



PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

Chris McCluskey & Kim Avery

*The podcast dedicated to Raising the Standard of Coaching...
and Changing the World*

Episode 006

Daring to Answer the Song of Your Heart with Christopher McCluskey, PCC, Part 1

Dan: Hi, this is Dan Miller, author of 48 Days to the Work You Love and you're listening to Professional Christian Coaching Today with my good friends Chris McClusky and Kim Avery. I encourage you to join them in raising the standard of coaching in changing the world.

Kim: So welcome to another episode of Professional Christian Coaching and we do have a treat in store for you today. This is actually my opportunity to put Chris McClusky on the spot. Over the years I've had the privilege of knowing Chris, probably seven or eight years now. Chris, I have heard snippets of your story, the real story of what goes on behind the scenes, in your heart, in your family, and how God is working through all those things, good and seemingly really difficult, to not only grow you and your life but to grow Christian Coaching as a profession. And so I'm just going to invite the listeners to settle in as I do, as well, to learn a little bit more about you. So is your seat belt on, Chris? Are you ready to go?

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Chris: It is. This is quite an experience being interviewed on my own broadcast here, right? But it's by my co-hosts so this will be fun. What a kick.

Kim: All right, I'm looking forward to it. So why don't you go ahead and start, maybe not with the day you were born but a little bit of background about what even interested you in Christian coaching and how you came to be in this field.

Chris: Sure, yeah. I was raised as the oldest of three children. We were stair stepped, real close in age. My brother's not quite two years younger and my sister's just three years younger and change. So we're very close together and a very close knit family, a strong Christian family. Mom and Dad have been married some fifty-odd years, both still alive, both in relatively good health. Actually, believe it or not, just live right up the road from us. We can take a little stroll up the dirt road that we live on out here in the country and drop in on Mom and Dad. And interestingly now, many years later and many trails later, my siblings live on other portions of this farm that we live on out in the country. But going back to the beginning and being raised in that family, it was a close-knit, healthy Christian family. I have a lot of the models that I hold still today as a husband and a father, for what marriage can be and what Christian parenting can be and what family can be from that family I was raised in. I count myself tremendously blessed, just blessed beyond all measure, in terms of the family in which I grew up. That doesn't mean that it was perfect, that my parents didn't wish they could get a do over on some things and that doesn't mean that myself or my siblings were angels. But in really any serious way that I can look at my childhood, adolescence and the launching years from that home, it was just a really, really rich bed of soil to grow up in, if I used the metaphor of being a plant. So launching out of that, all three of us kids went off to different colleges and we all three within a relatively similar time frame met the persons who were eventually to become our spouses. And so if I kind of pick up our story thread here at about the time that we're really fully adults but don't really have a lot of the adult responsibilities and pressures. There is a Christmas that will forever remain ingrained in all of our minds, I know.

When we were all in our early twenties, all just finished with college and I think two of us still in our Master's programs, but in other words, probably the youngest was maybe

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twenty-one or twenty-two and the oldest was twenty-four, maybe just knocking on twenty-five. Nobody had any kids so all three siblings married, nobody's got any kids, nobody really settled into a major career path yet. Certainly, working, paying our bills, living independently but we found this family that we had grown up in with Mom and Dad, living in Toronto, Canada. Now, we grew up in Ohio most of our lives but they were landed immigrants. My father was in the steel industry for a number of years so he was working with the steel company that was headquartered out of Toronto. So they were over in another country, so to speak, across the lake there. Rachel and I were living in Kentucky, working on my Masters. My sister and her husband were living in Ohio and my brother and his wife were living in Indiana. So not terribly spread out from each other but going in the direction that was actually very typical, I think, of most modern American and probably just Western culture kind of families. In other words, you grow up; you get good grades in high school. Why? So you can go to college. You go to college and you get a degree and you work to get good grades. Why? So you can get a good job. Where's that good job going to be? I don't know, where ever it is. So you go where the work is.

And we found ourselves at this Christmas gathering in Toronto at Mom and Dad's house with all three of us saying, "Huh, here we are." Interesting, kind of a wrapping up of a season behind us. Definitely a sense of pivot going on right now. New season opening up, surely in a few years, sooner rather than later, should the Lord bless us, we're going to have kids and be settling into career paths. Are we where we want to be? Are we where we feel God is calling us to be, as individual couples? And we spent a week together at Mom and Dad's place and, again, with no other kids tugging for attention or robbing sleep, we just had some long, into the night kinds of conversations about life vision and sense of calling and equipping. And what are the things closest to the Lord's heart. To put it in a nutshell, all of us had a very strong sense that one of the most important things, in fact, arguably the most important thing that we could do in terms of preparing for the next season, was to focus on family.

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Now, forgive me for referencing a very popular radio broadcast of that title for many, many years. But yeah, we recognized that maybe the greatest legacy, the greatest impact we could have in this world would be simply to do exactly what our folks had done, to raise a healthy family in a generation where we all had seen a lot of our peers begin to go through broken families and splintered relationships. This is in no way denigrating blended families and all the other definitions of family that we now hold. But we were looking at an intact nuclear family, Mom and Dad loving each other and realized, wow, that's a big challenge of the century here. We're seeing a lot of our peers, whose parents and/or even they are already beginning to struggle with that. And we realize that some of the elements of that was the disintegration of community because of the need to go where the work is, because families were not around to help with the parenting of the next generation. We realized that aside from the nuclear family we grew up in, we didn't really know our extended family very well at all. We knew they loved us. We knew Aunt and Uncle so and so, and Aunt and Uncle so and so and the cousins were here and Grandma and Grandpa who lived there. My grandfather on the other side had been deceased but we knew Granny. And so we knew of them, Christmas cards and presents and birthdays cards and the occasional visit once a year or once every other year but were they instrumental in shaping us? In impacting our daily lives? Could my folks help out with childcare or could we vacation together? No, because they live in other states and we live in other states and here we are now, myself and my siblings and my folks, starting off in a new season and realizing, well, we're going into the model most people do. Where's the work? That's where we're settling.

And it was that awareness, that scratching the surface of bigger vision. I can't say we had this amazing sense of all kinds of heavens opening up and giving us a blueprint. No, absolutely not. But we had enough of an awareness of, hmmm, I don't think we really want to follow the directions that we're basically heading in right now, but in our generation, with further disintegration in the culture anyway having happened since the sixties and the seventies, now we're in the mid-eighties. I think it's going to be harder to raise intact families, to keep strong marriages together, especially if both wind up working and families are far flung and all. So we all simply agreed, Kim, that we would

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begin praying earnestly that, if it would be the Lord's will, that all of us would be led to some kind of a place where we might be able to settle down to raise up our families, if God should bless us with them, in relatively close proximity to each other. That's as much vision as we had, just kind of a vision of what you don't want and listening to what I've come to call the song of our own heart. And saying, "well, our desire would be that we would be closer together and the extended family could have a dynamic impact in raising of our own nuclear families. So Lord, we will earnestly and consistently bring this before you in our own marriages as we go back from Christmas break and just be open, if You would lead."

And so really, the Lord tells us if we seek, if we knock, He's hearing and He's going to answer. And it was really not even a year from that Christmas before my dad had gotten the largest raise he'd ever gotten in his professional career and he and Mom took a really nice vacation, now that they're empty nested. And they came back and said, "Hey, guys, you're not going to believe what we did. We bought a vacation home. It's in a little town called Dunedin, Florida. It's just north of Clearwater, Florida, over on the Gulf side of Florida, kind of what they call the Suncoast by Saint Petersburg and all, Tampa Bay area. But we've never done such a thing; we never had the money to do such a thing. Don't know what we're going to do with it but we're going to vacation there and if any of you all came there to - it's not a timeshare, it's our little place, it's a townhouse - you're welcome to just knock yourselves out."

So we all decided that we would take Spring Break at the townhouse. And as Spring Break rolled around and for that Easter we found ourselves again now, all together in the same place and began to realize as we were prepping, "You know, we're working fifty weeks out of the year to vacation somewhere one or two weeks a year, often Florida, and people live in Florida." [laughter] So to kind of close out this season and open up a new season, Kim, what happened is, I went down and took a couple of interviews, just two, while I was down there for that week. We continued to talk and pray and dream. None of us had kids yet still. And I got two job offers. Went back home, having listened to that song of our hearts and daring to risk, nothing in particular holding us in Kentucky or

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Ohio by that point. My Masters was done. And so I turned in a two-week resignation and Rachel finished out the schooling year up in Ohio and I scooted down to Florida to that townhome when everyone else went back home to their places and got started in Florida. By six weeks later, Rachel, my wife, moved down.

My sister and her husband came in the same moving van with them because he was brand new in his position as a teacher in the school district they were in Bowling Green, Ohio, and the levy didn't pass that year. So you know how it goes, last hired, first fired, if the school levy didn't pay in. He didn't do anything wrong, but he's out of work. She's not yet got a job; she'd just finished her degree. So they said, "You know, we can look for work in Florida, as well as we could look for it here." So bam, bam, there we were. The Lord began to open up what we felt like was the answer to the prayers and so moved down there. To just wrap up that season quickly, it was another year yet before my brother's wife came from Indiana but it was when each of the families then had all had their first child. And it was we two families in Florida having our first and Michael, my brother, in Indiana and his wife being pregnant with their first. They began to feel, "Oh, yeah, this is what it feels like to have a child coming and family's not around. And we're seeing what a support Rachel and Kelly, my sister, are to each other. They're in Florida; we want to make that happen." So they took a more proactive leap to come down there and start a new career for him. Long story short, that's where we wound up for the next, basically, decade of our lives.

Kim: Yeah. It's beautiful. I, as a Florida resident, I'm always surprised that everyone doesn't live here. So I actually love the idea that you moved here. I think everybody should. It's a great place to live. Of course, you're not here now, but it really strikes me, a couple of things. It's unusual, I think, Chris, at such a young age, to not have children and to be in your twenties and have that values identification, to listen to the song of your heart. For many people that occurs in their late thirties or early forties or maybe at the birth of their first child. And so, I do think some of that is a credit to the family you grew up in and the ability to have that conversation and a safe place to have that conversation. Your brother and sister and your family, your parents, all together, being able to say the things that are

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most important, to listen to one another and stir up that song so it's not just a "wouldn't it be nice, I wish" but "let's pray about it." And then, when you pray about it and your eyes open and start to see the Lord leading and the clues. So it's just a neat trail of breadcrumbs. I think part of the legacy that your parents have left in sowing seeds into you all.

Chris: Kim, it absolutely is. I'm blown away, actually, because you put your finger on exactly why I believe that kind of conversation happened for us up there. It is the fruit of the spirit of the home that my folks set. My father is the example that I hold for a spiritual leader in a home and that's not because he sat us down and did all kinds of preaching at us or making sure we did our sword drills well and knew all of our Bible verses, not that there's anything wrong with those things. But Dad's spiritual leadership was first and foremost, although he did teach Sunday school and he would speak to men's groups and all and Mom did the same. The spiritual leadership, the leading from the Spirit, was in the tone that was set in that home that said, "we love being a family and we love each of you. We believe that you were entrusted to us to raise up for the King and we want to hear from Him, 'Well done, good and faithful servants' one day. And so we want to reach into the fabric of who you kids each are and try to call out, try to draw out, what it is you're created for, how you're knit together." That's classic coaching language. I don't know where my parents got that from but that was, in fact, how they were raised, so yeah, it does produce fruit. There was an environment in which we were encouraged to listen to the song of our hearts, to sing the song and to dare to keep singing the song, to pursue the things that you really desire most strongly. Because it's not just a selfish, humanistic, "Oh, if you can dream it, you can do it" kind of a thing. It's trusting that in fact the Lord placed that song in your heart. That's His fingerprint in your being or whatever metaphor works for someone. And so, go ahead and call it forth and then listen to it and begin to try to act on it. You caught it, Kim, that's pretty cool.

Kim: Well, that's a neat place to resume again. So fast-forward. I know that, like myself, you're a therapist, and worked in Florida for quite a few years. So talk about the therapy and the coaching. How did those two things come about?

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Chris: Yeah, we figured we're all in Florida. We started having kids so this is the answer to the Lord's prayer so end of discussion basically. We're gonna raise our kids here all of our days and, as you just said a moment ago, I'm not in Florida now. I haven't actually been there for seventeen years. We lived there almost a decade, all of those families and I do believe that was for that season. I opened a private practice as a Christian psychotherapist. It was called Christian Care Counseling Centers. It became during the time I ran that the largest distinctly Christian practice on either side of the Tampa Bay. We were the referral of choice for many churches in the area. It was very ecumenical but very distinctly Christian and, in fact, it was totally fee for service. We didn't do a sliding scale. We were not a non-profit but we also didn't bill insurance companies. We were not an EAP or a HMO or any kind of an insurance affiliate of any kind. So Christians came to us self-screened. You know, with a practice like Christian Care Counseling Centers you're a Christian if you're calling that place. And they would pay out of pocket for work that they could have gotten paid off at times at eighty percent coverage or maybe even one hundred percent coverage through their insurance. They came to us instead. Why? Because they knew that their faith and their worldview, their moral code, the tenants of their faith they were seeking to align with were going to be honored and integrated into their work at a very painful season of their life, because psychotherapy is always about healing brokenness. Something is not as you would desire it to be, maybe it's through errors of you own, maybe it's things that were done to you, and maybe it's just physiology and life crises, any number of things. But there it is, what are you going to do?

So that was what I figured I would do all of my professional life. But, the Lord keeps stirring up the song. It's kind of like the same song but a different verse or something. We began...Rachel and I had at this point, now that I'm fast forwarding this to, this is probably the tail end of 97, um, the middle of 97 and we had three children. Let's see, my sister would have had three by that point and my brother would have still had two, I guess. So we were settled into parenting, we had actually all chosen, interestingly, to homeschool. We were just kind of experimenting. We thought, "How badly could you possibly mess up kindergarten, right?"

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Kim: Right.

Chris: And then we did, and we thought, "Okay, that wasn't so bad. How bad could you mess up first grade?" And by the second year that we were all fumbling our way through, we realized, "Ooh, we love this flexibility and portability the homeschooling lifestyle could afford for us." So wow, maybe there's a new piece of the puzzle. Isn't it cool that the whole world can become our classroom, so to speak? Ah, except for one little rub and that was Dad's tied to his practice. If you're not in the chair, you're not making money. I had a team of therapists working for me at that point and interns and all. But still you're pretty much there as a typical job as work, Monday through Friday, you know, normal business hours. And one night a week I did groups and all. So there was that, again, very typical way the American family normally works, of kids waving bye-bye to Daddy in the window on the way out, as I got in my car and made the ten-minute commute to my practice. And you come home at dinner time or a little bit later and hopefully Mommy has kept it warm and we'd all settle down and have the evening or nighttimes I'd come in and it's real late and all we get time for is a tuck in and kiss on the head or something. But, okay, that's just the norm, right? That's what you settle for.

Well, all I knew was that it wasn't the song of my heart and it wasn't the song of Rachel's heart. We began talking about the possibilities thinking that was engendered by being a homeschooling family, except for this one piece of me being tied to work outside of home. Now, telecommuting was pretty brand new. In fact, the Internet really wasn't being used very much yet. Al Gore had given it to us all. [laughter] Right? He'd blessed us all with it but we didn't know what to do with it yet. Amazon only sold books at this point. So really, people did not go to the Web for very much, so I didn't have much of an understanding of how I could utilize what I believe are my gifts and my calling as a people helper, in this case as a psychotherapist and do it from home. I knew I didn't want my therapy clients coming to my home. That wasn't going to be real cool. So basically I think there was just, if I can use the soil metaphor again, the Lord was turning the soil over, kind of prepping me to hear some new thing that He was going to drop.

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And so it was in 97 that I found myself at a workshop, actually. It was an all day workshop for private practices outside of managed care. And the presenter was a gentleman by the name of Patrick Williams. He became my first coach. Pat Williams was actually not the primary presenter. He was invited as a guest and he came up and talked for probably ten minutes. It might have even been for only five minutes but probably ten minutes, maybe fifteen. The main thing was to (?) psychotherapists of all stripes about how to break free from managed care and to have an independent practice. I was the only person in the room - they had us raise our hands - who actually was already doing that but I was at that looking for their tips and pointers. And this guy comes up, Patrick Williams, and he talks about this new field that was beginning to emerge called life coaching. And he explains it as being somewhat similar to counseling, except you're not working in brokenness but in healing. And you're utilizing questions and exploration, like we do in psychotherapy, except you don't even have a template in your mind to work from, in terms of the goal, like a diagnostic model that says, "Okay, this is what health looks like and so I'm coming in and asking questions around that vision of health." Instead, a life coach, he says, is coming in with no preconceived notion of what the answers might be to probing questions because we're just genuinely exploring questions of possibility, vision, what could be, what would you long for, what would you desire? This guy was reading my mail, I think. [laughter]

Kim: He was singing your song, actually.

Chris: My song, that's exactly right. I could not shake that five or ten minutes' worth of plug. I don't remember anything else that happened at that workshop. I do remember, here was this psychotherapist - that was Pat's former work - who was entering into what he called a field. At the time it seemed like it could be called just a fad, you know, just a passing thing but I couldn't shake it. And so I sat on it for almost a year. I'm not one to just jump on the hype train of whatever, this latest thing. But I kept bringing it up to Rachel and saying, "You know, if this is real, you're working with healthy, stable clientele, that means it can be done via telephone. You don't have to see them face-to-face." It could

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utilize this new thing, the Internet and email that people were starting to play around with. Do you remember the AOL days, Kim?

Kim: Oh, you have mail.

Chris: You have mail and those little discs were coming to all of us and we were playing with it, just a novelty like Facebook was a few years ago. Or smart phones when they first started to come out and everybody wanted the toy because you could take a picture with your camera. Now we wouldn't know what do without it. Back then, we didn't have any idea what email was gonna do and make possible. But I realized, "Wow, teleportability, I could use my fax machine, at least, and maybe even this email thing. I could work from anywhere. Wait a minute, game changer." All kinds of new possibilities came in. It's like having the song and suddenly someone introduces you to new instruments or something you can make all kinds of new sounds with. So to run this one forward, I began sharing all this with my siblings and with my folks. We were all living there in Florida now, not in the townhouse together, of course. We'd all broken out, had our different houses and all. We were living, I don't know, twenty minutes to a half hour from each other so we saw each other every week. The kids were having homeschooling time together. The moms would swap the kids back and forth for different age groups and all. So we would get together frequently and we started talking about, "You know, with this homeschooling and portability, wouldn't it be something if we could work from home? Wow, do you realize that we wouldn't have to live in a densely populated, metropolitan area." I mean, we were in suburbia, but, man, when the snowbirds - Kim, you're in Florida. You know when the snowbirds come down, right? During season, it takes twenty minutes to get across the street to buy groceries. It gets very, very packed in, and we were realizing, "Wow, it would be great to live in the country." [laughter] Wonder what that would be like?

Again, just a willingness to listen for a song, to begin to just hum it along, if I can stay with that metaphor and maybe sing some of the words. What if, what about, what would it be like, kind of step into the future of it and try it on. These are all coaching concepts. I did not know to call them that at that point. But by 98 I realized, "I've gotta call this Pat

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Williams guy." You know I held on to his card. So I picked up the phone, called and said, "You don't know me, but remember that conference a year ago?" He remembered it, of course, so I shared my story, my desire. I said, "I think you're doing what I'd like to do. Would you teach me to do it?" And Pat said, "Well, you know, there's a couple of schools that have launched that are actually training people at this. In fact, I trained through one called Coach University but I'd be happy to just work with you privately as a coach/consultant, therapist turned coach. And kind of help you put some of the pieces and infrastructure together. And then, if you transition into it, great. It might take training somewhere else." And I said, "Cool. I'm in." So I hired Pat as coach/consultant, started fleshing out more of the vision, and again, continued dialogue with my sibs and my folks.

Well, unbeknownst to any of us kids - I call us kids but we were in our thirties - Mom and Dad realized, "Oh, they're serious." And that wasn't scary for them; that was exciting. If God's about to do a new thing, we want to perceive it. We want to be listening and tuned in. And Mom, again, unbeknownst, she didn't say a word to us, she had always pined for the childhood farm she grew up on, when she was a little girl. She lived there from the age of five until fifteen years of age. She went to a one-room schoolhouse that is on the property. She lived in a home that did not have electricity until a few years after. She can recall being the one who got to throw the switch to turn the lights on at the beginning and in her childhood and that her daddy had built it with his own hands. He had farmed that property. Now, my mom today, 2015, Mom is 71 years old so she is not an old woman. This is recent history but it sounds like Little House On the Prairie. She grew up in a home that her dad built with his own hands. He farmed this property initially with a team of horses and a plow. He eventually saved enough money to buy a tractor. The one-room schoolhouse, Mom would walk, oh it's a quarter mile, maybe three-eighths of a mile to the little schoolhouse in the morning to fire up the potbelly stove to get it warm enough for the teacher before the teacher would arrive in the morning. She would have milked the cows in the morning. They raised chickens. They had all kinds of crops in the fields here. So that was my mom's childhood. I mean no indoor plumbing. There is an outhouse and a water pump out there. They hauled water from a cistern for years before they got a well put in down outside.

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So that is where she had pined for. It had not been her life. She had moved off at fifteen, married my father at nineteen, lived in suburbia. All us kids knew was suburban lifestyle but Mom had that little song about country life and all the richness that the country does afford, the beauty and the animals and all God's creation. Kind of like a little taste of Eden, I think. But she didn't say anything about that to us, when we started dreaming about the country but she looked into her childhood farm. And, lo and behold, that farm, Kim, it was in foreclosure and had been for three years. They didn't know.

Kim: Wow.

Chris: The bank allowed them to buy it for a song. [laughter] Not literally, but to keep with the metaphor. So as I began to try out a trial balloon of coaching, Mom and Dad said - again, reminiscent of ten years previous - "Hey, gang, you're not going to believe what we did but--" [laughter] I'm serious here. "We bought the farm." That's not generally what you want to hear your parents say but in this case, it was cool. "We bought the farm that Mom grew up on as a little girl. It's been neglected for twenty-five years. It's in a derelict state. We don't know what we're going to do with it. We might vacation there. We may even just turn around and sell it. We're certainly going to keep it for a little while. We want to go back. She's got tons of memories from there." Kinfolk, we knew, still lived in the area but I probably visited the farm once or twice as a child. I didn't have really good memory of it. But there it was. And they said, "Now listen, if any of you get serious about moving to the country, you know, you're welcome to go there. Knock yourself out. You could start a base there and look at the surrounding area, if you want to or, again, we might just turn around and sell this but there it is."

We believe this is another piece of the whole plan, yeah. So long story short, with that piece in place and me coming up and looking over the property, coming back and relaying it to Rachel. Rachel, my wife, actually moved here sight unseen. She had such confirmation that this is where we were to be. I'm serious. She came with great peace, saying, "I know that's where the Lord's called us." After moving here, actually, she had

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more than fifty specific, what people would normally call, déjà vu. They were instances where she absolutely could not know the lay of the land or the buildings or the interactions with animals or the lay of a creek or whatever, but she was there and she felt very confirmed over and over, this is where the Lord, in fact, had been calling your spirit and here you are now. We didn't know that but I went back and said, "Yeah, this is what God's got for us." And she said, "I know it is." So we started the process of alerting my faculty or my staff there, my therapists and interns and secretaries that we were going to begin closing the practice down. We gave six months advance notice. In a very healthy fashion we terminated clients or referred them off to other therapists, helped my clinicians all get set up in their own practices or transition to other places of employment, sold the house, and moved to the farm, out on this little dirt road in the middle of nowhere.

This is in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains. There's not a mall within a hundred miles of here but this is where we settled with great peace and confirmation. Now get this, here's another piece just like the throwback from ten years ago. We were listening to the song of our hearts. This time it was my brother, not my sister, who came in the same moving van - actually we had to get two moving vans this time. But he came in the same moving caravan with my wife, after having initially said, "Oh, you guys are crazy. You're not going to move out there and what about our dreams of raising families and all? This is where we are to be." To coming full circle with his wife, as the two of them prayed and listened to the song of their hearts. You don't talk another couple into something like this, unless you're a very unhealthy enmeshed family, which I don't think we are. [laughter] They began to hear that the song was similar. He came out with me, scoped out the land, and actually picked out a home site with me. And so, he went back, and he interviewed by distance, actually via the Internet. Found several job possibilities in the area; got a job in the area - he's an industrial engineer, got an MBA, very highly educated family, intelligent family. We're not crazy but he said, "You know, I'm coming with you."

And so their family moved with our family here onto the farm that first year. And within another year, this time it was my sister and her husband, who came up, again at Easter

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Break, with their kids and they just fell in love, again, with seeing family. Now, actually, in such close proximity that we can walk to each other's homes. This is like a throwback to maybe a hundred years ago. No, we were not living without indoor plumbing and electricity, but being able to walk to each other's homes and plant gardens together. By this time we had gotten some horses and chickens and ducks. It was fun. And they went back home. Mark closed down his Merrill Lynch practice, ten years in the making, closed it down and came here to start over with A. G. Edwards, building a practice in the town near us. And that's how each of the families transitioned here. And, of course, you can imagine that about another year later Mom and Dad were on the property, as well.

Kim: And so it's just such a beautiful meshing of your values. It's the family. It's the flexibility. It's the portability. Everything that the song of your heart was singing. Except...there's another piece to this story that I know because I've heard you talk about it. And it's often the part of the song that plays loudest for most of us. It's that financial security, that career piece. So talk about going from a full, thriving practice to what you thought would be a smooth transition into coaching.

Chris: Yeah, it wasn't exactly smooth, not by any measure whatsoever. The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry. And this one really went awry! Still believed that all the way it was still the Lord's calling but sometimes He goes ahead to make the road places smooth, sometimes He simply goes ahead and assures us that they will be smoother than they would have been. But He's going to open doors that none can close and close doors that none can open. And all kinds of challenges hit us immediately that I could not have anticipated. I had worked out with Patrick in coaching the model that I thought; in fact I had proved it out. I had built a trial balloon of a coaching practice right along side of my therapy practice back there in Florida, was very pleased with the upside potential, financially, was securing a large caseload already. I had eight to ten clients by the time I came here. All I had to do was give them a new email address and a new phone number and we're good to go, right?

Not so fast. But that was the plan and it made sense and so we got set up here in temporary housing. We settled onto the farm and I immediately recognized, oh, wait a

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minute, these phone lines - that was back in the days of dial up Internet, I did not have high speed yet - can't handle dial up Internet. They were the old party lines from, like, way, way back.

Kim: Oh my.

Chris: Yeah, these were made when the operator would connect you and you might hear two or three other conversations going on at the same time. They didn't use them that way anymore but that's all the wiring was so I could not get on the Internet. So all these clients that I had secured and was going to transition so nicely into - this was January of 1999 that we settled on - I, instead, had to contact them by phone and say, "You know what? I'm not going to be able to serve you this month because we don't have cable laid out here that will handle dial up Internet. I don't feel like I can serve you well just via telephone because that's part of what we contracted for, was that we could interact by email and all. So let me get that into place and we'll pick back up in February." Well, they all had already lost December but they were very gracious and they were like, "Okay, cool, no problem." So no income in January, none from December, as we closed down. That's all right. We took the nest egg from the sale of the house in Florida. We're going to be okay for a while, right? Well, February came and went and we couldn't get the cable laid down either. Finally got it laid in March, picked back up a couple of those clients and a tornado ripped through, just north of us, about a mile north of us. It did not hit us but a huge surge came down the electrical line. And I had set up my office in my granddad's old house that he had built here on the property. We weren't living in it. It was totally uninhabitable but it had animals living in it before we moved on. Kind of sad. But I had put one room of it to be my office and it was an ungrounded electrical system. So, phone, fax, computer, scanner, printer, you know, everything that runs on electricity is fried. This is in the days of floppy backups but, no, most of us were not backing up very faithfully. [laughter]

Kim: Some of us still aren't. [laughter]

Chris: I lost everything so I barely got back on my feet in the second quarter of the year of being here and lost everything. Sent the computer off to St. Louis. There was nothing

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retrievable, had to buy a new computer. So we're burning through cash really fast. I did not have a large nest egg because we had sunk a lot of what we originally had into the establishing of that old counseling practice and, goodness gracious; we're still a young family. I was thirty-four years old when I moved on here. We'd just had our fourth child. Rachel was staying home. We didn't have another income so we had tightened the belt everywhere we reasonably could. We'd sold our two vehicles. We'd bought a used minivan, which we lovingly dubbed The Ford Humiliation. [laughter] And it was. The Ford Humiliation was truly that. But that was okay. We had one used minivan between the two of us. We did not break ground on a house. We actually bought a singlewide mobile home trailer, as did, interestingly, my brother. He did the same thing. The scriptural principle we were following was, first establish your fields, then build your house. Right? Words of wisdom. And so that's exactly what we were doing. We were first establishing our fields, in this case our businesses, and then establishing us. Temporary housing is cool. We can do a singlewide with four kids. It's a little crowded. I can't run the coaching practice out of there but I'll set up in Granddad's old place. And, wow, things just went from bad to worse. By the time I finally got back to where I finally had reliable Internet and new equipment and all of my forms and credit card processing and everything back in place, it was mid year and I had no clients that I had originally brought with me. I was finally able to pick back up a couple.

Kim: Ouch.

Chris: Yeah, ouch. They were one hundred dollars a month, kind of a token thing to get me going. But, yeah, that first year we grossed what became a new definition of gross for us. We grossed just over eight thousand dollars total from that. And then I did some teaching throughout so I think our total gross income our first year was twelve thousand or something or other.

Kim: For five people.

Chris: Well, for six people, yeah., four children and Rachel and I. So we were flying through the cashola. Now I knew coaching could still work but I'm not back in Tampa Bay anymore.

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I'm not able to go to a Business Networking International kind of a meeting or a Christian Businessperson's luncheon. In fact, to this day I have not had a client for personal coaching who lives within fifty miles of me here on this dirt road. This is not a place to get clients from so I had to learn how to market in a completely different way from how I had ever marketed before. I did traveling and speaking. I would take a speaking gig. I'd do a marriage retreat. I'd do a business anything. I would fly to a conference. I paid, actually, over twenty thousand dollars that next year. I traveled more in parts of the United States then in 2000, than I had traveled in my entire life combined by plane. Well, it burned through all the rest of our nest egg. By year two we had zero dollars and we got to where we were about twelve to fifteen thousand dollars upside down in cash. This is, oh, my goodness, using credit cards to buy groceries kind of a time. And you've cut your losses, man. You're out there and this is where you are, not because you were crazy, not because you did something foolish, but because you believed God had called you. You dared to sing that song and it was a whole lot harder than anything you thought it was going to be.

Now, my brother was going through some similar challenges through a change in the job. He was already in his second job, and like I say, my sister and her husband, they had come on and he was establishing his A. G. Edwards practice but that's an uphill climb. You don't take your old portfolio with you. So we were all three here, tasting bits and pieces of fresh vision and family, and I've often said I'll take all kinds of debt financial but not relationship debt, not lifestyle debt. You get one pass through life. You get one shot raising your kids. You don't get do overs on those years. We knew we were moving in accordance with the songs of our hearts but it was really hard.

Kim: Yeah, but, Chris, this is so interesting to me because I feel like God in a way almost brings all of us on this journey, as we're following His leading and His song. And like you, I work with so many coaches who dare to dream, dare to follow God and then it seems like - and I know we haven't even hit all of it - everything goes wrong and caves in. How did you keep yourself encouraged? How did you talk to yourself? What did you do?

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Chris: That's the right question to be asking here because, honestly, of course, it was brutally difficult. Things like this are going to do one of two things only to the marriage. They are going to drive it together or they're going to blow it apart because those pressures are very real. This is not just funny anymore. We can laugh about it now in hindsight but it wasn't funny at the time. It was really scary. In fact, I was out in that farmhouse. You've heard my stories before of being out there when I was trying to heat that one room I was set up in with all my beautiful cherry wood furniture from the old therapy practice. I'm in this rickety room with a bare bulb above it. I can hear the rats in the walls, seriously, just climbing around. It's in the middle of bitter cold winter. I can't heat it well enough with a space heater and I've got my army jacket on. I've got my wool cap on, gloves on my hands. I would take my gloves off, dial the phone, put my glove back on, put my headset on, then pull my wool cap back over me, try to keep my teeth from chattering while I'm in a coaching session. [laughter]

This is not working really well but it needs to. I say it's not Plan A, Plan B, and Plan C. It's Plan A.1, Plan A.2, Plan A15, Plan A.25 but we knew Plan A was where the Lord's called. And you're right; many times it is far harder than we believed it was supposed to be. I firmly believe that if you have a strong conviction because you spent time in prayer, you spent time in conversation, you sought wise counsel, you spent time in silence and solitude, journaling, fasting, you prayed this thing through to the point you felt firm in your conviction. And, by the way, God never showed up and just told me, "Thus sayeth the Lord, go to Missouri." But if you have the kind of peace and confirmation, then you go and you don't look back. You don't get there and when it starts to get hard say, "Oh, I want to go back to Egypt. It was so nice when we were back there." You don't let that thing that we all hear in our ears whenever we're trying to embrace a call that says. "Oh, but what about security? Isn't that kind of crazy? You don't want to do that. Are you nuts?" When you make the commitment, you commit. And as a couple, you make sure that you're on pace together. You let that commitment and the difficulties drive you to each other. Rachel and I experienced our intimacy as a couple and as visionary parents for our kids deepen to a level that we had never even tasted in the years prior. And factoring into these years we had our fifth child. And eventually, before we ever moved

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out of that trailer, we had our sixth child. Now six kids and a mom and a dad in a singlewide trailer, I just tell ya, you know, it's cozy. [laughter]

Kim: And you're all about family.

Chris: All about family but it's really cramped. Thank the Lord that, actually, by the end of that second year the vision of what I had had with Patrick Williams, working with my coach for what coaching could produce, had in fact proved out. I just had to be tenacious enough to stick with it. And keep figuring out what's working and do more of that. What's not working? Well, goodness gracious, stop! Don't keep doing the same thing. Try something different, mix it up, but when you find that something hits, do it again. So it was really only in that second year that we grossed a little over fifty-four thousand dollars. Now, that's not where I was with the therapy practice back in Florida. I think I was pulling down around eighty-five thousand plus benefits package and all other kinds of nice benies of owning your own practice. That was pretty nice back then for a thirty-odd year old, you know, young dad. But we were where we wanted to be and we were raising the kids the way we felt called, in the country with extended family around. And by this point, of course, my folks had moved on as well, so we were tasting of richness in many other planes besides financial. And we could begin to see that the financial was going to come through. I didn't know if I'd ever make what I had made. I'm happy to say that by year three I exceeded anything that I had ever made. So the coaching not only worked out on paper, in practice by year two, figuring out what worked, it began to work in spades and by year three it was paying out so well that I was making six figures and replacing anything I had made, not only as a therapist but with a team of therapists working for me I was still grossing more and keeping it. Because of working at home.

So yeah, the other was there, just incredible challenges to get there.

Kim: Sure, sure. And how wonderful to stand on this side of it and to see how God provided. But if I could just highlight something you said, which I think is just so incredibly profound. You said because you made a commitment. And I've noticed in my life and other people's lives, my clients' lives...I think of my daughter who runs Ironman triathlons, you know,

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almost for a living. The difference between her finishing and other people not making the finish line. I've watched, she's been terribly ill, had terrible accidents in a race, and on and on and on it goes. Yet she always finishes, even if somebody else went home, even if the whole race goes home, she finishes. And I've learned it's because she commits beforehand, no matter what, "I'm going to finish this race." And from the place of commitment, I realize we ask different questions. We don't ask, "Oh, what if it doesn't work out? What if it doesn't, what will it be like?" We say, "Because I'm committed, what can I do? What's God teaching me? What are my options?" Like you said, "What's working and not working?" So I just wanted to, I don't know, put a spotlight on that word commitment because I think that people have to commit, if they're going to do something like this.

Chris: Oh, Kim, I'm so glad you underscored that because that is the thread that should run through everything. You nailed it right there. In fact, that's probably the biggest take away from this entire story. It is about listening to the call, the song, as I've said, daring to sing the song, daring to answer that call, and then committing to, essentially no matter what, this is going to happen one way or another because I believe it's what God's called me to. This is one of those things I'm going to answer for before the Throne. People ask, "Well, what's the fallback?" I say, "There isn't a fallback. We don't put a fallback in place for something like this. We answer a call and just, "Let's just keep moving forward because we believe God has rich things for us in this new land." So really, Kim, that takes us up to...I guess that's through the next decade, getting established well here on the farm but wrapping up my thirties, starting to step over into the forties. And you know the story kind of takes another turn here, right? [laughter]

Kim: Yeah and as a matter of fact, it's such a good story, if I can just indulge you and ask you to maybe just save that because I think it's worth, seriously, an episode in and of itself. Because the troubles aren't one and done, now they're over and I'm on this side of the mountain and things got better. I know for you, there are ongoing struggles and it's so representative of so many people who are listening today and there are so many lessons to be learned from that. So perhaps we can just get you safely on the farm, making

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money, following the song of your heart. And if you would just kind of leave our listeners with a thought on your faith journey. What did all that do in terms of your relationship with God? And we'll wrap it up there for today.

Chris: Well, good for you. I love you just taking charge there, cuz that's probably exactly what needed to happen. But yeah, we've got me on the farm and things are going well with the coaching practice so we'll pick up there next time. That's great with me. What I would leave people with is exactly what we just said there, that the primary theme is dare to listen to the song. Dare to begin to sing the song back. In other words, to take it and say, "What is it like, if this becomes my own? How can this happen? Lord, I bring it before you over and over in prayer and fasting and private retreat and in discussions with my spouse and through coaching and seeking wise counsel, all the disciplines of our faith." How could this be operationalized? What would it take? Who can help us? What's the time frame? Chunking it all down and then stepping out in firm commitment. As they say sometimes in war times, you know, we burn the ships. We're there. We're committed. We're not going to turn back. There is no, as I said, Plan B here.

So I guess we'll continue forward into the dark years, as we call them fondly, through the early forties there on our next podcast, eh?

Kim: Okay. Yeah, and I hope everybody stays tuned for that because, like you said, the years in some ways actually get darker and get a little bit harder. But until then, Chris, I'm going to steal your line here at the end since I get to be the interviewer of the day. Just encouraging everybody to keep raising the standard in changing the world. God's richest blessings to you.