them. They're very interconnected. One of the things I learned from Rosalind Picard, who's this really interesting roboticist basically at MIT, but she actually works on how computers interact with human emotion. Because most of the time we think of computers as helping us with the mind side, but she actually works on helping computers not feel emotion. I don't think computers can do that. I don't think Ros thinks computers can do that, but computers could do a better job at sensing our emotions. And one of the most fascinating insights I got from Ros is that emotion is actually our primary resource for cognition. That is the way we figure out what's going on in the world, that's cognition very broadly understood. They way you figure out, interpret, and respond to the world is mostly not rational.

(12:58)

It's not your mind. It's your heart, it's your gut feeling, which we now know literally is reflected in the human nervous system, or neural system, that goes all the way down to the vagus nerve, that goes all the way down to your literal gut, down to the center of your body. And we do a lot of our thinking, what we think of as thinking, we actually do with all this other apparatus, which we would usually call our heart. And at the same time, emotion without reason is unhinged, and very reactive. And we need that ability to step back and analyze. You're so right, you can name the different parts, but you can't separate the parts. And especially the way the Hebrew language is built and the way that the writers of the Old Testament clearly think, they just all go together. But it's amazing how much of our model world does separate them, and has neglected different parts of us.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (13:53):

And certainly our Western world separates those all the time. We could stick on this, I think for the rest of the podcast, but let's turn the conversation to temperance, which is this quirky conversation that we're having in this podcast. And in a moment, Andy, I just want to simply ask, what would your definition of temperance be? But, let me just prime the pump a little bit. It certainly comes up in scripture, maybe most prominently, Paul and Galatians. Of course, Fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness. I think I missed one in there, but the last one is self control. I wonder if there's a sense that temperance, to use Lord of the Rings language, is the one ring to rule them all.

Andy Crouch (14:43):

Oh interesting.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (14:43):

As we're looking to cultivate virtue, which is what this series is about, and Denver Institute has this book coming out about vice and avoiding vice, there might be this sense that actually temperance covers all of them or undergirds all of them. Again, just would love to hear your definition, what is temperance for you and why is it important for the Christian life?

Andy Crouch (15:14):

Well, I think it's unfortunate that we come to this word at a point in the English language where it got used for abstinence. The temperance movement in the history of the United States in particular, it was part of other countries too, but it was a movement to abolish the drinking of alcohol. A women's rights movement fundamentally saying that the abuse of alcohol was doing such damage, and causing such exploitation, particularly of women and children, that it would be better to just stop using it. And they adopted this word temperance that historically has a really different meaning. You guys have thought about this more than me, but my definition of it would be essentially, the ability or the quality of pursuing enough of a good thing. To pursue temperance is to have enough of a good thing that one benefits from the good, but not to pursue too much of it.

(16:19)

And I'm also thinking about the interesting way we use it in various chemical processes. We temper steel, we temper glass, and we temper chocolate, which is probably the most fun. And all of those create very broadly speaking, a kind of resilience. That is to say a tempered glass is less shatter prone than untempered glass. Tempered chocolate is less... It stays mixed better. I guess is the best way to put it. It stays with all the best things about chocolate for longer and better than untempered chocolate, if I understand this right. And I was thinking about that as I got ready to talk with you, that actually there's a way in which the total abstention from good things leaves vacancies in our lives that are in danger of making us less resilient, less able to bend with the world rather than break with the world.

(17:20)

But, the right amount of good things actually helps us engage the world with resilience. But, too much of many, many good things, especially those that have a shadow side like alcohol, actually then again makes us less resilient. There's this beautiful middle where... So, I am not a teetotaler. My family and I love wine in particular, and most nights with dinner we have wine. And one glass or one and a half glasses of wine is this incredible gift that enlivens the conversation, enlivens the meal, enlivens your sense of being awake and present in the world. And I think in a way, it makes me more resilient. There's a lot of adversities in life, but because of the great gift of wine, when I sit down for a good meal with my family, or our guests, or whoever's there around the table, and we sip that wine, you just can't be totally self-pitying. You remember, right?

(18:23)

It's good, it's very good. The world has incredible qualities to it that I can enjoy. And that gives me a kind of resilience for the rest of the day, knowing that glass of wine, that dinner, those friends are there that night. But obviously, we all know, a lot of us from personal experience that if you just keep drinking, all the benefits of that thing are going to go away, and be replaced by all kinds of new vulnerabilities, and dependencies, and inability to deal with the griefs and losses and adversities of life. I would say a little is so good, a lot is really not good, and temperance is actually the internal capability to choose only what is enough of the good.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (19:06):

Yeah, I would just say that reframing is so helpful. The way you're explaining temperance. And you're in good company. Paul telling Timothy, "Take a little wine-"

Andy Crouch (19:19):

Little wine.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (19:19):

"... for what ails you."

Andy Crouch (19:19):

Exactly.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (19:22):

Or even, here's what St. Thomas Aquinas had to say about this. Joanna found this. St. Thomas says, "Temperance is withholding the appetite from those things which are most seductive to man." We would say to men and women. "Withdrawing us from things which seduce the appetite from a bane reason." Obviously, it's kind of ancient language, but I think Aquinas is getting at the same thing. It's not total absence and abstinence, it's not no to everything, but it's the right amount of yes, I guess, is what I can use it.

Andy Crouch (19:57):

Yes. Exactly. But, I don't know, we might want to talk about this. There's always been substances that people are tempted to take too much of, and of go over the top into the far side of that resilience. I actually think our modern world is unique in the sheer ease of this overabundance. That just for many of us, not every single person, because if you are truly poor, there's a lot that the world does not offer you. But, even if you have just a middling level of income, and you walk into a grocery store, and actually in

some ways in our country, the US, the less income you have, the more likely it is that the story you'll find in your neighborhood to provide food will have very few things that aren't built, many of them literally by food scientists, to activate your craving. And to invite you not just to have five potato chips, which is a perfectly fine number of potato chips, but 500 potato chips.

(21:08)

And we've got aisles and aisles full of very cheap stuff because it's actually not that expensive to produce, and also therefore, very profitable stuff to the producer. Green beans are not profitable. They can be very tasty when properly prepared, but to the producer, they're a very low-margin item. Potato chips, unbelievably profitable. We've got aisles and aisles full literally in our stores, but also metaphorically in our technological world of stuff that's like, oh, you would love to have a lot of this, wouldn't you? And man, I think for us, exercising temperance in this endless grocery store of candy aisles is just an incredibly difficult thing.

Joanna Meyer (21:47):

Oh my goodness. And I think that relates very much to our consumption of media and technology. I-

Andy Crouch (21:52):

Exactly.

Joanna Meyer (21:52):

... discovered that my friends and I had struggle with binging Grey's Anatomy. I mean, Grey's Anatomy is 19 seasons in, and there are many, many episodes each season, like 20 episodes of season. And honestly, I had a conversation with a friend this week where I said, "I laid down and I thought, I'm going to just watch one episode this evening to relax. And three episodes later, it was 1:00 AM and I was on the couch," and I thought I was the freak. And my friend said, "Oh no, that happens to me all the time."

Andy Crouch (22:17):

All the time.

Joanna Meyer (22:18):

And I realized that's a normative pattern, that the idea of a measured dose of what is good, or restraining our ability to just indulge in an unlimited way, it's not natural to us anymore.

Andy Crouch (22:29):

And by the way, Grey's Anatomy, especially, is it still in production? I'm afraid I don't know much about this show.

Joanna Meyer (22:35):

It is.

Andy Crouch (22:36):

Here's the thing. Back in the early days of serial television, you could say, of TV series. When TV was broadcast and when you had to actually sit down at 8:00 PM to watch a primetime show or whatever. Episodes were written to resolve at the end because if you're not going to watch another episode until next week at the same time, you are not going to be a happy audience if the thing is unresolved. You need resolution. And sometimes it was quite hackedneyed. Every 30-minute show would have its little arc of conflict and resolution, but at the end it was done. You were like, "Okay, well that's done." Well, now of course, because it's all driven by streaming, and the economics of streaming, every episode is designed to end on a cliffhanger, unresolved, requiring you to press that little triangle that says, "Show me the next one." And it's designed to create that effect. But three times one, whatever, one level of relaxation and repose one episode of Grey's Anatomy provides, three X is not three times as good as you're discovering.

Joanna Meyer (23:42):

It's emotionally stimulating to a negative degree. It's like-

Andy Crouch (23:44):

Yes.

Joanna Meyer (23:45):

... the fat, salt, and sugar of those potato chips and junk food, but it's for the soul, and it's just not a good thing.

Andy Crouch (23:50):

Yes.

Joanna Meyer (23:51):

Andy, one of the reasons why I wanted to interview you when I first emailed you and said, "Hey, can we have you on the podcast and can we talk about temperance? I thought, "Well, Andy's a genius at most things." But also, I would argue that temperance seems to be an unacknowledged theme in a lot of your writing, whether you've been writing... You've written two books about power that have been deeply moving, and you've also written about technology, the tech-wise family. How do families have restraint in this day and age? And then also your new book touches on themes of both technology and the global forces of money and the market. And all of those are talking about how we relate to these consuming, attractive forces in our world. Am I reading you correctly? And then, I'd like to know a little bit more about what role does temperance play in human flourishing?

Andy Crouch (24:40):

Well, no one has ever put it to me that way. And I'm not sure I ever would've thought of it that way. But when you mention that, I feel like it's very right. Since I started thinking about power in particular, I... You look very happy that I said that,

Jeff Hoffmeyer (25:02):

Right? I told you Joanna is wicked smart. I think she's just celebrating that she found the secret key to all of your books that you didn't even know.

Andy Crouch (25:11):

Yes. See-

Joanna Meyer (25:13):

I've been soaking myself in your writing for about a month.

Andy Crouch (25:17):

That's why I was replying because we're seeing video. I think those listening don't get to see you, Joanna, celebrating. You're like, "Oh, I got it! I got it!" Yeah, you did. I think you're right. And really, maybe one reason I think you're right is that about, oh, 15 years ago, I guess I realized the great under examined topic for many Christians was power. And while I wrote explicitly about that in my book Playing God, and then I wrote about a dimension of it in my book, Strong and Weak, and now you would think, "Oh, he is onto this other thing called technology." Well, technology is just the concentrated pursuit of a kind of power that the modern world is most distinctively undertaken. So, I'm really still writing about power. When you write to about technology, you're absolutely writing about power. And power, in some ways... It's interesting what you said, Jeff, that if self-control coming at the end of that list is somehow the summation of the virtues.

(26:17)

The ability to have the good, but not too much. Power has always been, I think recognized as the kind of fundamental promise and temptation of our constitution as image bears of God. We've been singled out from creation to have power. God gave the man and the woman authority over the other creatures in a way that he doesn't give authority to other creatures. He says, "Fill the earth. Subdue it." Which is an invitation to creative power and also to a kind of dominion. I don't want to say domination, but dominion over the world. Well, all of that is power language, and because it's presented to us by scripture as a gift from God, we know it's good. But then, you immediately realize within five seconds of becoming an adult human being, which usually happens in seventh grade roughly, you realize this whole story has gone really wrong. People are not using their power well. People seek too much power. People seek the wrong kind of power.

(27:16)

In order to fulfill what we're made for, we have to have it. It's not just good in the sense of nice to have, it's actually essential for human flourishing that each of us have power. And yet, if we are not temperate in our pursuit of power, when the serpent whispers, "Oh, wouldn't you like to sort have direct access to good and evil? Wouldn't you like to be like God? Wouldn't you like to be independent of God?" All of those are invitations to a too muchness of power for which we are not made. So, I think you're really right. The word that if you had prodded me in this direction, until you've said the word temperance, the related word that I would've used is this Greek word ascesis, which we get the English word aesthetic or aestheticism from. And I was very influenced years ago in reading the most important modern philosopher on technology, whose name is Albert Boardman. Albert writes toward the end of his first book, which is just a deep and challenging and brilliant analysis of what's really going on in the modern technological story.

(28:33)

He says, "In a way, we're going to need a new aesthetic movement that is a new ascesis because the forces, the power we unlocked with technology in the world are just so abundant. They will do so much for us if we let them. They will replace us, and displace us in so many ways if we let them, that we're going to have to be able to live frankly with way too much available, and the ability to say, "Nonetheless, in order to have the best, I'm leaving some of this power untapped." And you could look at that at the level of hydrocarbons residing under the surface of the earth, or how many Twitter feeds I can follow at once. It works at a lot of different levels. To be human is to live within proper limits, rather than reach for all that is now seemingly within our grasp. And so I've thought about more in terms of ascesis, but temperance is just a Latin way to get to the same Greek idea, I think.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (29:37):

Hi, I'm Jeff Hoffmeyer, Vice President of Advancement here at Denver Institute for Faith & Work. And I would like to invite you to become a part of our new monthly partner community. Whether it's a monthly commitment of $25, $50, or any amount, your generosity will support Denver Institute's ongoing efforts to help men and women love God, their neighbors, and society through their daily work, including this podcast. To say thank you, as a monthly partner, you'll receive a welcome box. You'll have exclusive access to private digital content, personalized vocational coaching, and discounts for Denver Institute content and experiences. To become a monthly partner, simply visit denverinstitute.org/give, or see the show notes in today's episode. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

(30:29)

That really, as you were talking about that, it seems, as you're talking about power, part of I think the limiting of power for us, the temperance with power, is that we can then share power with others. That would be, I think the biblical model. It's a power for others, and that's similar to a biblical idea of freedom. And all these words kind of cluster around each other. It's not just a freedom from-

Andy Crouch (30:56):

Yes, totally.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (30:57):

... sin, devil, hell, it's a freedom for others. And that temperance, even what you're talking about with a glass of wine. One glass, one and a half, then you can be free for those you were at table with.

Andy Crouch (31:12):

Yes, wow.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (31:13):

When you go beyond that, you stop being able to do that.

Andy Crouch (31:17):

The British, I would say English, I think, have a saying, "There's no number between two and six" referring to sitting down at the pub, and how many drinks you have. If you get the onto, you're in for six. And it's a totally different thing, and it's not good for the others around. I think that's really interesting.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (31:33):

Yeah.

Andy Crouch (31:33):

And that's a really interesting note. Thinking about the grocery store tends to lead to a kind of individuals like, this won't be good for my health, but actually when I am in temperate with anything, it actually does great damage to my ability to be present with other people, and to empower, and engage deeply with other people. That's actually, I think, an important addition. I need this, not just because it's not good for me to be overly dependent on these things, but because I'm going to miss out, and other people will miss out on blessing of my being present with them in the way I'm meant to be. Which is certainly true when you chase power in many forms.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (32:12):

Absolutely.

Andy Crouch (32:12):

The more you chase it beyond its limits, the less present you're able to be in a loving, empowering way to other people.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (32:19):

Andy, let me throw another word in here. We're kind of throwing a lot of words out here, but you've written about the word mammon, this biblical word. It means more than money. So, explain what Jesus meant by mammon, and then maybe even relate it to what we're talking about in terms of temperance.

Andy Crouch (32:37):

Yeah, well, what did Jesus mean when he said, "You cannot serve God and mammon?" I will say that not everybody agrees in Christian history on what he meant. Some people think he did just mean money. I don't believe that, and the first reason I don't believe it is that his first interpreters, the gospel writers leave the word untranslated. It's an Aramaic word that it can sometimes just mean money in Aramaic. But, Jesus spoke Aramaic all day, every day, and they translate everything else he says. There's only two things they don't translate. They don't translate a couple of these moments where he seems to utter words that have a kind of spiritual power. Where he raises the girl from the dead with a phrase that they report, they just pass along the Aramaic rather than translating it. And then, of course, the other thing that they don't translate is proper names. We don't really translate names usually. So, if it's a name, it gets just passed along.

(33:33)

And that leads me, and by the way, led bishops of the church who had a lot more insight on this than me, just as early as the second century of the Christian era to say, "Oh Jesus, when he says you cannot serve God and mammon, he's not just talking about money generically. He is actually talking about a personified reality." And we, in the history of Christianity, would call one kind of personified reality, demons. The demonic. And I really do believe that when Jesus says, "You cannot serve God in mammon," and just as God is not the name of a concept, God's the name of a person, that mammon is... I don't know if I want to say if it's personal, because I think actually the demons reject the personal ultimately. But they are wills. They are individual wills who try to intervene, and interfere in human affairs in such a way to lure us away from our intended purpose. And mammon, I believe, in Jesus' mind, and certainly in the tradition of the church has become associated with the demonic power that attaches itself to money.

(34:43)

And that power, whenever you get close to money, I assure you, mammon is whispering in your ear. Here's what you can have if you have just a little more of this. And it's always present in money-based economies. I think it's singularly present in our modern world because in some ways I think mammon won the contest to distort the loves of human beings the most in the last 500 years. In other words, there's lots of demons, there's lots of vices, there's lots of temptations. Sex, money and power are usually considered the three big ones. The temptation to war, the temptation to sloth, there's lots of them. But which one has most systematically derailed the human story? I would say it's mammon, the love of money.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (35:32):

Yeah.

Andy Crouch (35:32):

And that's recent. That wasn't true in AD 1000, I wouldn't say. I'm not saying people didn't love money, but there was less money to love, frankly. There wasn't an entire economy built around the idea that profit maximization is the only goal of human work. There's just so many things that we've added to this story that mammon's been like, "Oh, bring it on. I can win the whole human story now." So, that's how I see it.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (35:55):

Yeah, that clearly reframes, of course, our relationship with money. That puts it in the category of the Apostle Paul's language of the powers and principalities.

Andy Crouch (36:06):

Exactly.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (36:08):

It's what the theologians would call the third actor. It's not just God and humans, but there's a third actor on the stage.

Andy Crouch (36:15):

Wow.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (36:15):

This [inaudible 00:36:17] actor. Yeah, I think you using that Aramaic word mammon, all of a sudden that convinced me. I realize this is important to think about, pray about, just it elevates the whole concept.

Andy Crouch (36:32):

Right? Yep, it's so important, especially for those of us who intersect... Everybody does to some extent, but I think who you all work with are people who intersect with these systems that are money and generating money, valuing systems, money-driven systems. And it's not that I think having a unit of exchange, a means of account, and a store of value is a bad thing. That's the traditional economics textbook definition of money. That doesn't sound like demonic, that just sounds like useful tools for human value exchange. But part of I think why mammon works so well, is that underneath those classic three definitions of money are the idea of countable, storable, fungible power. And it really gets back to power, and it's the idea of I can have a kind of power that I know how much I have, that's the accountable part. I can store it for later. That's very unusual with power. Most power has to be used today, while you've got it.

(37:36)

But money says, "Oh no, no, you hold onto me, and whenever you want, you can use me. You can use me 10 years from now, you can use me tomorrow." And then fungible, I can exchange it for other things. Not many forms of power are like that. I have a kind of power as the parent of two children. They're adult children now, so it's not a whole lot of power, but I have some. But that doesn't make me the parent of your children, or my neighbor's children. I don't have that power in other cases. But with money, I can exchange my power for anything I want, which is very unusual. And I think mammon hooks itself to all those and says, "Don't you need to know how much? Aren't you a little vulnerable if you don't know how much? Don't you need to store it for later? Aren't you vulnerable if you live only trusting God for today? And don't you need to have anything you want?" Which is what money can get to you in a way that no other form of power can.

Joanna Meyer (38:26):

That's so fascinating when you think about some of the modern, I would say industrial titans. I think of Elon Musk, but I'm really thinking about Jeff Bezos. And if you had looked at his life 25 years ago, I wouldn't have described him as a powerful person. He wasn't particularly charismatic or attractive, but boy-

Andy Crouch (38:43):

That's interesting.

Joanna Meyer (38:44):

... has he controlled money and technology. Step by step by step, he's acquired both and look at his life now. And I hate to say this. I feel like I'm pointing fingers at Jeff by saying this, but he's at the cross hairs of what it looks like to have the power of mammon active in his life and influence. It's breathtaking when you actually think about that.

Andy Crouch (39:07):

Yes, and-

Joanna Meyer (39:10):

Andy, I'm wondering... Oh, go ahead.

Andy Crouch (39:11):

Well, at the cost of relationship. It's just a matter of public record that not only Jeff Bezos, but a stunning number of these other people who have made uncountable fortunes in our time also have not been able to sustain a covenant at the heart of their lives. And that's no accident. Not that there aren't many other ways to have your marriage fail, but getting a lot of money is a great way to not be able to sustain the most important relationship.

Joanna Meyer (39:46):

I'd love to know, and I'm going to spring a question on you, but how do you see in people's daily lives, as you observe life and culture here in the US? How do you see mammon practically at work? You said failed marriages among the very, very wealthy. How else do you see it having a hold on people's lives?

Andy Crouch (40:05):

Well, fundamentally, I would ultimately say the loneliness of American life is extremely connected to the dominance of money in American life. We've brought more and more things that people used to do out of neighborliness, out of friendship, or out of family commitment. We've brought more and more of those into the circle of the money economy. More and more of those things are paid, or can be paid for. Whether that's caring for your child or caring for your parent, but also things like caring for the natural environment around you. Mowing the lawn. I'm from New England. In New England, the only lawn-like thing that people had 400 years ago was this area called the commons. And now, I'm not saying there wasn't an economy involved because this was where people kept their cattle, and their ruminant animals, and the animals kept the grass cut, which gave us these beautiful green, New England lawns, sheep or cows or whatever. And you did it together. People knew whose cows were whose, it wasn't communism by any means, but there was shared commons.

(41:24)

And now where everybody has... You may have a one quarter acre lot and you still have your own lawnmower that you bought with money. Or, your own lawn mowing service in which you buy the service rather than the machine. Now that's your little space, there's no commons in the same way, and you basically pay to have it taken care of. And any one of these developments, and just you could go on and on in life. There used to be these things we just hardly on necessity because our great grandparents just didn't have much money. None of them did really, unless you happened to be a Carnegie or something. They had very little money, but they did have relationships with their neighbors. And people provided for each other out of a sense of sometimes duty, sometimes a little grudgingly, but still, you belonged to each other. And when you can purchase all that, then you no longer have to be dependent on other people. And who really wants to be dependent on other people? So, we're all like, "Oh, I would love to sign up for the lawn service," or whatever.

(42:32)

But, then you also no longer have an occasion for a relationship with another person. The fundamental thing I see in our shared life such as it is just how lonely it is most of the time because most of our transactions are mediated with money. And then, you start to wonder, if not be quite convinced that the person on the other side of that transaction is only there because of the money they're going to get. They're not there often because of the relationship they're going to get.

(43:00)

When I walk into a convenience store, which is a very interesting name for a store, I don't expect the person behind the counter wants anything to do with me to be honest. And usually I can tell they don't. They're in a hurry, they want to serve the next customer, I'm just another credit card to them. And I won't say I don't stop at convenience stores sometimes because they're convenient, but I know what I'm

missing when I do that, which is I'm very, very unlikely to form lasting relationships with people who are, after all, my neighbors in my town, in my county, but who I will never have the kind of relationship that neighbors used to have. Does that make sense?

Jeff Hoffmeyer (43:42):

Yeah, and hearing you talk about that loss of the commons in New England, it makes me think about architecturally, the loss of the front porch in homes. Now it's all in the backyards on decks, and if you're with people, you've invited them. It's not the front porch where you just literally are hanging out with your neighbors, and that architecture enables that. It seems like what you're saying, Andy, is relational connectivity. This is actually one of the practical ways that we can practice, just gain some momentum in temperance in this idea of [inaudible 00:44:25]. I don't know if I'm adding words to you, but we actually need each other to be able to have that right amount of yes, that right amount of no.

Andy Crouch (44:35):

Yeah, and let me think out loud about it. I think what the convenience store offers me is too much of a good thing, which not is not just... Walker's Shortbread is what I buy at the convenience store, but there's lots of other aisles. Whatever you like. It's not just the stuff, it's actually the convenience itself. As I've thought more about this, when I go into convenience stores, I've tried to slow down. So, what am I doing? I'm trying to not maximize the convenience, the whole point of a convenience stores convenience. But we can make an intentional decision. I am going to pay just one click more attention to the persons who are in this store. As I go to that register, rather than just minimizing the amount of time, maximizing the efficiency, I could go through just a little more thoughtfully, a little more attentively. Maybe I will see their name badge, and maybe it'll be appropriate for me to say, "Thank you Jeff," or whatever.

(45:38)

Or, to just ask them a question if there's not someone behind me in line, just like tiny little micro decisions, all of which are basically saying, "I'm going to take a temperate approach to the convenience I'm offered right now." For the sake of what? For the sake of being with other persons. Or, I might do it for the sake of, in a sense, being with God. I need to not maximize my day in such a way that I don't have the space to hear my soul calling to the origin of my soul. But, all that is going to require voluntarily saying, "I'm not going to take all the convenience that's on offer. I'm not going to take all the purchases that are on offer. I have to say no at some point so that I can actually be with the world in a way, be with other people, with God and with creation that I'm responsible for." Rather than just passing through it as fast as I can and using whatever of it I need to get to whatever I think my destination is.

Joanna Meyer (46:37):

Yeah, I think about Jesus's ministry, and part of what fueled his relationships with people and his miracles, were that he allowed himself to be inconvenienced.

Andy Crouch (46:48):

Yes, interrupted.

Joanna Meyer (46:48):

To be walking down the street and have someone cry out, "Son of God, have mercy on me!" That's inconvenient. That is not something I want to hear somebody say to me as I walk down the street.

Andy Crouch (46:55):

And he's got a plan, he's on a journey, he's like got a direction, a destination. And yet, at that moment he stops. "What is it you want me to do for you?" As if that's not obvious.

Joanna Meyer (47:08):

Don't touch my robe.

Andy Crouch (47:08):

Exactly.

Joanna Meyer (47:14):

I would love to turn our conversation in a practical direction because one of the things I just have appreciated about your work over the last few years is that you've made this tangible. You've provided people some really thought-provoking tools of how they can show greater temperance with both technology, and the rhythm of modern life. And I would love to talk about... I'm a little bit more... I'm giving you a wide open space here to tell us a little bit about maybe some of the principles that you introduced in The Tech-wise Family. Because I think you had very tangible tools. As well as I'd like to hear about the Rule of Life that you guys created at Praxis. We use the Rule of Life at Denver Institute, and our listeners have had a chance to hear a little bit about that. But you really developed a vision of a rule of life for entrepreneurs. And there may be other examples, but I think those are great places to start that can illustrate for our listeners what a more temperate life might look like.

Andy Crouch (48:03):

Yeah. Well, actually the first thing that comes to mind, both with technology at the home, which was the focus of Tech-wise Family, and with our Rule of Life is the very first topic that comes up in the Rule of Life, as we developed it for entrepreneurs, is time. And the fundamental discipline there is rest. And I actually think this is very connected to technology in the home as well. We live uniquely in an era of history where most of the stuff around us is designed to stay on all the time. I don't know if you've noticed it's gotten harder and harder to turn off your phone. They shipped with on off switches back in the day. Now to turn off my iPhone, there's two buttons I have to hold it the same time. They're on the opposite side of the phone. It's very hard to get the right grip to do it. And then it puts up a prompt saying, "Are you really sure? Okay, slide this thing if you want to, but why would you ever want to turn the thing off?" It's just not designed to be turned off.

(49:05)

And that's so different from an on switch where the moment you split the switch, the thing's gone. Our devices now are like, "Are you sure? Press this again. Rethink your decision." They are not designed to be turned off. And I think the most healthy thing we can have is a pattern of work and rest in our lives. Which of course the biblical language for this is Sabbath where yes, some of the day, and some of the week... The majority of the week, I am engaged in the world, and I'm using technology to extend my capabilities, which is I think what it's meant for at its best. But, one day in seven, I go through all those awkward steps to say, I'm turning this off because we are not made for always on life, and we're made for rhythm. And of course, we experience this with sleep, and some people imagine that they can cut down on their sleep. We have a lot of evidence who can't really do that. We're just made for this. And until the blink of an eye ago in human history, you just had to.At the end of the day, the sun went down, it got dark, it got very expensive to keep the lights on. You could light a candle for a little while, but that candles were not mass produced. But now, we just keep the lights burning. We imagine that we are 24 7 creatures. The emails keep arriving all night into the next day. And the single-most valuable thing I think we can do is have a rhythm of on and off. At home, our family settled into this rhythm of at a minimum of an hour a day, a day a week, and a week a year, where we would turn off everything that had a switch and some things that you could only unplug and they didn't even give you a switch. We just minimize our interaction with independence on the technology layer of our lives, and return to all the other things you can do when you don't have all the devices glowing at you.

(51:05)

An hour a day, that was dinner time while our kids were in their double-digit years. It was bath time when they were little. A day a week for us, that was Sunday. And then a week a year, this will happen actually in two weeks for me. We'll go to Maine, where we've gone many summers for many years, and I will set up an email autoresponder the Friday before we leave. I'll answer all my emails, and then I will set up this that says, "Unfortunately I will never read your email." And it's like the happiest day of my

year when I set this two-week vacation auto response. And it is very true. It all goes to some archive. I never look at it. I leave with an empty inbox, I come back... This is the secret of this. I come back to an empty inbox because for a while I was like, "Oh, I won't answer emails on vacation." But, then you come back to a thousand emails. The most demoralizing day is like the Monday after vacation.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (51:58):

That is simply brilliant. That's the best idea I've heard in a long time. What I love about what you're describing is each of us can do this, right? And you're actually-

Andy Crouch (52:09):

We really can do it.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (52:11):

... about temperance. We don't have to go full Wendell Berry. I don't know if you're a Wendell Berry fan, but not have a computer, not have a phone, write with a pencil, send a manuscript with a typewriter. Actually, six days you shall work.

Andy Crouch (52:26):

Yes.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (52:26):

Six days you shall use your phone. But just for one hour, one day, one week, you're going to actually turn the thing off and rest.

Andy Crouch (52:36):

But when you do that, you will find out initially how dependent you've been on it, and how intemperate your use of it is. Or really, in some ways, how intemperate its use of you is because the level of anxiety we feel when we first start to practice these Sabbath disciplines, it's mind blowing. Because we don't necessarily think we're that dependent. Because part of how addictions work is we develop para addictions to soothe the distress of the addiction that cloak from us, how dependent we are on whatever the primary thing is. And when you let all that go, you discover, oh, I am wrapping way more identity, anxiety, fantasy, whatever, in this thing than I ever imagined because it's all coming pouring out when I turn the thing off. But, on the other side of that, the first couple years I set that email auto responder, I'm like, "I don't know if I can do this. What if someone offers me, I don't know, the pool of surprise or something? What if I miss out?" There's all kinds of reasons we get addicted, and think we have to be on all the time now.

(53:42)

In fact, first of all, we go away in August. No one's doing anything in August. It never matters. I don't think I've ever felt, oh, something critical happened that I missed, at least in my life. The first couple years actually, there was quite a bit of anxiety setting that auto response, even though I felt and knew it was the right thing to do. But then, you get to the other side, and you're like, "Oh, I am never going back. I'm never going back to 52 weeks a year of email." That's not a temperate use of email. 50 weeks... I do 49 really because the 12 days of Christmas I take off as well. 48, 49 weeks is plenty. But gosh, you don't ever discover how embedded, and enmeshed in this stuff you are until you have a rhythm. And then, you discover how good it is to have a rhythm. And there's a point after which you're like, I'm never going back to that enmeshed life that I once unthinkingly lived.

Joanna Meyer (54:41):

What are some of the other principles of the Rule of Life for entrepreneurs that you've created?

Andy Crouch (54:47):

For entrepreneurs specifically, the basic idea of a Rule of Life is that particular vocations have particular temptations. And of course, there's a vocation of being human, which we all share. But then there are these specific things, whether it's being a monk or being a writer like I am, or being an entrepreneur. Our Rule of Life, we felt like we needed to identify what are the areas where... It is such a temperance question because it was really the areas where sort of entrepreneurs who are almost always maximizers anyway, are tempted to maximize to a really dangerous extent. That is they're tempted to a lack of temperance. Time was the first one, but then, let me see. I don't have it right in front of me, but I think I can remember. We ended up with six. It was then money, then imagination, then power itself, then community, the nature of our relationships. And I've got five, and there's one more that I am not going to remember at this moment.

(55:47)

But, to unpack what all those have in common is that entrepreneurship gives you access to a way of life in which you start behaving very intemperately. That is, you feel hurried all the time. That's the time issue. It's not that entrepreneurs have too much time, they have too little time, and they're tempted to work 24/7. And then, also to make people work way more than they should. And of course, this has become part of the entrepreneurial script in our world. And not just in the United States, there's this thing in China. What is it called? Like ten six or something like that. 10 hours a day, six days a week, something like that. There's just this expectation for relentless work from the employees, not just the entrepreneurs. We wanted to say no, we need disciplines that temper our use of time. Same with money. Money, if you're on the for-profit side, a lot of the reason people go into entrepreneurship, and a lot of the reason people invest in entrepreneurial ventures is the dream of extraordinary amounts of money.

(56:46)

If we don't have a pre-tempered relationship with money before the big windfall, before the exit, before the IPO, should that happen, we're going to be in big trouble, so we have these disciplines around money. Imagination though is a subtler one. Imagination is the essence of entrepreneurship, is envisioning something that isn't yet, but that could be. And yet, we are surrounded by imagination-absorbing devices in a way. Things that rob us of the time and space to think truly creatively about the work we're doing. Whether that is the endless glow of email, or the endless offer of entertainment in the evenings. We need a relationship with these other things that can fill our imaginations so that we have room for the actual dreaming and creating that entrepreneurs are meant to do. With all of them, the underlying question was, what are we tempted essentially to neglect or abuse?

(57:51)

The community one is more about maybe the abuse side... Or the neglect side. Well, maybe also abuse side, but we're tempted to neglect all of our other relationships for the sake of this big audacious venture we're building. And we just don't think that's a healthy attitude towards even a really good venture. Too much is not right. You should work on it, but you should also have people who know you and love you whether or not your venture ever succeeds or fails. Those were the kinds of questions and discernments in a way that went into our Rule of Life for people who want to be redemptive entrepreneurs in the world.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (58:27):

Decision making is the last one. I just Googled-

Andy Crouch (58:30):

Oh, decision making. Exactly. Thank you.

Jeff Hoffmeyer (58:31):

... Rule of Life. Yeah,

Andy Crouch (58:32):

Exactly. Because when you're any kind of leader, you spend your days making decisions. So, boy, if we don't have a well-developed spiritual discipline for how we're doing that, then we're going to make decisions basically out of fantasy and anxiety. Those are the two false drivers of the human life. Fantasy is dreams of the future that are untethered from reality. Anxiety is fears for the future that are untethered from reality. And the reality is that you are the beloved child of God, and you don't have to fantasize, and

you don't have to be anxious. But, if you don't have a discipline in place, you will make most of your decisions out of some combination of fantasy and anxiety.

Joanna Meyer (59:11):

We will link to the Praxis Lab's entrepreneurial Rule of Life because it's so thought-provoking, you'll want to see it. Andy, thanks for joining us today. As we wrap up the conversation. I'd love to give you the final word that's kind of a special gift I give all of our guests is to say you have an opportunity to give a charge to our listeners. And I'm wondering if you would offer a few words to invite them towards a more temperate way of life.

Andy Crouch (59:35):

Huh. Well, here's what actually comes to mind. All of us, we know in our heart of hearts, what are the things we've had too much of, or have been tempted to grab too much of. And I'm sure those things come to mind for anyone listening to this, but I actually wonder if an invitation might be, what is the good you have not actually taken enough of? Is it a walk out of doors? Is it some food that gives you joy? Is it some place that's beautiful? What's some good that you have actually not taken the time in the rush of your life, and the dependence of your addictions? You haven't taken the time just to have the proper good that when you have it, it restores your soul. I think there's an invitation not just to have less of things, but actually to have more of the good. And our lives are so much better when we've had something in our day that leaves us unable to just totally be self-pitying.

(01:00:50)

And we have to say, "You know what? This was not an easy day in some ways, but I'm sure grateful for that." And I think the invitation would be, however hard the things you're facing today, what is that good thing you're positively invited to take up enough of?

Joanna Meyer (01:01:08):

Gosh, that was a thought-provoking conversation with Andy. I think I say that at the end of every episode, but today really resonated with me. In our show notes, we'll provide a number of resources for you. The first is links to all of Andy's books, including his new one, which is called The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World. We will also link to our new book, Virtue and Vice, which is so thought-provoking. Really fun. Thinking about some of the ancient values of the Christian faith can really shape our modern work and life. We'll have a link to that for purchase in our show notes. And finally, we'll put a link to the Praxis Labs Rule of Life for Entrepreneurs if you were intrigued by what Andy shared today. A few great resources for you. Thanks again for joining us today.

(01:01:57)

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