



On Following a Prompting to Start a Business at the Worst Possible Time

Guest: Courtney Hobbs

Shelley: You're listening to the *Faithful Career Moves Podcast*. I'm your host, Shelley Hunter. This is a place where we talk to people who recognize the Lord's hand in their lives, and specifically, in their careers. Thank you for joining me on episode 9 of the Faithful Career Moves podcast.

This week, I'm interviewing Courtney Hobbs. She's a mother of four young kids who recently launched a landscape design business called Southern Roots Design because she's a southern girl growing new roots in Idaho. Now, before we get to the interview, I want to tell you a story that might seem a little random, but I promise there's a point to it.

A few years ago, I volunteered to bring dinner to a family in need. Despite my good intentions though, the date got away from me and I didn't get the plan to dinner started in time. In a panic, I ran to the grocery store, looking for an alternative and as I approached the meat counter, the butcher, a woman asked me if she could help and I told her oh my gosh, yes, please. I explained my predicament. She came from behind the counter, grabbed a piece of meat, took me down a couple aisles, and quickly gave me a really easy recipe for pork chili verde that turned out so good. So good, in fact, the family raved about it. They asked for the recipe.

It's now one of my son's favorite meals. It is actually the go-to recipe I make whenever I have to take a meal to someone. Because this woman shared something that comes naturally to her, a gift and a passion for cooking. She allowed me to bless one family that night and many more since, and especially my own.

Now I've heard people say, look, the Lord doesn't care what you have for dinner. While that may be true many nights, this night I believe he did care because he had

a family in need. He knew I wanted to be his hands and he inspired this woman to go beyond her job to help me out that day.

What does that have to do with Courtney?

Well, I've also heard people say that the Lord doesn't care what you do for a living. He doesn't even care what major you pick. Just pick something that's good, and it'll be fine. I don't believe that.

Listen to this episode with Courtney and then we'll come back to that thought at the end.

As a landscape designer, Courtney does everything from just helping a homeowner select plants for their yard, to creating a full design that includes color drawings, plans, plant selection, even structures, and water features, walkways, and more. Everything you need to really beautify a space. I asked Courtney to start us off by just telling how she even got into landscape design.

Courtney: [chuckles] It's a funny story. I would not be a landscape designer if it weren't for my mom. I feel like a lot of people in this industry say that kind of thing. Like, my mom or my grandma were really into gardening or plants and they instilled that love of them with me and their father was in agriculture or something like that, but that's really not at all what I mean when I say my mom is the reason I'm a landscape designer. To preface this story, you have to know my mom was a very hands-on kind of parents. [chuckles] She is great. I love my mom. She is the most fantastic mother and the most unselfish, hardworking person in the entire world.

She followed me through school. She worked at all of my schools. In high school, she was the one giving the announcements over the speaker and all my friends and kids would ask, "Isn't that so weird having your mom on the speaker all the time?"

I'm like "Well, no, not really." If you grew up with that kind of a mom, you just learned to live with it. [laughs] It wasn't strange at all. That's just how my mom is just very involved in all of our lives and her three daughters. Anyways, it was my sophomore year of college and I was trying to narrow down what I wanted to do.

I had tried to take some classes of things I might actually be interested for a major, but I needed some extra credits as I was signing up for classes and I wasn't really sure what I should do or what classes to take. I was just trying to think about it and figure out what I wanted. My mom's not that kind of person. She's more make a decision and do it.

[laughter]

I came home one day, and she told me "Oh, I signed on to your account and signed you up for the residential landscape design class." I'm like, "Seriously, mom? What am I going to do with that?" For real. Yes, I just ended up really loving that class and it ended up becoming my major.

Shelley: Well, you are a good sport. Okay, then what happened?

Courtney: After I graduated from BYU, my husband and I moved to Atlanta. I worked for a really good company that in college I had chosen [chuckles] and decided I want to work for this company. I was really blessed that I got to do that. I really had my dream job for a couple of years there. Then I got pregnant and then decided to stay home. After that, I'm just a stay at home mom for 10 years. After having that fourth baby and we decided this is our last one for sure, then I just felt really strongly I want to do landscape design again and get back into it.

Shelley: Right away with a newborn?

Courtney: It was probably about six months after he was born. He was still very little. It didn't really make a lot of sense because it was crazy. I remember everyone told me they're like, "After three kids, it's all the same." That was not how it was for me. Nothing about it made sense that this was the time to start a business but I just felt really strongly that that's what I wanted to do.

Shelley: How did you go about getting it started then?

Courtney: I asked some friends if I could do some designs for them for free just to start practicing again. I'd take my baby in my preschooler to the plant nurseries, and we'd walk around all the plants. I'd read the tags and talk to the people there and just do whatever I could to remind myself all those things that I'd forgotten over the past 10 years. I'd check out library books, whatever I needed.

Shelley: You asked people, can I just do some designs for free? I would imagine people were all over that.

Courtney: I never had anyone say no.

Shelley: Yes.

[laughter]

Then what was the moment where you said, okay, I'm going to start charging for this, and then what was that like?

Courtney: Several months after I'd started doing some designs for people for free where okay, I feel comfortable now. When people would contact me, people would get word of mouth, then I would tell them, I'm glad you want this service. Here's how much it is.

Shelley: Good. Shortly after I met you, and I think you had come over to give me a bid actually on doing my backyard, you told me that you had just enrolled in one of the self-reliance courses at the church. For those who are not familiar with this, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints offers free courses on a number of self-reliance topics. Those include personal finance, finding a better job, education for better work, starting and growing a business. There's even a new course they're

offering called emotional resilience. Courtney, remind me which class you took and what inspired you to take it.

Courtney: I took starting and growing my business class. I heard about it and like, hey, that would be really good for me because that's exactly where I am right now. It just made sense to do it right then because I was in the middle of trying to do on my own anyways. For me, that class, I don't know that I could have done what I did without that class. It taught me a lot of things I didn't remember or know about having your own business. I think the most important part about it is that I had a really good facilitator who always reminded us to keep the Lord in our business and in our decision-making.

To pray along the way and get direction on how we should do things and to have faith and do the things that were asked of us in that class. You make a commitment every week. Some of the commitments are silly or you think, oh, how is this going to help? Our facilitator was like, "Hey, sometimes when you do what you're asked to do, no matter what, the Lord is going to bless you for it. I really took that to heart and tried really hard to do all the little commitments, even the ones that seem kind of silly.

Shelley: Give me an example.

Courtney: The very first one I remember was, they call it the paperclip challenge. You go around and knock on people's doors and say, hey, do you have anything bigger or better than this?

[chuckling]

I did that and I think I was the only person in my class that did that. [laughs] I tried every week to do something that was asked of us to do and the biggest part about that was just talking to people. It got the word out that this is what I'm doing. People are really supportive when you're trying to start your own business, especially women. Women love to support each other.

Shelley: I love that. I remember you telling me that many people wouldn't do the exercises. I know a number of people who have dropped out of the self-reliance classes after just the first night. I took the personal finance class myself and one thing I realized to use a Bible reference, I think this is the brass serpent. A lot of people think that stuff is too silly or too easy.

Courtney: It's too easy. Exactly, yes.

Shelley: No, I'm sorry. I need help building my business and you want me to do a paperclip challenge. That is not.

Courtney: Exactly.

Shelley: That's not what I need.

Courtney: I think they're really good, but you have to go in there with the mindset that you're going to do what's asked.

Shelley: Yes. Okay. Let's talk about some of the things that evolved for you as a result of the class or just developing your business. There have to have been some pivots along the way.

Courtney: I really was only planning on doing designs for people. Just sticking with the paper, handing it off, and saying, "Here's your design. Good luck"

Shelley: When we say that, you mean it's a picture of what you're [crosstalk]?

Courtney: Yes. It has the plan. It has all the plants labeled. It has everything like a map for the yard. In the middle of the class, I don't remember exactly what the challenge said to do, but I just remember having a strong impression that I needed to email you and see if you had found anyone to install your backyard yet because I had already given you the plan. I needed to see if you had already done it, and if not, to see if I could do it, which was kind of scary. I'm not a big contractor with laborers, crews, and machinery like that, but I really just felt like I should do that. I did, and you said yes. I was like, "Oh, great." [chuckles]

Shelley: First of all, I had no idea I was part of your story, but really that proves something really important. Oftentimes, when you have a business or a service, people are hesitant to reach out because they feel like they're pushing or they're selling something. When you reached out to me, I actually really needed the help.

Courtney: I guess you never know unless you ask. People aren't going to be offended if you're just asking to help them.

Shelley: Great. Okay, so back to the pivot. Originally, you were just going to do plans.

Courtney: I felt like we should try to do your backyard and get that done right. I learned a lot to make myself a better designer too. I think that's important to have both sides of it. The install and the design side. I realized that I really love doing that. I love having my hands in the dirt and being a part of the start to the finish, and I've done a couple more. Nothing quite as big as yours on my own. Now, I've found contractors I like to work with. I realized that I really like being part of it from the beginning to the end and making sure it's done right. That was something that at first I wasn't sure if I'd have time to do it still having my kids at home, or if I'd even want to. That was really helpful. To do something outside of my comfort zone and figure out that this might be a direction I wanted to go.

Shelley: You have to experiment with your business.

Courtney: You have to try different things and to really get it to where it's going to be perfect for you.

Shelley: Do you think you're at a place where it's perfect?

Courtney: I think I'm going to be figuring things out for a long time. It's probably going to change over time too, as it gets bigger and my kids get older. One other

thing I didn't really plan on is, when I thought about doing this, it was something that I could do for myself. Now, I can't wait for my boys to get older. That this could be a summer job for them, that they can help out doing things. My oldest has already done that. It's a way for them to learn how to work and earn money. I love the idea of that.

Shelley: What other ways has your family had to adjust?

Courtney: My husband has been so supportive. If I need to go to appointments, if he needs to put the kids to bed or whatever, he's been great. Same with my oldest son, he's been really good at babysitting when he needs to or doing things like that. It hasn't all been easy with the younger kids. There was a point right at the beginning when I first started that I was gone a lot more and doing things, which was very unusual.

Before, I was with them 24/7. All the time. One of my sons had some emotional issues for a while. I don't know if it is a direct result of because I was gone, or if it was just a coincidence. I really don't know. I took a break for a little bit and just focused on him and the family. I was really grateful that I could do that. That's one of the main reasons I decided to start my own business was so I could have that flexibility, but it's so easy to have that mom guilt every now and then.

Then I remember, "It's probably good for them." I'm very busy during the springs and summers when they're all home all day long. Before, we would plan excursions or things to do all the time. Now, they more have learned how to keep each other entertained, play with each other, and come up with their own things. That's a good thing. That's good for kids to be able to figure out things on their own.

Shelley: Yes. I always treated my kids like they were part of my business. Sometimes, it means "You need to do this while I need to go finish up an email. We're going to go on an adventure, but I need to make a stop on the way. Then, we'll get ice cream." Part of my survival skill was just to integrate them as much as I could into my business.

Courtney: One of the things you said reminded me the beginning of starting everything, I talked to a landscape designer that I know. She's been doing it for a long time, and her kids are older now. One of the things that she said to me that I have always remembered is she said, "You know, I really wish that I had waited until my kids were older to start." I always remember her saying that.

I don't necessarily feel like I need to wait, but sometimes that sentence will pop in my head, and I remember, "Okay. I need to slow things down. I need to put this to the side and focus on my kids for a while." I don't want to lose that. I don't want to have that regret when they're older.

Shelley: I always say, "I'll be the tortoise." There are many ways that I could have excelled my business and made more money and done more things, but like you, I never wanted to have the regrets. I always say, "I'll be the tortoise."

Courtney: Yes. I like that.

Shelley: It gives me such comfort to know the Lord knows that. That's my prayer, and I say, "All right. I'm going to take this slow because I can't do everything. I'm going to trust that you just have this figured out for us."

Courtney: One of my main prayers is, "Please just help me to find a good balance." Everyone always tries to give me advice on how to grow it, what to do, and how to make it bigger and faster. That's now where I am right now. I'm the tortoise.

Shelley: The finish line is way up there, but I'm way back here. Just join me in that. [crosstalk]

Courtney: [laughs] That's right. Yes.

Shelley: All right. Let's switch gears. Can you tell me about a leap of faith that you've had to make in your business?

Courtney: Back when I was in college, actually trying to choose my major, I had taken that landscape design class, and I really loved it. I was trying to decide between landscape management, that was the actual major, food science, and exercise science. Three completely different things. I was getting really frustrated because I was praying about it so hard, and I wasn't getting any answers. I called my dad one day, and I told him how stressed I was that I couldn't decide what major to choose. His first answer to everything whenever I call him is, "Well, have you prayed about it?"

"Yes, Dad. I have. I'm not getting an answer." Then, of course, he gives me some scriptures to go lookup. Basically, the gist of them were you can't just ask. That you really have to figure out what you think you should and then just go forward with faith. I really tried hard to figure out what I thought would be best, and I went and declared my major as food science. I just knew that exact day. I'm like, "That was the wrong decision. That wasn't it." I just felt so bad about it.

I went right back to the office and changed it to landscape management. Right away, I knew that was the one I was supposed to choose. Yes, it felt good. That was my big leap of faith. I realized, sometimes, I just have to just push forward and trust that if I start to go the wrong direction that the Lord's going to put me back where I should be. As long as I'm really trying hard to keep him in the decision making and have him guide me where I should go, then he'll get me there.

Shelley: That has to give you comfort, too, as you're trying to grow this business now.

Courtney: It does.

Shelley: Look, "I'm doing what I was directed to do."

Courtney: Yes. Like I said, nothing made sense about the timing as far as when I decided to start my business because it was probably the craziest point in my life.

Yet, I just felt so strongly that I should do it, and I just really wanted to do that. I really go by that a lot.

Shelley: I love that. Courtney, what is an unexpected blessing? Something that you could not have predicted for yourself in starting this business.

Courtney: I guess I didn't really realize how much I missed interacting with people. People who aren't stay-at-home moms like me. The only people I interacted with were playgroups and people who had kids my age. Right now, it's so great to just get to know people and get to be friends with my clients.

Shelley: So interesting. What advice would you give to somebody who wants to start a service business?

Courtney: The most important, I think, is don't compare yourself to other businesses or other people. My success isn't going to look like someone else's. I get on Instagram, and I follow a lot of other landscapers or designers. I'm like, "Oh, my gosh. Look at all these things they're doing. I'm hardly doing anything compared to them. Look at all this knowledge that they have. I have that 10-year gap where I didn't do or learn anything. Even though they're my same age, they've got 10 years more experience than I do."

All this stuff that's easy to get into your head. That's not what's important. I think that really big on keeping the Lord in your business. He helps remind me all the time, "Your business does not have to look like someone else's. It just needs to be what's right for you."

Shelley: Especially when you're just starting out. That's the point. You're just starting out. It's okay.

Courtney: It's okay that it's small, and that's what I need right now.

Shelley: Well, and you're so talented, I know that it's going to get bigger when the time is right. Looking back now, is there anything you wish you had done differently?

Courtney: The one thing that I wish I had done is, in those 10 years that I just was at home with my kids, I wish that I had spent time or made time, even if it was just 5 or 10 minutes a day if I had gotten a book from the library, or watched a YouTube video, or got my old textbooks out, or done something during that time because you always look back and think, "Could I have done more?"

Shelley: I actually suspect you're being a little hard on yourself, but I get it. It's something Cami Brusckke did, episode one if you want to go back and listen to that. She was actually really intentional with her time as a stay-at-home mom because she did have plans to go back to get her Master's and resume her career. It's a good point.

All right, Courtney, over to my last question. How have you seen the hand of God in your career?

Courtney: Oh my goodness, just in every way. Yes, He's been there the whole time, in helping me know what direction to go in, or to take that class that I did, or to contact certain people. I try really hard to keep my business in my prayers because I know that He's there to help me, and He has.

Shelley: Thank you so much for being on the show today.

Courtney: Thanks for having me.

Shelley: What do you think? Does the Lord care where you made your end? Does He care what you do for a living? When I started this website and podcast, I had a focus on integrating faith in your career as a way to support your family. With just nine episodes complete, my viewpoint has expanded significantly. In talking to the faith-based career experts and the talented people I've interviewed so far, am now seeing how much the Lord inspires us professionally because it broadens our reach and enables us to be His hands in ways we might not even recognize if we're only just doing a job.

Let me tell you about my backyard. I love my house and I love where I live, but my backyard is the crown jewel. I spend hours out there. The design Courtney created and installed is perfect for me and brings me peace in a crazy busy world with a revolving door of teenagers. Because I can find peace on my patio, I'm a better mom. I do better work. I'm more productive with my time, and that serenity allows me, in turn, to serve many others.

When we get to the other side of this life, I think we are going to be shocked at how many ways the Lord has orchestrated our lives to help each other out. Many will argue that it was just a recipe from a butcher, and it was just a backyard from Courtney, but I see the ripple effects, and in both cases, it's so much more than someone just doing a job. What do you think?

Once again, thank you for listening to the *Faithful Career Moves Podcast*. It's my hope that listening to this episode will inspire you to think more broadly about how your career and your spiritual journey intersect. If you like that idea and want others to have a similar epiphany, then please share this podcast on social media. Leave a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to podcasts or leave a comment on the website. Doing so will help others find this content as well.