

Where's God When Your Startup Stops?

A Story of Journalism, Faith and Entrepreneurship, the fourth annual MPJI Lecture was given on March 13th, 2017

Thanks Paul, for that generous introduction. You always bring a Minnesota guy when you're about to get a blizzard, because you know he'll show up no matter what. If you'd invited someone from Los Angeles or Washington, they would have cancelled and Paul would have been giving a speech about his just recently completed trip to South America.

It's great to be here. It's great to see some friends: friends from churches that I went to in New York, friends from work today, friends that I work with in Minnesota.

So, I have started two startups, as Paul said, one worked and one did not, but both ended kind of in grim fashion for me. The first one, *TheStreet.com*, took place during a period that is now called the Internet 1.0 era, which for some of you in school might have been when you were born. But it was a very exciting time back then. Just to give you some perspective, when I first got into journalism in the 1990's there was a bombing at the World Trade Center, in February. I worked across the street at *The Wall Street Journal*. It was a Friday. In 1993 *The Wall Street Journal* didn't publish on Saturday. I called down to the news desk and I said "I'm ready to go out and cover this story," and they said, "It's Friday. We don't publish till Monday. We'll just take the AP on Monday morning."

Because there was no Internet, there was no way to publish anything, in 1993. That changed in 1993-94 when the Internet began to become commercialized. And I dove headfirst into the Internet 1.0 era. It was a time of great excitement. Amazon was just starting. Companies like Yahoo were just starting. There was an old company called AOL that was just starting. Companies that don't exist like Netscape were just starting. And I dove headlong into it and for five years I was completely immersed in what was happening in the digital age, the early parts of the digital age. *Fortunes* were being made overnight. Company models were being destroyed.

It was very exciting and very heady. And then it all came to an end, in the summer of 2001 when the Internet, what they called the Internet Bubble, burst. And I remember the last day I was at *TheStreet.com*. It was five years of intense work. I went with a group of colleagues to Morton's Steakhouse in downtown Manhattan. It was destroyed later that year and is no longer there. But we had what we called "The Last Supper." We talked about the last five years and what we had

done to pioneer new forms of journalism, to take on *The Wall Street Journal*, to take on *The New York Times*, all the exciting things we had done, all the talent that we had gathered together. And we toasted that moment and then I went home and it was July 1, 2001. I woke up the next morning and I realized I didn't have a cell phone, I didn't have a computer. There was no furniture in my apartment because I had never had time to buy any and I just sat there and said "what happened these last five years?" It was almost like emerging from a coma, or some kind of weird out of body experience. It felt like I had done nothing but that job for five straight years. And I began to take stock of what that meant.

I'm going to talk more about what led up to that last supper and that morning of reckoning, but I want to just talk about some of our themes for today. We can talk about when your startup stops. I'm going to talk very importantly about restarting. I'm going to talk about lessons learned and then on a personal note talk about coming home, and what that means.

Now as Paul has probably shared with you if you've had him as a professor in class, there's something special about growing up in the Midwest. You long to go somewhere else generally. You watch TV shows that are in Los Angeles or New York City or maybe Chicago once in a while, but seldom about Minnesota. And growing up in Minnesota I always knew I wanted to be a journalist. I love sports. I wanted to be a sportscaster, maybe a sports writer.

I went to college in Minnesota initially, because I wanted to play college football, and you can see how big and hulking I am, and that maybe wasn't the best idea. I was the smallest guy on my team. I barely ever played. It wasn't that great of a team to begin with, and so I decided in my freshman year of college that it's time to grow up, time to be a journalist. I decided the way to do that was just to go to New York. If I can get to New York, I can become a journalist. Naive, perhaps, a little. So I applied to some schools in New York and I got into Columbia. I couldn't believe I got into Columbia. Little did I know at the time it had just gone co-ed and they were desperate for people from the Midwest. So I was kind of an original affirmative action student coming to Columbia, I remember that on my application, it said "You're accepted, but we can't guarantee you housing."

DAVE KANSAS



Dave Kansas is executive vice president for *American Public Media*, overseeing the operations of APM's station network, national programming, music and news operations.

Prior to joining APM, Kansas worked at *The Wall Street Journal* serving as chief markets commentator in New York.

Kansas held several roles at *The Wall Street Journal*, including editor of the Money & Investing Group (2003-2007). In that role, he oversaw coverage of Wall Street, banking, finance, investing, hedge funds, financial markets and insurance. Kansas also served as the deputy managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal Online* (2001-2003) and as a reporter covering Wall Street, investing and finance.

Kansas is the author of four investing books, the most recent being *The Wall Street Journal Guide to the New Rules of Personal Finance*. Kansas has also appeared on television and radio programs around the world, including the *BBC*, *CNN*, *CNBC*, *Sky News*, *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC* and *Fox*.

MOVING TO NEW YORK CITY

Now I had been on a plane for the first time in my life the year before. I had never been to New York. I knew I had a friend at Princeton, and so I looked at the map and they looked close together. And I figured if I didn't have housing I would just take the train—I'd sleep on his floor, and I'd take the train up from Princeton to go to college. So I get to Columbia for the midyear transfer orientation. Unlike many big college orientations, which are filled with balloons and parties, this was two hours in a windowless classroom. And, at the end, I raised my hand. I was a Pell Grant student. I asked, how does my financial aid change if I don't have a dorm room. Someone leaned over—there were 20 of us in the room—and tapped me on the shoulder and said “oh you must be Dave Kansas.” Apparently, I was the only one on financial aid. And he said “we do have a dorm for you, so you're OK.” I went up to the dorm that day. It was the biggest room I had ever lived in in my life, this dorm room. I thought it was a mistake. I immediately left town, so that they couldn't find out that I wasn't supposed to be in this big room.

Classes were going to start on Tuesday.

Midwestern I really am, at the end of the service I went up to the pastor, Scott Matheny, and introduced myself. And he said “well why are you here?” I said, “well I am in New York because I'm going to become a journalist. I am going to get a job here, and I am going to be successful, and” I mean, classes hadn't even started, right, I mean I'd just moved into my dorm. And he said “well, that's quite refreshing to hear from some Midwesterner kid.” So he introduced me to the dean of the college, and I met the dean of the college the very next day. Robert Pollock was his name. He was a scientist, a biologist. And he said, “I understand, young man, you want to be a journalist.” And I said “well yes I do.” And he said “where here are two tickets tonight to the Columbia Dupont Journalism Awards in the Low Library at Columbia.”

NBC RADIO

Now this, I didn't realize, was a big deal. I didn't have much of a suit. I had an old blazer with the plastic gold buttons, mickey mouse tie, you know, that was about what I had in the wardrobe. I walked in and there was Peter Jennings and Ted Koppel, Barbara Walters, and all these famous television journalists who are perhaps a little too old for you all to remember. I'm standing there and a



Attendees of the Annual MPJI Lecture - Photo by Cameron Strittmatter

“My first job in journalism—answering the phone from midnight to 8 in the morning.”

I decided on Sunday morning I was going to go to church, because that's what a good Christian boy does, he goes to church the first day. So, I walked around the neighborhood at Columbia. I grew up Presbyterian. There was a Presbyterian church at 114th and Broadway, Broadway Presbyterian, and I went to the church service. And then, just to show you how

gentleman named Kevin Roach walks up to me at the bar and says “Do you go to school here?” I say “oh, yes I do.” And he says “Do you work at the radio station?” I was like “well, I'm going to work at the radio station.” So I said “Yes, I work at the radio station.” He said “here's my card. Give me a call. We're looking for some people to work at NBC Radio Network News.” I proceeded to call him every week for seven weeks until he relented and had me down to visit their office, which was across the street from the Ed Sullivan theater in Times Square, and at the time was owned by General Electric, and he said “we have a job for you. You can answer the phones from midnight to eight

in the morning five days a week.” And I’m like, “well I’m in school.” He said, “well, what time does class start?” And I said, “Nine.” And he said, “Shouldn’t be a problem.” So that was my first job in journalism: answering the phone from midnight to 8 a.m. Let me tell you, going to Times Square in the late ‘80s, that was no Disneyland. I’ve always prided myself in having grit. I was naive enough to come to New York to think I can get a journalism job. Here I was working for a national news organization inside of two months of getting to New York.

I remember working as a church camp counselor with a group of campers, we were in the Sierra Nevadas, and the leaders had given each group a bucket, and it was called the anxiety bucket or something like that. And each of the subleaders went out with a group to go camping and hiking for three or four days. And they said “when you’re at the end of your rope, you can open the bucket and have what’s inside.” And my group, we’d get upset and I’d say, “oh, come on, come on, we want to save that bucket till the end. You want to be happy that you never opened that bucket till the very end, so then you can just enjoy it.” Well we got to the end, we never opened the bucket, and there were cookies that had become crumbs. And that’s a little twisted, is what I’m trying to tell you. So I was at NBC radio. One of my best friends I made in that job was a guy I met while sleeping through my 9 o’clock class. You know, cause I’d get done working at 8 a.m. take the subway back up to Columbia, have class at 9 a.m. to 11a.m. there was a midway break, and I would just pass out on the couch outside the classroom. And a guy named Paul Greenberg knocked me in the head one time and said, “why are you always sleeping” and I said “well I work from midnight to 8 in the morning.” He said “you’re insane.” So we’re still good friends to this day. It was a union job. We went on strike a couple of months after I started, which was kind of an interesting education on how the world works.

I went back to Minnesota to be a camp counselor at church camp. I’d been a church camp goer since I was in third grade. I was the water front director, and it was always a fascinating thing. On a Friday afternoon, I’d leave New York City, fly back to the Midwest, arrive at dark, and drive up to this camp in Wisconsin on Lake Mud Hen, and it would be dark, and the next morning I’d wake up in, rural America.

NEWSDAY

And I did that for two summers. My senior year NBC radio folded into a radio outfit called “Mutual,” and I got a job at *New York Newsday*, as a regular dead tree print journalist. It was about at this same time that I started going to a church that was meeting in the Upper West Side of

Manhattan at a Seventh Day Adventist Church. Seventh Day Adventists meet on Saturday, of course, so this church met on Sunday, it was Redeemer Presbyterian Church. There were about, I don’t know, 100 people there maybe. Tim Keller was the pastor. And it was an incredible experience. I sang in the choir, got to know people. It was a wonderful grounding for me, because I had struggled to find a great church around Columbia.

Going back to the career side, I was still in school, still working full time. In fact, I was making so much money working while full-time in school that I had lost my Pell Grant. I was too rich now, apparently, from working all of this time. And *New York Newsday* was an experiment of Long Island *Newsday* that started in the ‘90s to create a newspaper for New York. It ended badly, but it was going great when I was there. And I covered high school and college sports. If you’re from another part of the country, the best way to learn about New York City is to cover school sports. Because if you’ve got to go to a Monsignor Farrell in Staten Island, or Jefferson High School in Brooklyn, or Riverside in the Bronx, or Jackson in Queens, you’ve got to figure out how to get there, you’ve got to figure out how to get there safely, and how to get back home and write your story and file it. And I did that job for a couple of years after graduation.

Paul told me not to talk about this, but I tried to become a professional singer. I was in an a cappella group in college, and there was a guy at Tufts. Tufts was the a cappella kind of acme, the high point of all a cappella music, in fact if you ever watch “Glee,” it was the Tufts college group that played the boys group in the TV show. And this guy Deke Sharon, who has now become like the godfather of all a cappella, asked four guys to come to San Francisco with him to do a cappella singing in the summer after I graduated.

And it didn’t work out, so we won’t go into any more of that. But it was a lot of fun, but they got rid of me and reformed The House Jacks. They sing. They got a Tommy Boy record deal. It’s pretty awesome. But I was destined to be a journalist. So I was at *Newsday* after I graduated, covering the high school and college sports and the job I had was a really twisted job, it was 34 and a half hours a week so I had no benefits. That was on purpose. The only time I had benefits was if I was in a bicycle race because the United States Cycling Federation required me to buy insurance on the side to race bicycles and my mother who was always quite concerned said, “What are you going to do if you get sick?” and I said “Well I’ll go to the start of a bicycle race and I’ll fall over on my bike and I’ll go, Oh! I’m hurt! and the insurance will cover me.” It never did come to that.

But I did start to figure out a deal at *Newsday*. I worked from 3:30 p.m. to



Dave Kansas speaking at the Annual MPJI Lecture





Dave Kansas speaking at the Annual MPJI Lecture – Photo by Cameron Strittmatter

10:30 p.m. almost every day. And then in the morning I'd go in at 9x a.m. and I figured I'd freelance for all other parts of the day. So I'd basically work from 9 a.m. till about 11 p.m. or midnight. and by May of 1991 I'm out of college. I'm done with my singing career. I nearly had the most bylines in the 5th largest paper in America. I'm competing with the cops reporter. The cops reporter always had a lot of bylines. And I work in Queens and I get called into the home office in Manhattan to meet Rich Gale, the managing editor. And I thought, I'm finally going to get a full time job. I am set. I didn't have to go to Florida. I didn't have to go to Alabama. I didn't have to go Minnesota. I got a real journalism job by staying in Manhattan. I get there and they said "Well you're doing a great job. You got your part time freelance stuff you're doing, and the part time sports thing you're doing. And the union's filed a grievance against you saying it should be a full time job so you get to choose one or the other. It's up to you." And so, of course, I quit.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

I took a job at *The Wall Street Journal* as a proof reader, which was a long way down from what I had been doing before but I had read and heard that *The Wall Street Journal* promoted from within, including people from the Midwest. So I was quite optimistic about that. So I worked at *The Wall Street Journal* for five years.

Then in the summer of 1996 the Internet started exploding. I was, despite all my glorious journalism, quite massively still in debt. I had borrowed a lot of money for college. I had kind of lived without a job during the singing career, short lived though it was. I was

kind of focused on, if I stayed a journalist my whole life, I would probably pay off my school debt and my credit card debt by the time I was 50, which is two weeks from now. So I was really focused on that when these guys came to me in the summer of 1996 and said, "We're starting this thing on the Internet." I had gotten one of the first email addresses at *The Wall Street Journal*. It was on pipeline.net. The Journal had just gone online. It was still a very mysterious thing.

At *The Wall Street Journal* when the Internet was first brought into the newsroom they had a special computer that sat in the middle of the newsroom because everybody was scared something was bad in there. And you had to walk across the room to go on the computer that was connected to the Internet to use it. So it was a lot of mystery, a lot of questions. "What is this thing? What will it do?" And if you think about it, it really was not that long ago but it was like a foreign country. So I was working at *The Wall Street Journal*. One of the greatest newspapers in the world and I was a reporter. I had a great job. I could walk into any cocktail party and say "I work at *The Wall Street Journal*." And they would go "Oh! *The Wall Street Journal*. That's pretty exciting."

A 1990'S STARTUP

And these people came to me and they said "You should try to do something totally new and totally different. and I said "No, I don't want to do it. I don't want to do it. I don't want to do it." And then a friend of a friend knew some of these guys who were trying to invest in this said they were desperate. They're going to not do this thing if you don't say "Yes." They need somebody from some big journalistic entity

otherwise it's a waste of their time. So I went home and did the math. I figured out what I would need to do to pay off all my debts in three months, by Christmas of 1996. Because I figured they'd be out of business in six months. And then what would I do? So I came back to them and I said "well here's my number." It was three times what I was making at *The Wall Street Journal*. And they said "Done!" and we'll even give you some equity. And I thought "What's equity?"

I said "Thank you very much." So at this point in my life, I had only lived in apartments where I had an air shaft room or they were filled with cockroaches or both. So I wasn't in debt because I was splurging on a giant apartment in Tribeca. It was just like being a journalist was hard and you've got to really hustle for everything you do. So I was thinking about this offer and I went to Lake George with some friends and I remember looking up at the clouds and I remember, I was just deep in prayer—because I was scared about leaving the comfort of *The Wall Street Journal* to go to something that I had to explain for six minutes to tell them what it was. Most journalists, their goal in life is to get to the biggest safest place they can brag about: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*. I was going to leave one of those places and go to something that really didn't exist. But I felt in that time of prayer and reflection, I remember standing in the lake. It was like "You should just go. What have you got to lose? You're 29. You're single. If it doesn't work you can just do something else." And it was very comforting and very reassuring. So I went to *TheStreet.com*.

THESTREET.COM

Startup life is really fascinating. If you've ever worked for a big company and your phone's not working you send an email to somebody and they come and they fix your phone. If you're working at a big company and your computer's not working or it breaks you call somebody and they replace your computer. I had worked at *NBC* and *General Electric*. I had worked at *New York Newsday* and then I had worked at *The Wall Street Journal*. And I walked into an abandoned bank vault with phone lines strewn across the ground with computers with mismatching boxes and phones that didn't work and nobody had the same business card if they had a business card at all.

It was September of 1996. I went there for two days and I came in for the 3rd day and I said I just can't take it. I need to take some time off. So I left. I went away for three days, came back. And we were supposed to start publishing by November. Our staff at that time was three people, including a college graduate, someone who had worked in

Denver, a woman from Yale. It was a very small operation, so part of my job was to hire people. And you'd go out to recruit people and you'd say I want you to come work for this thing and people would say "what is this thing?" You'd have to explain this thing and they wouldn't understand what you're talking about. So a lot of the early days was trying to find people. If you ever do an entrepreneurial startup especially in a known industry, go looking for people who think they've had their last shot. They made a misstep. There's something wrong. They're talented but headstrong or someone didn't like them and it went sideways. They're so eager to prove the people who put them on the sidelines were wrong.

I remember one guy in particular that we brought in was an incredible talent for *TheStreet.com*. This guy, Jesse Eisinger worked for the *Dow Jones News Service*. Jesse was brilliant, but Jesse knew he was brilliant. We hired him, made him very prominent and I'm happy to say that I think it was three years ago he won a Pulitzer Prize working for *ProPublica*. Alex Berenson who at the time was just a cocky young reporter who had worked in Denver left *TheStreet.com* to go to *The New York Times* and

“What have you got to lose? You're 29. You're single. If it doesn't work you can just do something else.”

now is a very successful thriller writer. Next time you're in the airport look for Alex Berenson and you'll see a lot of his books. Today I had coffee with a woman named Jamie Heller. She's a top editor at *The Wall Street Journal* now. Adam Lashinsky a columnist at *Fortune*. Herb Greenberg, is seen on *CNBC*. Gail Griffin ran *Barron's* online. I mean we had this great array of talent that was just so fun to work with. That was probably the best part of building a company from scratch. You can create your own culture.

If you want a culture where people don't cuss all the time, you can create that culture. If you want a culture where people are respectful and edifying you can create that culture. That's one of the beauties of entrepreneurship. The huge risk is it might not work. But you have so much authority over what kind of culture is created.

One of the challenges to our culture is we had two owners who were quite mercurial. One guy was named Jim Cramer. Has anybody heard of Jim Cramer, *CNBC*? Yup. And a guy named Marty Peretz who at the time owned *The New Republic*. We started in 1996, '97, '98. In 1998, the venture capitalists started to come in and I'll never forget

my first meeting with a venture capitalist. He said “what’s your hardest question?” I said “I’m trying to figure out who to hire, or how many people to hire.” And he said to me, “Well, what’s your budget?” And I said “well I don’t know. I just hire people.” And he said, “Well that’s quite an early stage investment for us.”

We were not a traditional operation. So they were about to put in \$10 million

“Hey, I need to borrow \$425,000”

into our company that would have made us a real company with a board of directors and the whole thing. And at the time, the two owners were not talking and the investment was coming late and we had payroll to hit. So I called Jim Cramer’s hedge fund partner, who I didn’t know that well and I said “Jeff, how’s it going?” And he goes “Pretty Good.” I said “Hey, I need to borrow \$425,000, just for a couple days.” and he said “What?” I said “Well, if I don’t get \$425,000 from you I can’t make payroll, and then we’re really in a lot of trouble.” So he said to me “I need to talk to my wife.” So he calls his wife and he calls me back and he says “OK, you’re sure you can pay me back?” It was like are you sure you can pay me back Tuesday for a hamburger today? I said “Yes. I can pay you back” and so he lent me the \$425,000 and we made payroll. It’s always a great question to ask somebody have you ever had to make a call like that? That’s a real entrepreneur moment. You have to just do something audacious and nuts and ask somebody who you barely know for almost a half million dollars.

I should tell you that this was a crazy time. Two of my favorite books are “O Pioneers!” by Willa Cather—it’s about being young, tough and gritty in the plains—and “The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald. So “The Great Gatsby” protagonist is Nick Carraway. Nick Carraway grew up in Saint Paul. I grew up in Saint Paul. Nick Carraway came to New York. I came to New York. Nick Carraway got caught up in the crazy 20’s. I got caught up in the crazy 90’s. Nick Carraway ran into all kinds of crazy people and ran across the guys who won the World Series and great bootleggers. It’s just all kinds of just this weird life for Nick Carraway, who came from that small town in the Midwest. Well that was kind of my life in the late 90’s.

THE \$9 MILLION MAN

Jim Cramer, he was a larger than life figure. He’s still pretty larger than life. Roger Ailes used to run Fox News. We had the first business show on Fox News. Rupert Murdoch, I remember sitting across from Rupert Murdoch. He had a

big yellow pad in his hands and I was across the desk trying to sell him TheStreet.com and he was like “bah, I don’t think so.” In his Australian accent, you know? I wrote a book called “TheStreet.com, a guide to investing in the Internet age,” it was number one on Amazon. And then we had an IPO that made me the \$9 Million man. I was on the cover of *The New York Times* business section. Dave Kansas: Rich, a journalist. Crazy. Journalists aren’t supposed to get rich. And it was a weird fantastical time.

Can you work 100 hours per week? Jim Cramer wanted me to be answering his emails at 6 a.m. He didn’t expect me to go back home until 8 p.m. or 9 p.m. That included the weekends. He slept three hours a night. I remember it got so crazy that when I had the money I bought a subscription to Metropolitan Opera for Friday nights because I knew that was the only way I would leave the office. If I knew I had to be at the Met at 8 p.m. I would leave at 7:45 p.m. or something like that.

But what was also happening was that a lot of things that were core to my being. Remember I was talking about being a church camp counselor at Redeemer fellowship. Those things were washing away. I wasn’t going to church. I wasn’t in fellowship. I wasn’t praying. I was all consumed with what this fantastical land had become. I was barely in touch with friends and family.

We opened an office in London, so I was in London one week out of every four. We talked about global domination.

But it was hard to see when you were in the center of the storm just how all consuming it can be. But then, if a thing can’t go on forever—as a great economist once said—it won’t. And the Internet bubble, the first one, the 1.0 ended with some companies that would make you laugh today. Pets.com was worth a bajillion dollars. It was a crazy time.

BUBBLE POP

In the fall of 2000, the bubble starts to burst and markets start to fall. I personally had a bunch of stock and I went to my accountant and I said I want to buy this apartment. It was a beautiful apartment and I was still living in air shafts with cockroaches. So I said the stock was trading at about \$20, and he said well if you buy that apartment, you should be fine if the stock doesn’t get any lower than \$8. So I went and bought a 2,800 square foot loft in Tribeca, which was amazing. You could have set up an archery firing range down the middle. It was one of those things where the elevator opens up into your place and you have a key, like in the movies. So about eight months after buying this place when the company’s stock was at 90 cents I was in a little bit of trouble. I had margin calls. We were laying people

off. We had hired all these people. We had people scattered all over the world working for us. In the fall of 2000 I remember I flew out to San Francisco to close the San Francisco bureau, took the Red eye back to New York to layoff 26 people in New York. And in the Spring of 2001, I remember I'm in Maui on vacation and I get a call to say we have to cut 40 more and I said "Put my name on the top of the list." And it all ended. The Last Supper. All that fantastical life and I emerged the next day thinking "where do I get a computer? Where do I get a phone? Where did all my friends go? What time is church on Sunday? Where was God?" Really, the question was "Where was I?"

FINDING GROUND

It came at an interesting time. I didn't have a job. I had a \$10,000 monthly mortgage, which even today sounds like a lot of money and it was a real lot of money in 2001. And then September 11th happened, right? I lived 10 blocks from the World Trade Center. I heard the first plane go over my apartment. I heard it hit the tower. I went down there and watched people fall. I was to the north, so the second plane actually came from the south, All I saw was the fireball.

I went to church. Anybody here heard of David Bisgrove? David Bisgrove works at Redeemer. I went to church after September 11th and I met with him and I kind of just laid out all my frustrations, all my failings, all my concerns about where everything had gone right up to and including 9/11. I was angry about that. And he talked to me and prayed with me and we talked about fellowship. I had the arrogance to think that I could maintain a faithful walk without fellowship. I had been arrogant to think that I could do that without being in a church with quiet time and prayer. And he was holding me accountable to that and directing me toward a guy named John Mason who had just arrived from Australia and was starting an Anglican church with the help of Redeemer. It was called Christ Church. It was my third startup, Christ Church.

It got me grounded. It got me back into a rebuilding mode: fellowship, prayer, Bible study. I was in a Bible study with Paul and some other journalists here, in a Bible study that John McCandlish Phillips led, and I was very grateful for that.

I always knew him as John. He was a wonderful guy. He knew the craft and he knew what it was like to be a believer in a secular environment. He knew how you need to be true to your faith but not expect everyone to understand what you're thinking about or the language that you might use. He knew you had to learn to talk to people in a language they would understand. One of the phrases I like to use is "I'm a Christian is the same as saying I'm left-handed." It's not like some

big proclamation it's just saying something of who you are. And when you're in a secular environment, especially the national journalism environment, which is not terribly friendly to people of faith generally, Christians in particular have to have the ability to speak in the language and nomenclature of that culture to be effective.

Now, ultimately, I went back to *The Wall Street Journal*. I was the Money and Investing editor. One of my favorite stories of that time was this: I was what they call the acting investing money editor, and here's some advice. Don't ever be the "acting" anything if you can help it. It's not that fun. It's better to be The thing as opposed to the "acting." But if you are the acting just pretend that you are the



Dave Kansas speaking at the Annual MPJI Lecture – Photo by Cameron Strittmatter

real thing. And in that year there was a big battle between The New York Stock Exchange and *The Wall Street Journal*. We were writing these stories about the executives at the the New York Stock Exchange and it was a very bitter multi-month, very public spat. I remember the two lead journalists, Kate Kelly and this woman named Susanne Craig were nervous and scared because they were being personally attacked by the New York Stock Exchange, a very powerful and important institution. And I pulled out the Bible from my desk and looked at them. Everybody kind of knew that I had the Bible around and went to church and stuff like that, but they tried to pretend they didn't know. I said "Here's one for you." I said "Oh God, you are my God,

early will I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you, in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.” It goes on, it goes on, it goes on... “My soul follows close behind you. Your right hand upholds me but those who seek my life to destroy it shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword. They shall be a portion for jackals but the king shall rejoice in God. Everyone who swears by Him show glory, but the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped.” And I have to tell you my two non-church going journalist friends loved that. They just felt like in that moment, we were sharing something that there is justice, that the lies won’t deter us, that there was a shared thing that we all had from our different perspectives.

I remember my boss at the time, a guy named Paul Steiger, who later started

“Remember your diggins.”

ProPublica, had lunch with me at the end of that first year after all that stuff with the New York Stock Exchange and he said “How did that go? How was your first year in your opinion?” And I said “Oh, it was great.” And he looked at me and he said “I didn’t think you were going to make it.” I said “What?” and he said “Yeah, it was pretty bad. The New York Stock Exchange thing?” I said “Yeah, but we were fine.” We had the Psalms.

Alright, moving on. I’ll skip over this. We moved to London by the way, after I got married. Our son was born there. I will tell you a quick story about meeting my wife. One of the hardest things for me living in New York was trying to find someone. And I’ll never forget, we rode bikes for six weeks. That’s how we dated. We rode bikes together. And we were riding in Central Park on the East Side when she told me where she went to church. And I was like “Oh wow. I found someone who goes to church. I can get married now. So we’re married.”

WISDOM OF GATSBY

I talked to you about “The Great Gatsby.” If you’ve read it as many times as I have and you have any connection with the Midwest you’ll remember toward the end he talks about his favorite memories and it was about taking a train home for Christmas for the first time. And holding tickets in his hand and comparing invitations and feeling the snow fall down and saying that’s his middle west, not the lost sweet towns or the prairies but the thrilling returning trains of his youth and the sleigh bells. And he remarks that the story of Great Gatsby was about the west

and about how he, Daisy, Gatsby, Jordan were all of the west and that somehow they had some subtle deficiency that made them perhaps not quite adaptable to eastern life. And I always held that in my head in the 20 something years that I was out east. Because I was always fighting it, loving, fighting it, loving it, and ultimately decided that it was time to go home and I’m really glad that I did. I moved home in 2011. I work at American Public Media, which as Paul said, is where I am today. I have a great family. My dad just turned 81. He set a swimming record in his age group the week before. My mom just turned 80. My in-laws just moved to Saint Paul, which is of course as you know, the Brooklyn of the Twin Cities.

I have a good church and a good job and it’s really exciting and it’s made me reflect on the lessons of the startups that I did that worked or didn’t work at all. Talking with my pastor in Minnesota, he’s talked to me a lot about idols. I mean, I think about idols I think about the Old Testament and things like that but he said “No. what’s most important? Is your job the most important thing? Is working 100 hours a week the most important thing? Look for your idols? Are they where you want them to be? Priorities.” There’s probably a good reason I didn’t get married until I was 41. Because I didn’t really have that as a priority. I didn’t really have building a family as a priority.

WISDOM OF KELLER

Fellowship suffered when I didn’t make that a priority. Same with quiet time. And I think the most important thing to think about when you’re in New York is accountability. Who is holding you accountable? Because this is a city great with anonymity. You can do a lot of things here and nobody knows, or at least you think they won’t. So who’s holding you accountable? Because you can’t do it by yourself.

A couple lessons I wanted to share and then we’ll wrap up quickly. Tim Keller once said to me “How do you feel about money and how do you feel about power?” I said “Money terrifies me and I’m very comfortable with power.” And he said to me “Very few people are comfortable with both and you have to figure out what you’re comfortable with and find ways to hold yourself accountable for what you’re not comfortable with.”

John Mason for me was a great pastoral leader, building a church. He had grit. When we tried to meet as a new church, Christ Church, we had to move I don’t know every six months. People kept kicking us out because we didn’t think correctly. A friend of mine, a long time roommate of mine, Greg Corcoran, he said “remember your diggins.” That’s an old Boston-Irish phrase, remember where you’re from. Don’t ever lose track of where

you’re from. Some people come from South Dakota and they don’t want anyone to ever know they’re from South Dakota. I told everyone I was from Minnesota. I was proud of it. I kept my Minnesota driver’s license and when I wanted to come home and head hunters would call about jobs in Minnesota, you know who they would send them to? Me, because I was the only one they knew who was from Minnesota. But your diggins are also your relationships, your family, the things that you grew up with, the things that have lasted over time. And don’t forget friends and fellowship. I think in New York it’s really easy to go racing after the next big thing.

Another thing Tim Keller said, “New York is full of energy. either you’re grabbing energy from it or it’s sucking energy out of you and there’s very little middle ground and don’t lose track of that.”

My final thoughts are that whether it’s a startup or whether it’s journalism or an entrepreneurial pursuit, people of faith are needed more than ever. Truth is more important than ever and I really think journalism is more important than ever. Journalism has always been hard. People are paying a lot of attention to the current president who declares journalists are “enemies of the people,” or the opposition party, but the previous president prosecuted more whistleblowers to journalists than all previous presidents before him. So it hasn’t been easy for a long time.

Just because one person doesn’t say it very nicely, that doesn’t change the fact that being a journalist has been tough for a long time and we need brave, good and faithful people.

A colleague of mine is here, Mark Garrison, somebody who does that very well for Marketplace. So there’s no shortage of jobs and a high need for smart, truth seeking people to pursue journalism. So I encourage you to do that. Thank you for your time.



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