

William:

Hey, everybody. I'm so excited to be doing a "How God Built This" episode.

William:

It's been a while and long overdue, but I think you're going to love today's story. I got a chance to meet another kingdom entrepreneur, another guy who I like to say it this way, "What's a kingdom entrepreneur?" Someone who wakes up saying, "How do we overpopulate heaven"? Wouldn't that be a great thing to do? Get in trouble for overpopulating heaven.

William:

And, today my friend, Matt Potter, who co-founded Pray.com joined us. And we had a wonderful conversation about how God is building this amazing app. That's growing like crazy to become a real destination for spiritual development. He's got experience in the tech space, he walked away from an amazing job and frankly, him even being here on earth is a miracle story in and of itself. So I hope you'll take a listen today. I hope you'll go check out Pray.com and I look forward to joining you again for another, how "God Built This".

William:

Well, hey everybody, welcome today. I'm super excited to introduce you to a new friend of mine, Matthew Potter. And I met all about a month ago, and I think one of the first conferences that had been held in a long time, it was one of those ones. I think I was supposed to speak at it in 2020. And then I don't know what the same with you, Matthew, but we hit up a chance to visit with each other. And we're already scheduled to talk today. And Matthew, I love Matthew because I love praying and I love prayer. But man in addition to that, I also am an incurable chronic entrepreneur.

William:

And when you see those two things come together, it's pretty amazing. So Matthew is the co-founder of Pray.com. And you know, I thought today, this is such a cool story that I thought maybe the most interesting thing to me is hearing how, how God's using people in different ways. And that would be a really cool story for you to hear. So, Matthew, I hate to just throw you right in there, but welcome to the show. Thanks for joining us and tell us your story, man.

Matthew :

Thanks for having me, and it was so great to meet you in person. Finally, at the CFX conference, it was so much fun being there and speaking and you know it's so strange to say in-person these days, right? There's people on my team that we've hired you know, we've got a great 50 person team at Pray.com and there's people on the team. I haven't even met in person yet. And yet we got to meet at the conference. So it was incredible.

William:

You know, we've done the same thing here. I'm sure some churches out there, listeners you've hired people and you've never met in person. We had a little like happy hour the first Friday after we got back in the office and a lot of the people hadn't met each other. And honestly, man, we've been having to rebuild culture because of it.

William:

I mean like it was like the bad last half hour of a middle school dance where nobody knew how to ask the other one. "Okay. It's the last slow song. Can we-" like everyone just stayed in the corner and sort of, so we're all having to get to know each other, but...

Matthew :

Sounds like a middle school dance.

William:

That's what I'm saying. Exactly. Exactly.

William:

So I totally empathize with you, but yeah. Great to meet in person. Now tell me you've been in the entrepreneurial space, but also in the kingdom oriented space. So walk me through your story and how you ended up at Pray.com.

William:

You guys listening, you wouldn't know this, but a million people are relying on Pray.com every single month right now. And that's only been up into the right and I'd love for you to tell us your story and how that intersects with Pray.com. Just tell us what God's doing.

Matthew :

Well, I'd love to tell you my story. Actually we'd have 2.5 million monthly active users right now on ray.com over 10 million downloads. And we're gaining at around 800,000 new downloads every single month and absolutely incredible. And it's really only because of God to God be the glory for that, that we're able to grow that quickly.

Matthew :

So yeah I'll tell you my story. There was a scared, lonely and hopeless 15-year-old girl in Vancouver, Washington who walked into a local community church to talk to a pastor that she had never talked to before in her life about the biggest decision she was going to make in her life up to that point.

Matthew :

And that local church pastor ended up calling a friend of his who just planted a church in Los Angeles and asked him for some advice on what he's going to tell this 15-year-old girl in a life or death situation. Right? And so the pastor told him, he said, "Hey, I've got two members of my little 20 person congregation. Who've been trying to have children for 10 years and haven't been able to, why don't you float the idea that that girl give her baby up for adoption"?

Matthew :

And so she did, and I ended up getting adopted by my parents in Los Angeles through this pastor network, if you will, through phone calls. Right? And my dad, because he got me from the church, ended up becoming the head elder of this 20 person church meeting in a high school gym.

Matthew :

Well, fast forward I grew up in church. My pastor's daughter, Kayla is one of my best friends. We grew up together in church and our church that started off as a little 20 person church plant ended up becoming a 15,000 person mega church in Los Angeles.

Matthew :

And we're known as one of the most diverse churches in America. And it's probably just based on where we're geographically located but, the church has been thriving and been incredible. I ended up going to Boise State University and my senior year, I had the bright idea to leave one credit hour short because I had started my first company and I wanted to be like Steve Jobs or Bill Gates. I saw them, I saw that they left Harvard early and had very big success with their companies. And I thought "You know, I'm going to leave one credit hour short, just so I have the story".

Matthew :

So my parents have absolutely loved me for that. Hopefully they're listening. Hi mom! But yeah. So left one credit hour short, I had started my first company and it's called HomeStack. We built over 6,000 apps in the app stores.

Matthew :

Where all of the major real estate companies in the United States. So we built apps for Sotheby's, Coldwell Banker, Century 21, Keller Williams, and [inaudible], Engel and Volkers, many, many, many more. And we built a white label, real estate app solution to help them fight against Zillow, Trulia, and Redfin. So it allowed those companies to have their own app where people could search for homes and the company was doing absolutely incredible. I started it with my co-founder Will GrayWall, my senior year of college. And we ended up building and bootstrapping, which means we just, we put our own money into it on credit cards and went into debt to start a company, slept on friend's couches and made it happen.

Matthew :

Over 12 years, we were experiencing success by the world standards. The company was achieving excellence. We were doing very, very well, but every day I was coming to work, just feeling empty inside.

Matthew :

And you know, it was kind of a difficult time because the company is successful. Everyone is celebrating. Everyone is excited, customers are happy and I'm just not feeling right. And so what a tech entrepreneur do that are feeling empty inside? We go buy fancy Italian sports cars.

Matthew :

So I did that-

William:

Which one?

Matthew :

I got a Maserati for a little bit and you know what it works for about two weeks and you realize that it's not really fulfilling.

Matthew :

And so I ended up calling my pastor's daughter, Kayla and said, "How can I help and give back to the church?"

Matthew :

I grew up in church. It was a huge part of my life. I was very involved in my church and then you know, starting a company and you're doing a hundred hour weeks, everything that it takes to be successful. And you're just kind of going through the motions and going to church on Sunday.

Matthew :

So I called Kayla. I said, "Hey, how can I help? How can I give back"? And she gave me a few ideas and I told her "You know what, let me pray about it". One of the big ideas was our trip is opening a new campus in Santa Monica, California. And I said, "I'm a tech entrepreneur. I don't know a lot about opening new church campuses. So let me pray about this".

Matthew :

And providentially the next day, I just went to a local coffee shop in my hometown. And I ended up standing in a line and I see a friend of mine who we were in entrepreneur groups together. We started our first companies at the same time. And when I looked at him, he looked horrible, completely disheveled, hadn't shaved, just looked horrible. And it was my friend, Steve Katina. And Steve is the CEO of Pray.com. And my co-founder in Pray.com. And when I saw Steve, I just said, "Steve, what's going on? Are you okay"?

Matthew :

And he said something back, something like "Horrible, not good". And it was really all he could muster up at the time. And so I said, "Sit down and let's talk, let me let's find out what's happening".

Matthew :

And so Steve's background. Steve went to USC, won a Rose Bowl under Pete Carroll, ended up starting a media company as a homework assignment and became the CEO of \$150 million a year media production and aerial surveillance company. They had helicopters, jets, and airplanes, and they would work for Sony Pictures, Paramount, the FBI, the CIA Homeland security.

William:

Wow.

Matthew :

Anybody who wanted to strap these super expensive cameras to aircraft. They had all the clearances, licenses and insurance to be able to do it. And so they would work for shooting the movie transformers one week and the next week they're down at the border doing surveillance with the CIA.

William:

Wow.

Matthew :

Pretty incredible. So when I sat down with Steve, he ended up telling me that his business partner just died in a tragic plane crash in Median, Columbia. They were filming the movie "American Made" with Tom Cruise and they were doing stunt flying all day. And in a routine trip back to the hanger at the end of the day, the plane ended up crashing in the middle of the jungle and they don't know why. And Steve's business partner died. And it was really the first time Steve experienced tragedy in his life.

Matthew :

And when Steve grew up, his mom was Jewish. Dad was Catholic. He kind of opted out and played sports. And during this time when his business partner died you know, he was trying to do all the "hippie woo-woo California-stuff" to make himself feel better.

Matthew :

He was drinking green juice, going to Soul Cycle, listening to Tony Robbins and Oprah's "Super Soul Sunday", but nothing really helped him until someone sent him a podcast from a pastor and it transformed his life. And Steve was telling me the story at a coffee shop.

Matthew :

The day after I talked to my pastor's daughter. And he told me that he felt called to build the digital destination for faith content because he was the media guy and he didn't know about Christian content online.

Matthew :

And so I said, "Steve, I talked to my pastor's daughter last night on how I could help and give back to the kingdom. And we providential, we ran into each other today and you don't know what providential means yet, but I'll tell you later". And he told me, bought the domain Pray.com. And I said, "Steve, I'll help. You I'll even do it for free, whatever you need. I just want to give back". And he asked me to start the company with him and two other incredible people, my co-founders, Mike Lynn and Rhinebeck, and we started Pray.com and I stepped down as CEO of my own company the next day and put my co-founder in a CEO of Homestack.

William:

Wow. Wow. That is... and when, when was this?

Matthew :

So that was five years ago. October-

William:

Five years ago, Pray.com was already bought?

Matthew :

While someone had it. And they were holding onto it as an internet property, like as an asset park in it. And so it was parked and the person that Steve bought the domain from had like a coffee book full of domains of four-letter domains, three-letter domains, and none of them were in use.

Matthew :

And so when Steve had this meeting with this other entrepreneur, he said, "Hey, if you get an idea for a business, flip through". And three pages, in part of the way down was Pray.com and Steve knew that's what he wanted to do.

William:

Wow. Wow. So that was five years ago. And then what do y'all do? Just sit around and pray?

Matthew :

No, that's, that's a great question. So what we did was before we decided to build anything or do anything, we interviewed hundreds of pastors and we, we interviewed them to see what they would want out of a domain, like Pray.com. We interviewed a hundreds of churchgoers members, all different types of churches. Old, young, Baptist, Presbyterian, Non-Denominational. You name it. We went through the whole gamut and did a ton of research in the first year.

Matthew :

And after the first year we settled on content plus community. And that we needed to build an app that created community, and that had incredible content. So we built the number one app for daily prayer and faith based audio content. You can use the app for daily devotionals. And then we also built out all this incredible content. We did the Bible in three different ways, a sleep version, an entertaining dramatized audio version, a kid's version with former Disney voice actors and actresses. And we even hired a 61 piece orchestra to make all the unique music and compositions for the app as well. And then we started building out incredible meditative content and all of these different things that help you deepen your faith.

Matthew :

It's really been incredible to see. And we, we started out just with a few different features that brought people together and allowed them to share daily devotionals in the app and content back and forth with themselves and their communities and their family and friends. And we've had the app has been shared 42 million times outside of the Pray.com app and listening or using an app is a big deal. But when you share an app or you share content with someone else, you're putting your personal stamp of approval on it, when you give it to someone and that's been done 42 million times outside the Pray.com app. We're just so honored and blessed and excited that people love the app and continue to use it.

William:

Wow. So as you have grown, so on this podcast, we've had the amazing opportunity to interview kingdom entrepreneurs who have seen God build things through them, right. Have you seen...is this the same rate of growth that you saw at your previous company, or is it different?

William:

And as a follow up, everybody thinks growth is this amazing, wonderful thing. It's also really messy and painful. It is in our company. I'm just a religion degree though. So maybe I don't have it figured out. So, how is the growth, how does it compare to your previous corporate experience? And tell us...the backside of growth what's keeping you up at night?

Matthew :

Yeah, so it's completely different than my first company. My first company was a B2B company. So business to business, we were selling to SMB small businesses that were real estate franchises and real estate brands. So growth there looks completely different than a direct to consumer company. And for the direct to consumer app, the growth has been really incredible. I mean, I mentioned it a little earlier, we have 10 million downloads of the app and we're starting to accelerate that. And really the only reason we're able to do that is because we have an incredible team of people who are world-class and had done it before and have tons of experience. Way more experienced than I do on growing direct to consumer.

Matthew :

And so our team James Pang, who's our VP of growth. And then Sushil who comes to us from Lending Tree and match group. As our chief product officer. They've just done an incredible job of helping us grow the Pray.com app. And, you know nothing really keeps me up at night. God is for you. No one can be against you. So I feel like I keep other people up at night.

William:

I literally do keep other people up at night. I am notorious for the 4:00 AM email... So now you've caught lightning in a bottle or let's call it the "Holy Spirit Lightning", whatever you wanna... however you want to say it, where are you guys aimed going forward? Like how... Where are you trying to steward the next few years? And what do you see in the future for Pray.com?

Matthew :

No, I love, I love that word stewardship. I'm glad that you said that, because I think about that every day.

Matthew :

How are we stewarding the domain and how are we stewarding what God has given us? And, you know, we're going to have to answer for that one day. And I really hope it's "Thank you good and faithful servant". That's the, but yeah we look at the future of Pray.com as outside of, of the United States. And so really right now, most of our users are in the United States. And we have just started with our amazing VP of internationalization and localization, [inaudible] who did this at Event Bright, which is a ticketing company and Squarespace, which is a website building company. She helped take them international. And so we have just started to go international in South Africa, and we were able to get over a million downloads in South Africa.

Matthew :

And then with the amazing Gary Valenciano, we were able to go to the Philippines and Gary's this amazing singer and artist in the Philippines. He fills like hundred-thousand-person stadiums in the Philippines and starts his concerts off with a prayer and ends with an altered call. And he has Christian

music and secular music. So he's this amazing...They call him "Mr. Pure Energy", and he's been our ambassador to the Philippines and helped us grow the Philippines to over a million downloads.

Matthew :

And so, really international is the future of Pray.com. Not to say that we're not focused on the United States, but we're also continuing to build incredible content and increase our content library. We have over 4,000 pieces of content in the Pray.com app and thousands and thousands of pieces of content that are also great in the Pray.com app from some of our incredible pastors and ministries that are adding their content to the app.

William:

Wow. Well, so how can I pray for you as you look forward to the future?

Matthew :

Yeah, that's, that's a great question. You know the prayer that we need right now is we're still doing a hundred hour weeks, and we're trying to steward the domain as best as possible. So the best prayer for us would be in stewardship and stewarding the domain. And then the second prayer, if you could pray too for us, would be for perseverance. And so stewardship and perseverance, that would help us out in a huge way.

William:

Well, now there's a...to use tech language. What's the word? Is a word? Freemium is a word, is that right?

Matthew :

Freemium, that's right!

William:

All right. I'm feel like I'm all the way back in my thirties. Hey, there is a freemium version of the app, right? If people want to just go to Pray.com-

Matthew :

If you just go to pray.com the website or on the app stores, you just type in "Pray.com". You can download the app. There's a free version that has tons of incredible content, daily devotionals, Pray radio, as well as all of our pastoral podcasts and ministry podcasts that are on there, that's all free. And you can use it for free forever. Or if you would like to try out some of Pray.com's cinematic audio content, where we've done the Bible in an entertaining show format, where you can hear your favorite Bible stories come to life. That's \$49.99 a year in the app, and you can choose to do that or, or not, but we would be blessed if you would try it out and tell us if you like it, there's a free trial. So you can try it for seven days for free, the paid version and decide if you'd like to buy it or not.

William:

That's awesome. Well, I, I love hearing the stories of how God's building things. He said on this rock, I will build my church. And I think doing search work and watching, like I have this weird seat in the kingdom where I watch how God's using companies or churches when they hire us to find their key staff.

And it's been so good for me because I've had a moment of confession. I've had this lifelong wrestling match with pride and, and I lose a lot. You know, it's like, I think I've said this before on the show, but Ted Turner has an amazing quote. He said, "If I had a little more humility, I'd be perfect".

William:

Like, that's me. Right? So getting to see God build his church completely, without me, it's been so good for my soul. It cures all that pride stuff. And so I love when we come on here and hear stories about an app probably a lot of us didn't know about, certainly wasn't even here six years ago,

William:

God is building his church...

Matthew :

Absolutely.

William:

...irrespective of a pandemic, irrespective of all the things the world is throwing at us and, and Matthew hearing what God's doing through you just gives me great hope that we get to be along for the ride as God builds his church. So I'm going to pray tonight for you to be able to steward the season, to know your times and use it well and, and to persevere.

William:

So thanks so much for joining us and everybody out there. I'd tell you they're going to be a lot of show notes and a lot of links to go to, but how easy is this Pray.com. You don't even have to pray about it. Just go to Pray.com.

William:

Matthew, thanks for joining us, man.

Matthew :

Thank you so much.

Christa:

Thanks for listening to today's. "How God Built This" episode. At Vanderbloemen and our sister company, Christian Teams, we help Christian organizations build their best teams through hiring, succession, compensation, and diversity consulting services. Visit our websites, [Vanderbloemen.com](http://Vanderbloemen.com) and [ChristianTeams.com](http://ChristianTeams.com) to learn more and subscribe to our Vanderbloemen Leadership Podcast, wherever you listen to podcasts, to keep up with our newest episodes. Thanks for listening.