

The Redemptive Edge by Praxis

Season 1, Episode 3

Jessica Honegger: Starting, Staying, and Making Courage Inescapable

Jessica Honegger: So it's this interconnectedness which really is the nature of a B-Corp. It's a stakeholder model, not a shareholder model. We truly are as stakeholders all completely interconnected and because of that there is no leaving. There is no “Oh, I'm just gonna leave this gig and no one's going to be affected, right?” And in that way I feel like I've made courage inescapable.

Andy Crouch (narration): This is The Redemptive Edge from Praxis. On this podcast we talk to people who are building businesses and nonprofits that look at the world differently—we'd call it redemptively. They're aiming to renew culture through acts of creative restoration. Rather than using people to advance their mission, they aim to bless people. And they are led by people who aren't living for themselves, or even just satisfied with improving themselves — but people who aim to die to themselves so that something beautiful can happen in the world.

That's the redemptive edge — it's not so much somewhere you've arrived as a journey you decide to take. This podcast is about stories from that journey. I'm Andy Crouch, partner for theology and culture at Praxis.

My guest on this episode is Jessica Honegger, the founder of Noonday Collection. Noonday describe themselves as a socially conscious fashion brand. They distribute artisan jewelry and accessories from around the world, and work to build deep connections between the people who make those items and ambassadors here in the United States who sell them to their friends and their neighbors. It's a \$17 million dollar business that employs four thousand artisans around the world.

This business model is called direct sales. If you are in certain social circles, you may feel like you've been invited to one too many parties for dubious direct sales products (although I have one friend who is so persuasive about essential oils that I almost tried them). But let me just say that Noonday Collection feels different. I have one friend, who is super suspicious of the direct sales model, who told me that Noonday is the one company whose parties she would actually go to. And in talking to Jessica, and reading her 2018 book *Imperfect Courage*, which in many ways is the story of her starting this company and what she learned along the way, I think I figured out why Noonday feels different.

If you want a classic story of a founder starting a business absolutely from scratch, starting almost by accident, and going through all the ups and downs of success and failure and questioning and breakthroughs and having to learn that angel investors are not actually angels who just give you a check — this is totally that story. But this is also a story about much deeper things, because Jessica is someone who just consistently chooses the deeper thing. You're going to hear that in this conversation.

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So Noonday Collection is not just products. It's not just this ambassador/artisan sales model but it started and in many ways is sustained by a story of adoption. So let's start with that thing you were trying to do, and what went wrong and what went right as you pursued international adoption for the first time.

JH: So my husband and I had two children under the age of five. And Joe and I had actually met during a training for Food for the Hungry International. And we were sort of hair on fire, justice-oriented, we want to go change the world. And that was the context that our relationship formed in, so we went overseas for a couple of years, had been home back in Austin for a few years, and this

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was our way of participating in that purpose that we felt like brought us together. This idea that we have been given opportunity and we want to use that opportunity to create even more opportunity for others.

And we went to an adoption conference, we started researching foster care [and] domestic adoption, but as we began to really pray and move forward we decided on international adoption. We decided to go ahead and take a trip to Uganda first, to explore and try it on and visit some orphanages. And so we went to Uganda, and that was actually the trip where some of my friends that were living there, they were living there specifically to create entrepreneurial opportunities for Ugandans. It was everything from teaching a plumber how to invoice and helping him with a microloan on buying a bike for his plumbing business, all the way to mosquito repellent systems.

And one of those businesses that they had wanted to start, but hadn't really thought through, was an artisan business. So we sat on their front porch and they began sharing, hey we really love this young couple, Jalia and Daniel, would you be interested in selling their goods? And I completely laughed them off and thought, what are you talking about, I'm about to do adoption right now [and] we've got a real estate company. But thanks for thinking of me!

And came home from that trip, realized you know what, we definitely want to pursue adoption. And one of my friends had gotten wind that we were pursuing African adoption and had just gotten back from Africa, and he reached out to me and said hey, I just met a woman who just adopted from Rwanda and she's here, she wants to facilitate adoptions for other Americans. And I reached out to this woman and said hey I'm interested in pursuing Rwandan adoption; would you mind helping me out? And she said yeah; we felt so many green lights but it was definitely an intense process.

In the meantime—our financial situation—we had been flipping houses in the Austin real estate market, and the recession finally kind of caught up to Austin. And we were really suddenly living off that nest egg that we had for all the adoption expenses because international adoption is really expensive. At that point ... the paperwork is pretty much through. We still have outstanding adoption expenses. We have no money for it. We were faced with this choice, and you know I say that that's when courage really cornered me. Was I going to let a financial obstacle get in the way of pursuing what we felt like we were supposed to do, which was to grow our family through adoption?

And at that point I knew I needed to start a side hustle, and that's when I called my friends from that previous conversation in Uganda who had said, we have all of these goods, we want to help these artisans, we want to help create a business for them, but we need someone in the US to create a marketplace for them. And I remember texting them and saying, is that offer still on the table? Real estate really isn't working out for us, and we still decided to adopt, the paperwork's already in the pipeline for Rwanda, could I sell those goods? And I thought it was probably going to be a one-night thing.

And I just remember the day that that first—what I didn't know, Noonday Collection—trunk show, came. Fear was knocking on my door. I was afraid that no one was going to come. So it was that fear of failure. And even more than the fear of failure or fear of rejection, really was that I was gonna be alone in that rejection. Right? That I was gonna feel all these terrible feelings of being alone. That was one fear, and then another fear was really how I was gonna be perceived because we still had a real estate company, it just was failing, and who invites people over to their home that could be potential clients? That shows you, shows them, how desperate you are. And I just remember that day

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thinking this was the stupidest idea. I need to call this thing off. And of course I'm so glad I did not call it off.

So many women came ... and you know this was women from my neighborhood, neighborhood listserv, all the way from women that I had known from various situations and social groups and about 60 to 70 women came. We did about \$4500 in sales. And people loved the jewelry. In fact there was this one necklace that sold out. And I mean it was like women were like what, no I need one! Can you get more of this?

AC: And you said, I can start a multinational direct sales ... like, this is my ticket. Did you realize at that point that you were something ...

JH: We'd had a real estate business and I know I have an entrepreneurial mindset. I come from a long line of entrepreneurs. I think that night, once everyone left my house, there was something deep in me that did go, huh. I have been invited to a lot of home-based model shows and I've never wanted to go. I've been asked to be a salesperson for some of these types of companies and I've never wanted to do it ... and yet tonight so many people came. And this got me really excited. I did realize there is a hole in the market and the direct sales industry of this whole idea of purchasing with purpose. There's a hole in the market in this fair trade sector of fashion-forward accessories ... So I can't say it came together perfectly like that but there was a spark there that thought there, there's a need here and I immediately texted my friends the next day and I said, gosh all of all of this stuff sold. In fact people are wanting more.

And they said well, you know, we wanted you to use that money to seed your adoption. But why don't we connect (because they were about to leave Uganda; so these are American friends that were about to move back home) and they said, let us connect you directly with our friends Jalia and Daniel. They're so talented, in fact we think they could be the future leaders of Uganda. They just are extremely poor. You know, 80 percent unemployment in Uganda. They didn't have a computer. They didn't have a home. Their kids were not in school. I mean really they were in abject poverty. And yet they had drive. They had potential. And so my friends connected me directly to them.

For me to place my next order, I went and set up a Western Union account. I knew I needed a proper website but didn't have money for that so I dug through and found gold jewelry that you know my mom and my grandma had given me for various special occasions throughout middle school and high school. And I went to the Post Office to weigh the jewelry because I didn't have—I couldn't afford a scale. So I go to the Post Office to weigh the jewelry and then converted from ounces into grams to figure out how much gold I had. And then I went to about three different Austin pawn shops, landed on the one that I thought was the most promising, pawned off this gold jewelry, had about—I don't know—it was between a thousand, fourteen hundred dollars ... and that was how we built our first website. that's literally how the business started. Scrappy beginnings, a lot of fear but going anyway.

AC: Let's talk about that for a moment actually. This is a big theme of the book, courage kind of not instead of fear but sort of in the face of fear; and you talk a lot about fear, but you've also ... you have like a track record of taking a lot of risk. So it starts way before Noonday Collection or way before even this you know, sort of bootstrapping, funding your adoption initially.

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And so as I read the book and as I think about you from the times that we've been together in person, I'm trying to figure out whether you actually struggle with a lot of fear—or whether you actually have an incredibly high tolerance for dealing with fear.

JH: Am I a hoax, Andy? You want to help me reframe all this and write my next book?

You know it's interesting, because I think that you can have two responses to fear. I think it's paralysis of, you know what, the outcome is going to be failure so I'd better just not try at all than to try and fail. And that's this perfectionistic mindset, right. But I think that you can still feel those same feelings of fear and instead of paralysis, it's like the counter—you know, you counter that fear by just going. You know, I'm afraid of heights, well then I'm gonna go skydiving. And that is my response to fear. I feel like whatever I'm afraid of, the antidote to that is to do the thing.

But it was eight months into Noonday where I'm like, OK this is this is not a fundraiser, this has turned into a business. At that point I had other women primarily—a lot of women who were in the adoption phase who also needed to fundraise, and they said, can I start a Noonday Collection in my town? So we had someone in Seattle start a Noonday Collection, someone in Nashville, Houston, Dallas. And at that point I'm multiplying myself. And now I'm starting to have to train people on how to sell, and I'm merchandising product. I've now built more artisan partnerships. Jalia and Daniel now have 10 employees.

And at that point I knew I either needed to raise money, I either needed to find an angel investor ... which I thought an angel investor with someone who was literally like an angel just give me a check. So I have this prayer list from that time of my life that I still have to this day; it's on my desk and it's like: I need fifty thousand dollars. I need PayPal and my website to learn how to talk to each other. I need more ambassadors.

And of course that's the beautiful thing when you are operating out of such a place of faith; I started reaching out to people, which is what I do. I love connecting with others and I love the wisdom that comes from other people, and one of the people I reached out to was someone who I had met previously in Africa; we would intentionally take trips every year to kind of search out how different organizations were trying to find sustainable solutions to poverty. So it was on one of those trips that I met up with some of my one of my old high school friends and she was working for World Relief and her husband was actually the head of the microfinance loan of World Relief in Mozambique.

So he was one of these guys who, I just wanted to meet to think more long-term about Noonday Collection. So I began meeting with him early mornings before he had to go to his job, and just kind of laid it out there, you know, here's my numbers—and he started asking me just a lot of questions: What's keeping you up at night? What do you feel like you're really good at? Do you think this is a nonprofit or for-profit? Questions that I had, hair on fire, not really stopped to reflect on very much.

And after a month you know on one of our morning coffees, he says you know, my wife and I, we've been saving up our whole lives to be able to own a business someday, a social business—and he said, would you be interested in being partners, business partners? And we could go in 50/50; I'm ready to go salary-free and live off our savings account. They had three children, one of whom had Down Syndrome. So his wife was not working. She was really pouring into the care that a child with special needs requires.

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So that was fear. I mean, when Travis is like, “let's be business partners,” what I really heard was “are you going to sacrifice my family for the sake of this vision?” And I imagine them homeless. I'm going to lose my best friend, one of my close friends, so I would say that that was where I remember very specifically. That was my moment where fear was paralyzing me because I remember sitting on this chair that I sit in when I pray, and it was just being frozen by the potential outcome of failure. Because now when you link your prosperity to someone else's ... which in a sense, my prosperity already had been fully linked with Jalia and Daniel but I had actually not physically met them yet. So I'm sitting on my prayer chair, I'm thinking okay, if this just stops then Jalia and Daniel, this was just kind of a one-and-done thing.

And I remember doing one of those, God you got to speak to me now. I'm going to flip open my Bible and point. And it was Ephesians, and it said: You are God's workmanship—which, ‘you are God's poem’ in the original language—you are God's workmanship, created in His image to do good works which he has prepared for you in advance. And in that moment I did sense the peace of God and I sensed this peace of: this is the work that I prepared for you in advance.

And then it was that very day that Travis and I were meeting with a business counselor to go over this very intense personality test we had done to see if we were going to end up being good partners together. And I didn't know this guy's faith background whatsoever; but about halfway through he tells me, he says, “so according to your personality. you'll take risks only if you know 100% there's gonna be a successful outcome.”

AC: Which would mean it's not actually a risk, technically.

JH: It doesn't really sound like a risk to me, but okay. But what he says to me is, Jessica, there's this scripture and it says, “You are God's workmanship, and you're created in his image to do good works which he's prepared for you in advance. This is the work, like I believe this is the work ...” And that was my push. And so I jumped.

And I think for me, going back to this idea of fear, for me it's like maybe fear hasn't paralyzed me or kept me from doing something; but it has absolutely kept me from walking in the joy. And I could get tender right now, because even in launching this book, here we go again. Like, I launched this book and instead of really feeling that partnership with God, that joy of getting to do it with him, I started hustling after that outcome.

For me the fear is that internal dialogue of: Am I going to really receive that I am his poem and that this work has been prepared in advance and I just get to walk in it in partnership with my creator? I get to co-create with him. And so my challenge as an entrepreneur, as a go-getter, as one who doesn't let fear paralyze her—is doing it in joy and doing it in partnership. Because you see you can arrive to the same outcome of success or failure. But how are you going to get there? Are you going to do it in partnership with God? Or are you going to do it in partnership with fear, ultimately.

AC: As I was listening I wrote down two words that felt like they summarized the way that you respond when there is risk and when you do have that fear and that worst-case scenario playing out in your mind. And one was “action”—so that sense of, well she's just going to go ahead and act, rather than being paralyzed and not acting.

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But then the other word I wrote down, which I actually think is by far the deeper thing, is “connection.” And so I think about how you connected with Travis, your co-founder, ultimately. And how you, in that moment of realizing, that connection actually creates a new kind of fear because now someone else is dependent on me, his family is dependent on this venture succeeding in a new way. What I sense in you is, there is somehow this sort of deep drive to reconnect, to press into connection, that allows you to do that that risky thing joyfully and with a kind of assurance which doesn't necessarily mean an outcome of success.

JH: Yes, Andy. This is so true. Thank you for explaining myself to me. I love this.

AC: I think almost by definition entrepreneurs have that bias to action. I mean it's one of things we talk about when we look for and when we're recruiting fellows for our programs and so forth because that's just the essence of entrepreneurship, and it's actually one of the things I love about working with entrepreneurs, is the bias to action.

I actually think a lot of times we have a bias to disconnect. And all of us are, there's that kind of shadow side of our emotions, our imagination that says, oh it's better not to connect in this situation ... just fake it till you make it, do it by yourself, and do it without real dependence on God, certainly without real dependence on other people. And I'm just thinking maybe that's the deeper thing that we have to cultivate is action along with connection.

JH: I love that ...

AC: [And] adoption is so much about connection.

JH: Yeah!! And if I were to look at my parenting pre-adoption, I would say I was outcome-oriented in my mindset. I thought, OK I want perfect kids to come out the other side, and for me perfect meant, like, they love Jesus and they're changing the world, you know! We like to control outcomes or we like to think that we control outcomes; and when we think we can't control an outcome then we try to control our behavior in order to create this outcome in our heads. And so I would think about my parenting before, it was definitely like, I'm reading all the books, and I'm thinking OK, how do I create obedience and you know all of these things that we do.

And then you decide to grow your family non-traditionally; you decide to adopt a child who has come from trauma and grief, and you know very little about his background, and you know that's a whole 'nother story. But at first we said we want to adopt a healthy baby one year and under, etc. ... and then God really changed all of that and we changed all of our paperwork to say, you know, any child—and if there's health issues, then we just want to walk into whatever God wants for us. I mean, God created us to do all things in connection with him and with others, we can't trust God and not trust other people because God is “in,” right?

I think entrepreneurs also have this very typical reputation of being starters but not finishers. And I definitely struggle with that. I mean, thankfully my business is so extremely complex and creative that it is still to this day ... there's always something to start. There's a new line to design, there's new campaigns to begin, there's new people to bring on board. But I would say that if I wasn't connected, if Travis wasn't dependent upon me, if Jalia and Daniel (who now have a hundred full-time employees in Uganda) were not connected ... and they're not dependent [but] connected.

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So it's this interconnectedness which really is the nature of a B-Corp. It's a stakeholder model, not a shareholder model. We truly are, as stakeholders, all completely interconnected and because of that there is no leaving. There is no, oh I'm just gonna leave this gig and no one's going to be affected, right? And in that way I feel like I've made courage inescapable.

I think for me starting something, as a starter, it's actually learning how to sustain something and think about the legacy that we want to leave and the culture that we want to create globally. That's where the rubber is hitting the road for me.

AC: Let's talk a little more about that—about the actual structure of the business. I guess in two senses ... one is a more fuzzy thing maybe and the other is a very concrete thing, which is, you mentioned the B-Corp, and I want to explore why that structure and what that means to you ... and maybe it connects with the fuzzier thing, which is I'm actually thinking about how a very common model—and I don't necessarily think it's an all-bad model, let me say—of for-profit entrepreneurship that involves planning for the exit. You build the business, especially if you get venture funding. It's all predicated on an eventual exit either to public markets or to acquisition. And often that doesn't have to mean the exit of the founder, but in practice it does.

And it seems to me you've made a decision—maybe somewhat against your most natural inclination as a starter—to be a “stayer.” And that isn't to say you would never exit in some sense, and we'll all exit eventually, but you've chosen to double down on connection and connection to this business and to your community of people that you work with. And I wonder if that in a way is connected to having set it up as a benefit corporation (B-Corp) that really ties everyone together interdependently in a different way from the traditional for-profit structure.

JH: I have been really thinking about this a lot lately, because I am not a stayer. And so the fact that you just kind of proclaimed that over me ... I am constantly, especially during the first few years, because when I am uncomfortable—which, entrepreneurship constantly puts you in discomfort—I'm in my mind thinking of those escape routes, right?

And I think that way of thinking, when you are flying, you're building the airplane while it's going up into the air. Well, we've built the airplane, it's up in the air; am I going to pilot it, or am I going to stand at the door with a parachute on, thinking about the exit strategy? And it is so different when you just settle in to pilot the plane into the great horizon, which for us is to build a flourishing world where women are empowered, where children are cherished, where people have jobs, where we're all connected. And I'm just settling into my place there. Typical direct sales companies actually ... they're some of the few businesses that are able to scale without always taking on outside dollars. And it requires so much discipline, fiscal discipline, you know? And we are just so ... it's kind of like how you raise your children like—you guys, save some, don't spend more than you make—that's literally how we do things. We don't spend more than we earn. Can you imagine? Can you imagine?

But it does require a slightly slower growth, and I love that African proverb: If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together. So this whole idea of a stakeholder model, of connection, of collaboration—perhaps it does mean that we are growing slower than if we were just fast fast fast, get as much money, throw as much money at it as we can.

AC: This connects to something that I thought was really striking toward the end of your book. You talk about the temptation to really push your ambassadors, who are your salespeople, who are your channel, your profit engine in a sense. So I just think you're you're pursuing something that is actually

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much more sustainable and maybe more genuinely beneficial to everyone than if you were just going for the maximum return right away. And the exit,

JH: Yeah, I mean I think that is really ... especially with where you're working and partnering with people in poverty. They're so accustomed to the flash in the pan, and you know, Jalia, I quote her in my book, she's like, you eat breakfast but you're quite sure you won't get lunch; you eat lunch but you doubt you're gonna get dinner.

So this idea of long-term sustainability and long-term commitment has really enabled—that's really what's unlocked flourishing in so many ways—because they've been able to plan. And planning from everything from raw materials and production needs, and planning for how many people they'll need to hire for the upcoming year for those orders, and when you can both kind of settle in for a long term, it really does ... it's that connection. It's like: I'm not going anywhere, you're not going anywhere. So let's just settle in and change the world together. And that's beautiful and challenging if you are not a stayer.

AC (narration): When I spoke with Jessica she was on a book tour and had just visited Washington, DC. And one of the things that is almost unknown about DC, but that it ought to be famous for, is a small group of Christians who have been “stayers” in that city for several generations now, the people of Church of the Saviour—a tiny but incredibly influential Christian community that was planted in 1960 and still is making a difference in the city. And it turns out their story has made a difference in Jessica's life as well.

JH: So I write about the significance of living in Washington D.C. and the impact that I had on my life in my book. When I was in eighth grade I went to go volunteer in the inner city with a church called Potter's House. And I remember visiting Samaritan Inns, which was an apartment building for women who had—men and women who had—come out of residential treatment and had gone through a rehabilitation and had gotten jobs, and now this was their housing and their community. And I remember being on the seventh floor, hearing this woman singing “Amazing Grace.” And I looked outside the window and at that time we had heard that this was the largest open air drug market in America and it's only two miles from the White House. And then here is this woman singing “Amazing Grace,” which of course, I had sung that song so many times but I'd never heard it sung by someone who's actually been through toils and snares.

AC: Many dangers, toils, and snares.

JH: Many, many. And that was this moment for me of understanding. I have been given power, privilege, opportunity—and it is not for me. It is to create flourishing in a sense. And so it's such a profound moment; I always knew I wanted to go back to volunteer for Church of the Saviour, this church. And it was started by Gordon Cosby in 1960. And it was right during the civil rights movement and he really wanted to be a voice of reconciliation. He wanted to really model church in a way that had never been modeled. I'm quite sure he is the first person to ever introduce the idea that a church could own a coffee shop—but they started it for it to be a gathering place and then also to employ people so it was also where they employed people that were coming out of homelessness. It was also where I was exposed to this idea that work and jobs is actually the way to help people emerge out of poverty. So it was so formative for me.

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So last week I was in Washington D.C. and I thought, I want to go back to my old stomping grounds. I hadn't been back to Potter's House in about six years; and when I was there six years ago it was relatively like it had been.

But then on one of the walls was the history of the church, and clippings about Gordon Cosby and his wife Mary, and Church of the Savior, and all the different work they had done in this city. So I'm sitting at this table and I'm just really letting the moment soak in and I'm thinking about this idea of legacy and [if] Gordon, who passed away four years ago, were to walk in in that moment, what part of his legacy would he see?

And he would definitely see parts of it. It's still owned by—it's called the Eighth Day Church. There was still a communal meeting space. But it also made me think about what are some of the things maybe he wouldn't see, that were very much a part of his intention and his founding spirit and heart. Like, how do you adapt over time while also staying true to your intention? How do you pass down culture? And I think that's a big reason I wrote this book, because I think that ... and why we write is because, it's the words, right? It's words that can translate culture, translate values. It's how we can all be on the same page as we build this global company at Noonday.

AC: I was really interested in a section in the book where you talk about realizing you needed to hire a nanny. And you said something that I thought was interesting ... you said (I don't have the page open but you said essentially), I had lived a kind of pre-scripted life, that had a certain script for what motherhood was, had a certain script maybe even for what a business founder was. And we talk at Praxis about how important the founder's script is, that is: what story is the founder living by. But I'm increasingly thinking, as we talk about it, that actually the secret in a way to being a redemptive founder is not living by a single script or not being bound by a script. And that actually what distorts our work so often are the scripts we think we have to live by. And one of the things you've had to live out or really have had to, to some extent break ground in, is the question of how do you be a mom wholeheartedly, fully, and be founder and CEO or ...

JH: Yeah, you know, growing up in the South and growing up with an amazing stay-at-home mom and a pretty traditional dad. My personality is like my father. I grew up in San Antonio, 80 percent Hispanic, so I'm very influenced by the Latin culture and I think, even though I was bent more towards my dad, kind of this bias towards action—you know I want to go on adventure, get out of my comfort zone. I think as a little girl you think well, I'm supposed to follow in the footsteps of my mom. And my mom went to college, moved back home, actually made her debut which is a southern thing that is still very much around where I grew up. Met her husband while she was making her debut and then literally got married. So I grew up with this narrative that a good wife and a good mom takes care of her home and takes care of her children. And if I actually want to have a shot at it, like my kids turning out, then I've got to follow this script that is the only thing I had seen.

So now ironically through motherhood, because of motherhood, I'm starting this business, and so we're officing out of our home for the first year and then when Travis became my partner he moved in, and suddenly I'm parenting three kids under six out of our house. So there came this time and thankfully actually we were able to find this office space that was really near my house. And I remember there came this time where I need to get a nanny, and so we find this amazing woman. She ends up nannying with us for five years. She is filled with joy and service and literally was Jesus with skin on for our family. But instead of receiving that gift with gratitude, I saw it as this indictment of "I can't do both. I can't be both a good mom and a good CEO. Obviously I'm choosing the CEO thing. My kids are gonna be screwed up forever." So this is the script.

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And again I have a bias towards action so I'm doing the things still. But is there any joy when you're living into a narrative of shame around this huge role in your life as a parent? No. Not a lot of joy. And I realize it was taking away from my connection with God and my freedom. So for me I really clearly remember there was this a moment of literally kind of letting God commission me in my role as CEO and mom.

AC: You said something really interesting to me ... you said that God was commissioning you as a CEO. And in my mind I was putting a period there. I was expecting that was what you had felt God commissioning you to, that would then make it OK to do this; but you actually didn't have a period in mind. Because you said to commission you as a CEO and as a mom. And I think that's really powerful, that you are called to both of these things, God, this is part of the workmanship that you are (that Ephesians verse) and that God wasn't commissioning you to one at the expense of the other, but commissioning you to each in the way that they could be done together, that would bring flourishing in both.

JH: So I had this moment with God that was just really receiving the narrative, his narrative over my life, and ripping up that former narrative. Because my daughter was—I believe she was around 6 or 7—and I was putting her to bed, and Jack had been home a couple of years at this point, and she says to me ,Mommy I am so glad that we adopted Jack because if we wouldn't have adopted Jack, you wouldn't have started Noonday and Noonday has helped so many families around the world like Jalia and Daniel. But Mommy, Noonday has really helped our family too. And that was it for me. I realized in that moment that Noonday was not at the expense of my family but for the flourishing.

AC: This story of Noonday is both a story of ... it starts with international adoption, with your own family's quest for international adoption, and now it encompasses this worldwide network of artisans as well as your ambassadors in places like the U.S.; you have all these people making goods around the world. And it strikes me that both of these things have come under some suspicion as people become more aware of the complexity of what happens when people with a lot of wealth and power, which is us, even with very good intentions, go to other parts of the world that that lack those resources. And you know whether that's governments like Rwanda's limiting adoption, or also questions honestly about interracial adoption or whether that is doing some kind of a violation actually to a child who is from and of a particular culture and racial heritage and lifting him out and putting him in another context. And then there's the whole question of, the folks who are making these beautiful things may not be paid wages that we would live at, and we have the affluence to purchase them.

So there's all this complexity in the work you're doing. I know you have thought about this but I think it would be very helpful to hear. How did you conceive of flourishing happening across these chasms of inequality that give us all these options and do give us the option to get involved, but also sometimes at the cost of potentially exploiting the people we think we're helping. How does that work for you and how do you see that working in Noonday?

Jessica: Yeah, you know when I “woke up” in the eighth grade, I continued to pursue justice and I got so much wrong. I remember going to Africa and coming back home and raising money for a little girl to go to school, convinced that I was going to be in touch with her forever, and this was the way, was education ... and I remember doing homeless ministry and passing out meals without any thought around, where are they going to sleep that night, and how could I be with them in the long term? So I think in this pursuit of justice when we wake up and realize we have privilege, you know

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Jessica Honegger: Starting, Staying, and Making Courage Inescapable

we go through a time of getting it wrong. And I think I did have a very much a material mindset towards poverty, that it was a resource issue.

I've been able to reconcile my privilege, my whiteness, my power with this idea of we are all created in God's image. And when I went and worked in Guatemala and in Bolivia I think that's where I saw how development could really get it wrong; because there were latrines in Bolivia that were filled with rocks. And obviously a development organization had come in and assessed [that] this is what this community needs. And that's really where I discovered entrepreneurship, I just got to know people that the community I was living with—it was the person who was making their clothes but then also making additional clothes to sell at the market. The person who was growing corn but also had a silo to store corn for the rainy season to be able to sell to people. It was that spirit of entrepreneurship, that image-bearing spirit, that I saw where people were able to really rise out of poverty.

And so I think for me I've been able to see ... I think when we look at poverty or privilege just purely through the lens of material needs or skin color, I think it is easy to kind of create this power dynamic—but when we really go to God's story, that each of us, it's the image-bearing story that we're all created in the image of God and each person is created to use their power to create more power for other people. And that can be done anywhere. This paradigm can be applied to every human being around the world. And I think that is what ultimately frees me. When I see it's not just it's not just for this American privileged context but it's this image-bearing narrative.

AC: And if the underlying story is of image bearing and the multiplication of power it changes what you do, how you do it, how long you do it.

JH: It does. You're right. It changes. It changes everything.

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AC (narration): Jessica Honegger of Noonday Collection. Her 2018 book is really worthwhile, and it's called *Imperfect Courage: Live a Life of Purpose by Leaving Comfort and Going Scared*. I actually think that subtitle sums up a crucial part of what it means for people of privilege to be part of restoring that narrative of image-bearing for everyone. When we leave our comfort and go scared, we join the world of our neighbors who often are not comfortable and often are scared. And somehow in that shared humanity, when the bondage of both comfort and fear is broken by love, we find connection and courage. That's pretty close to the heart of redemptive entrepreneurship.

Noonday Collection's website is noondaycollection.com. If you want to know more about Praxis and what we do, visit us at praxislabs.org. If you enjoyed this podcast, please rate and review us on iTunes — it helps other people find the show. We'd also like to address your questions, and we're preparing a bonus episode based totally on questions you have, so just leave them right in the review, or you can also give us comments and questions on our website at podcast.praxislabs.org where you can also get show notes and transcripts.

The Redemptive Edge is produced by the effervescent Mary Elizabeth Goodell, who in her day job is community manager for Praxis, with executive production from the sagacious Scott Kauffmann, our partner for content. We are incredibly grateful to Narrativo for their editing and production help.

I'm Andy Crouch — thanks for joining us on the redemptive edge.