

Realigning Priorities is Non-Negotiable – Faith, Family, and Practice – Dr. Michael and Jennifer Kelly: Ep #563

Guests: Dr. Michael and Jennifer Kelly



Dr. Michael Kelly:

Around the time that we joined Freedom Founders, we had spent the last two, three years before that just on a hamster wheel. Quite honestly, I was looking for a way out, selling my practice and maybe working a few days a week for somebody else. But what was funny is we went to that Blueprint weekend and for the first time in quite a long time, Jennifer and I went for a walk and we just talked. And what came out of that was we don't dislike what we're doing.

We just dislike the way we're doing it.

Dr. David Phelps:

Decades ago, I hustled to grow my dental practice and real estate empire. Society patted me on the back and every new deal and patient reinforced the success they said I had. Then my daughter Jenna was diagnosed with leukemia. Nine years, several intense chemo treatments and years of epileptic seizures, my daughter was given one more miracle, a life-saving liver transplant.

In that hospital, I realized I wasn't successful. I had money, I had real estate assets and a business, but the only thing that mattered was time with my daughter. In that hospital room, I decided to sell my business, leave active income and sustain my lifestyle with my real estate assets. Now, Jenna is healthy and all grown up and me, I am teaching others to do what I did. And I continue to uncover the principles, strategies and lessons we can apply in business and investing to create ultimate freedom for what matters most to each of us. Welcome to the Freedom Founders podcast. Hi, it's David here. Had the privilege of sitting down with a couple of our veteran members from Freedom Founders just to discuss the pathway, the epiphanies that they've had in their journey in Freedom Founders.

It's Dr. Michael and Jennifer Kelly. I'll introduce them to you in just a couple of minutes. Here's the basic story that they're gonna talk about.

They have reached a designation in Freedom Founders that we term free for life. To give you some context, free for life has five major platforms. First one is financial freedom. means you have enough investment assets to produce enough replacement income that you don't have to work.

Work becomes optional. Now Michael and Jennifer still have their practice. They'll talk about that where they are with that regard. Doesn't mean you're retired.

It just means you have the option to work the way you want to and that changes everything. And you'll that story from Michael and Jennifer. I think you would love to hear that. The next four freedoms are more subjective but still defined by each couple.

The next one is time freedom, having more time discretion, time optionality, time to do the things you really want to in life and not feeling like you're always at the grind, that so many of us feel like we are having to do during our career and raising our families. The next freedom is the relationship freedom, which is all about being able to be real and relevant for the people you care to be relevant for. That can be your family members. That can be your staff, your team, certain patients you want to deal with.

And also those that you don't want to deal with, like not putting up with certain insurance or vendors or patients who just don't appreciate the value you bring. When you have these freedoms, it changes your life and how you live every day. The next one is the freedom of health, which is a big one that a lot of people put off and say, well, someday I'll get back to health and diet, nutrition, and working out and the things that we think we can just put off forever. And of course that's never the case.

when we have more time freedom and more peace of mind, then we can focus on the aspects of our health, which is critical if we're gonna live a full life, even past our retirement days. And the last one is purpose and meaning. And again, many of us, myself included, worked many years really hard, dedicated to building a life and a fortress for my family to be financially in a good place, but that came at a cost and a price. And the big part is knowing how much is enough.

It's not too... to put a governor on whatever your desires are in life, to build what you wanna build, that's up to you. But what you'll find from Michael and Jennifer's story is that in Freedom Founders, while they were doing fine financially, they felt like they were on a hamster wheel. And how many of us have felt like that in our lives?

And so it became not how much do you pile up in terms of assets or practice value or EBITDA or those things that we put so much emphasis on, but it comes down to really what's important in our lives when we develop what those are with. clear intentionality, then we can reverse

engineer and say, well, what are we driving toward? And many of our members of Freedom Founders have found that once they did that, that the actual enjoyment from the practice, the career, the training that they put so many years into in their life becomes actually more pleasurable. It's something they don't want to give up, something they don't necessarily want to sell when they have something that they enjoy.

But that's the story of Michael and Jennifer. I'll let you dig in and hear it for yourself. Michael and Jennifer, it's so great to have you here today. And I've really been looking forward to having this conversation with you.

We've had the privilege, the three of us, I should say the four of us, with my wife, Candice, but certainly the entire community of Freedom Founders, getting to know you and I'd say getting to know you too, you know, more on a personal basis because of just some of the additional time we've had the opportunity and blessing to spend together over the last few years, but even like the last couple of months. I just, I really felt a cause to... want to have you share the pertinent parts of your story, your journey, your faith, ■ because we all three know that the attacks are real today, culturally, spiritually, and that good people are going to be tested in their faith, their journey, their convictions. And we need to continue to surround ourselves with people that are walking that same walk so that we don't feel like we're alone.

And I think it's easy in our professional careers. to feel like, we have to take it all and we can't talk about these other things we're supposed to do. We're supposed to be professionals that have it all together and everything's good. And we know that's not the case.

It never will be the case. So I just want to say thank you for doing this. ■ And let's just jump in. I want to start out kind of light.

If we can first, I want to go back to when you first met. I know there's a story there. There's an ■ orientation coordinator counselor, I believe in the mix there. There's a young lady who... has a lot of confidence, and there's even a prophetic father-in-law, I think, in the mix. So why don't you tie this together for us a little bit? It's a great story.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

You can start. So I was no dummy. was the orientation chairman for the incoming students. So I got to meet a lot of a lot of people.

One of the days on orientation, I saw this really cute girl coming across the campus and I went up to she and her friend and asked them if they needed any help finding anything. And Jennifer kind of looked at me and laughed and said, we're from here. We don't need any help or something to that effect. And we would see each other throughout.

throughout the year, but we ran into each other at ■ a fundraiser that the school did. It was a campus-wide fundraising event.

Jennifer Kelly:

with her parents. It was a weekend. So I was a freshman and Michael was a senior and my parents drove the whole 20 minutes to get to campus and we were going to an event together. And as we were crossing like a sports field, we ran into Michael and, you know, he introduced himself to my parents.

at the time, I think I was dating, I don't know, I was a sorority girl. So I was kind of dating many different people and having fun my freshman year. And so he mentioned that he was in the

interview process for dental school and it kind of perked my parents ears. And so, you know, he just said that he was going to be, you know, flying around and doing different interviews. And then he walked away and my dad said, Jennifer, that's the man you're going to marry. And I said, no way he's a nerd. And so my dad's like, no, I'm serious. And so I guess that would probably would have been about in the September.

of 1989, can't believe, ■ no, 1988, that was very long ago. And then I didn't see Michael again until probably right before he graduated from undergrad. And we were going into finals week and I ran into him and he invited me on a date. He said he wanted to say, he was saying goodbye to all of his friends and he was going to be attending dental school in Georgia.

■ Now that I think about it, I'm like, well, we really weren't friends. He was just asking me out on a date. anyway, you asked me out on a

Dr. Michael Kelly:

I asked her out on a date. We had to cut the date short because I had a senior event at one of the professors house. We went to a very small, it's called Stetson University in Florida and it's about, you know, at the time it was about what, 2,500 students, something like that. So very small university and we knew our professors.

Most of my classes senior year were like six people in a class with a professor. So we knew them really well. He had us over to his house for the senior event, but I invited her to graduation. She came to graduation with her dad.

They invited me to to join them at the beach in St. Augustine and we were pretty much inseparable after after.

Jennifer Kelly:

So that was Memorial Day weekend. We stayed in our condo in St. Augustine and by Labor Day weekend we were engaged. So, and then we were married the following February. So.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

the weekend before finals.

Dr. David Phelps:

No stress there.

Jennifer Kelly:

No, and then we don't do it.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

Anything small surprise. So Brandon was born six months later at two pounds.

Jennifer Kelly:

So yeah, we had a microbe screaming, our little boy, he's now 35. So that's our story. And so St. Augustine is a very special place to us.

It's really where we fell in love. And we get back there, sometimes we get back there to kind of revisit and have our memories and everything. But my dad, he still is very proud that he predicted that Michael would be my husband. And the driving, he says, well, what it was was, He says, I was very impressed with him.

He was very nice. And he says, but he was, my dad's an attorney. He's like, he's the first guy that you would introduce to your mom and I that didn't want to impress me by being an attorney. He wanted his own self and a dentist.

so, and they really, they love Michael like a son.

Dr. David Phelps:

Well, I can only know why just knowing Michael. And so from a campus courtship to building a family and then a career together, I mean, obviously it's worked. some people, some marriages, partners say, we don't want to work together. That doesn't work for us.

And I think that's smart. That's wise. That's the best way to go. You two have really joined forces.

And there are, we know many other people that work together in the business, in the practice. How has it worked for you and how have you worked through some of the normal issues that I think all of us might feel, some of the stress of the business and how do you maintain if you are kind of guardrails with your personal relationship but keeping a business like, give us some color there. And certainly there's had to be some things you had to work through, but you obviously have come to some principles that you both adhere to to make this work.

Jennifer Kelly:

So I think from my perspective, I come from a family of a couple of generations where the wife worked in with the husband. So my mom ran my dad's law office. My grandma, her mother, my grandparents, my grandmother ran, oversaw my grandpa's like fuel oil business. And so they, you I had some strong women who really, you know, they're their husbands helped me. And I think that that's God's design. So I just, I went, we went all through school together. So we were through dental school, we were all by each other's side. And we had some tough times, I think.

And then opening up a business as a hygienist, I think that that's a different role than like being like office manager or even a dental assistant. I see my own patients, very flexible in the beginning, you know, where when we had a young family where I didn't have, I didn't have to ever work full time. Michael always had a grace with that and it was always family first. then, it was actually, was family first, but husband and wife first.

And then once our family grew and had their own families, then I came on board more full-time as a hygienist. But I'm also, I think he sees me that I always have his back, that I'm always, I can see things from a different perspective, maybe in the girls perspective, the team or. Just even things that they don't see. feel like I have kind of that intuition that he likes. He doesn't always have a fast response for me, but it's something that he'll consider and meditate over and then come, you know, we'll work together. So.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

I think, you know, from my perspective, like I've had patients over the years go, my gosh, I don't know how you could work together or even colleagues that will say the same thing. Like I don't know. And my response is usually, well, I don't know how you could not, but that's it is. It's a relationship based issue.

And when we first started working together, I Jennifer was working two half days a week when we were in our Florida practice because our kids were little. And I remember her coming to me and she was working a little bit more and she's like, but you need me. And I'm like, Well, yes, but our family needs you right now. There'll be a time for that.

And we are blessed to be able to have you be with them. So we just arranged her schedule. she dropped them off at school. She picked them up at school.

And because by the time I would get home, the kids would look at me and I'd be like, how was your day? And they're like, nothing. It was, it was old news. They didn't want to talk to me about it.

And Jennifer would be able to say, well, tell them about, you know, this that you told me on the way home in the car. So I think those years were really valuable. But when she really started to take a larger role in the practice, quite honestly, it was a bit of a struggle because I was used to being a little bit more of my own self where a typical dentist, I get in my head, I know the right way of doing things. Jennifer's opinionated, but she also, what I came to realize over some different things that happened was that she brings a side, an intuitive side that I just don't possess.

Jennifer Kelly:

And I'm very opinionated.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

I've often joked that my assistant could come into the office with her head shaved and like two days later, I'd be like, did you do something different? I mean, I don't pick up on a lot of it, the emotional side of the business. And she'll pick up on things two weeks ahead of time and say something to me. And then two weeks later, something comes to light.

I'm struggling with my husband or whatever, with a team member. you're like, wow. She picked up on those little nonverbal cues much, much more than I would have. think the only struggle that, we ever face is that when you do work with your spouse, you don't leave your work at the door.

So, you know, we talk about the office on the way home. You talk about the office over dinner and sometimes you just have to say, Hey, time out. this is a lot of time. And, but again, being a team, I don't think, you know, I always know that Jennifer is there that she wants the best. for me, she wants the best for our family and she wants the best for our office. because we're both in alignment on our faith, it has also enabled us to work together to really prompt each other to be bold in our practice and to be, you know, we're called to be witnesses of Christ in our practice and in our lives. And I think sometimes without even saying it, The way we conduct ourselves ■ in our lives carries much greater weight than telling somebody about your faith. It's showing someone what it means to be loved, what it means to be cared for. I think that really is what makes a difference.

Jennifer Kelly:

Well, and we're also, you know, I know that people are watching us. I know our patients are watching us. I know our team is watching us. And I think now that I think we were considered the senior members of our office that, you know, right.

And it's like, I think that we can set an example of like, you know, a godly marriage, a godly work relationship. And we have a, we have, I know we have one girl that is very newly married and you know, there's some struggles.

Dr. David Phelps:

Wait, when did that happen?

Jennifer Kelly:

just being a new wife. And I think that, you know, we, can share that wisdom and, know, get on like an interpersonal relationship, trust and where she has someone to come to. So it's more than just like, we're the boss, you know, we genuinely look at our team as our family. ■

Dr. Michael Kelly:

seen, we've also had team members come in and interview and say, well, now that you guys are married, I don't think I'd ever I could ever work for a husband and wife. Like I've been in these horrible situations and the husband's cheating on the wife or they're always flirting with the girls and they're fighting at the office or the wife. All she cares about is money. And what's funny is those employees always come back and go, my gosh, you all like we can't believe the environment that's there.

It's just so healthy.

Jennifer Kelly:

I think that one of the things I try to do is I try to go above and beyond and be the willing wit, whatever it takes. I don't wear the label that I'm his wife. most patients do not know that we're married. And our team, of course, does.

But I'm in there doing what they're doing, folding the laundry, cleaning the bathroom, doing the instruments. so I actually do think maybe I work a little bit harder or differently, but I feel like I want to do that because I don't want them to think that I'm above them.

Dr. David Phelps:

It has to set a tone, know, just because I know who you are. It has to set a tone and I just have to think, imagine that the culture and the values that you espouse together, the way you do lead together, has got to create, as you said, know, some people, members have left and they come back and just remark about what it's like to be in that environment where the two of you set the stage and everything else is around that. I would just think that for, particularly for most females. to be in an environment like that because you're right, the workforce in general, not just in dentistry, the workforce, it can be very difficult for, I think, for women across the board. It's just hard and many times men and, Michael, we're a lot alike. We want to be kind, we want, but we don't have that intuition. And as a male, even though we want to help, we have

to be very careful and have... strong boundary lines on how much we would become involved in trying to help a female, right?

And I think that's where the two of you can do that because Jennifer, you can go there, but for me and for Michael to try to do that, it would be like, well, there's only so much you can do and you've got to really be careful about, mean, how much, so it can be tenuous, but I can see where you two really have done that really well and kudos to you for the work and effort I know it's taken. to do that because nothing's easy. No relationship's easy. You have to work on it.

You have to have the faith. You have the principles and you've certainly figured it out. We're always still figuring it out, right? But Steve, you've a really remarkable job in that capacity.

Jennifer Kelly:

We're still growing in it.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

learning and growing, Jennifer makes it easy.

Jennifer Kelly:

And you know, I have to say that, you know, just seeing how our team has evolved and where they are even in their personal lives is really amazing. And I like to think that we've had a small part in that of leading and being an example.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

Yeah, we even had a team member come to us last night and say, you know, I've been really working on my husband and I've been urging him and he finally told me that he's ready to, to, wants to go to church to find a church home. And they were part of a little Bible study that we did, you know, on off hours and stuff, obviously not connected to the practice, but, know, but they were part of that for a little while and just got to see that. And it's fun to watch those.

Jennifer Kelly:

Last night.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

know, the tree kind of grow and then eventually produce fruit and that's really special.

Dr. David Phelps:

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Dr. Michael Kelly:

you

Dr. David Phelps:

Well, Michael, I know that there was a time in the past where you felt, you and Jennifer felt like, you were doing well financially. You'd worked really hard. You you moved your practice from Florida to Scottsdale. And really, I know that, you your capabilities, your proficiency in dentistry allowed you to do some remarkable work and yes, provide for your family well, but you still felt like you were a little bit stuck on a hamster wheel.

Now know you've made changes, some dramatic changes in your practice model in just the last few years. Talk a little bit about that. because I think a lot of high income, deserving, hardworking professionals often feel like that too. It's just like we're working, working, working, but feel like we're just, where's there a chance to create some more margin and maybe a little more peace of mind so that, like in your case, you can actually feel like you can take the time with the patients that you want to do the dentistry, but also in their health, but also the dentistry that you wanna do when it's an open opportunity.
us a little bit of context around that.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

I around the time that we joined Freedom Founders, we had been, spent the last two, three years before that just on a hamster wheel. And my Florida practice, my youngest team member had been there for an 11 and a half years. And I was used to having longevity and this stability in our team. And we went through a season where, and the world's kind of changing a little bit.

I think that's less and less common. And we went through a season where it was just really challenging from a team. standpoint. We had some embezzlement, had some lying and just things that, you I had let a team member go for stealing a patient's AirPods.

I mean, just the nonsense that you think, are you kidding me? Like you're making X number of dollars a year and like I'll buy you a pair of AirPods. Like don't, this is silly, you know, but.

When you're facing that on a day in day out basis, the practice had grown to a pace that was untenable.

I probably needed to bring somebody in, but I knew that that would add additional stress to my life. And we really were, when we joined Freedom Founders, quite honestly, I was looking for a way out. I was looking for, hey, know what, selling my practice and maybe working a few days a week for somebody else sounds pretty good about now. I just want to show up, be an eight to five employee and not have the...

hassle. But what was funny is we went to that blueprint weekend and for the first time in quite a long time, Jennifer and I went for a walk after that first blueprint day and we walked around Dallas for like two or three hours and we just talked. And what came out of that was we don't we don't dislike what we're doing. We just dislike the way we're doing.

And so it was a hard process because, you know, when that wheel starts rolling downhill, it's hard to stop it. And so we had to really put the brakes on and start to slowly and methodically make the changes to the practice that we need to make because we both want to keep doing dentistry. We feel like it's part of, you know, it's a ministry to us. We're able to do things in our practice and really care for patients.

We spent a lot of time and effort in our lives learning how to do things and do them very well. And so it'd be a shame for us to stop that now, but we just want to do it in our lives. And I think for Jennifer, A big stressor for her was being able to have the freedom of time. And I'll let you kind of talk a little bit about that for you.

Jennifer Kelly:

Yeah, so freedom of time, as a hygienist, I'm booked out six months in advance. So if I wanted to take a week off or be with our daughter or watch our grandchildren, it was just impossible. So that was one of my things was just freedom of health and freedom of time. And so I'm able to do that now and I'm unapologetic about taking some time off.

And just some of the changes that we've made this past, I guess the past three years have also opened up my schedule where I can do that. So we first started, we came to the realization at the blueprint meeting that we needed to get rid of a toxic office manager. And for us, it was like, we don't know if we can operate without her. And once that all unfolded a few months later, she actually did it for us.

Once we started to. question or take over a few things to kind of lighten her load. I think she saw that she was going to be exposed. And so once that happened, I think that at first we did not have freedom of time.

We had a lot more work, but we knew it was a season and temporary. And that opened our eyes to more things. And then we ended up kind of restructuring our office and most recently even went out of network with all insurances. And that has also opened up our schedule and we don't look at it as a failure, we look at it as freedom and for him and also having the patients that truly value.

So it's so nice to be able to go in and if I have to get a patient in in three or four months or I have to bring them back for scaling and root planing or irrigation, they don't have to wait six or eight months to get in to see me. And it's, to me, I feel like I can breathe. I was going in, I would go in early, I would go in on days off, I would go in on the weekends. And I don't want to do that anymore, not after 32 years.

I think we both are the right to have the freedom of our own time because when we have that, we're refreshed. We put our oxygen mask on first and then we can take better care of our team and our patients.

Dr. David Phelps:

Well, you've certainly earned it. And I would say, you know, a lot of our peers in our group, anybody who's worked hard for several decades or more, you certainly should feel like you've

earned the right. The problem is, is the emotional side is like, you know, I want this, I want more time, more margin. I want to be able to spend more time with my family or my parents or give more, you know, in different causes.

But I feel like, you know, as you said, Michael, on the hamster wheel, trapped. So we have the emotional side, the drive for, you know, we want to... to be able to be more in different capacities, not just on this hamster wheel. You talked about the blueprint weekend and having conversations in Dallas while you were there.

What gave you the logical or rational side of the permission to start making some of the changes? You said that you're methodical, so that tells me you're rational. You're not irrational people, I know that. So you had to take what you wanted, but take it back to like, well, can this really work?

Are we going to create a bigger problem? Because that's what most people think. we get comfortable, right? We're comfortable, but it's a comfortable place because we've just been doing something.

We go, at least we keep doing this. We can at least maintain our, know, the water line, But that's, treading water is no place to live your life, if I can kind of use that analogy. So what gave you the confidence to go forward with some of the big changes that you made over a relatively short period of time?

Dr. Michael Kelly:

Well, think, you know, having the foundation of the two of us being on the same page and that started at that weekend. Again, you know, it's when you're going to a hundred miles an hour down that down that hill, it's really hard. Like you just keep going. And a lot of times there's not very little communication.

So when we really started talking about what we want and having those conversations, you know, started with that weekend really was ramped up during. our free for life process and going through the questions that are engaged in that. I think, you know, what really gave us that final confidence to pull the plug on it on insurance was recognizing that we, I think it was Alistair that said, you know, the absence of need is a superpower. And when, when we realized that we were at a point in our lives where We were going to work because we wanted to work, not because we have to work.

That changed everything because it gives you the confidence to say, well, yeah, I might lose some patients. That's okay. I might have to change my team structure. I might have to, I'm going to take some extra days off and my income might drop a little bit.

That's okay. And really getting for us to decide, you know, what we want to do is, so powerful and really gave us that confidence to say, know, hey, we got a, we got a huge landing net underneath us. So it's, it's okay. But I think honestly, even if we weren't a hundred percent there yet, because we had the confidence in each other and the trust in each other of our vision that we probably would have done those things anyway, even if the finances weren't a hundred percent there yet.

Jennifer Kelly:

Well, I also think having a good your team that's around you, I mean, you know, it's not the Michael and Jenner done. Michael and Jennifer Kelly, Dunn, Alaphys. It's a team. We're a

family.

We all work together. And we were also observing what our team was going through. mean, I'm talking about me working hard and staying late and going on weekends. But we were watching like our front desk and what they were dealing with with insurance.

And so our team is 100 percent behind us. They truly care. about the office, our patients, Michael and I, and we're seeing them just really have the confidence and supporting us in these decisions. So it's not like they're iffy or concerned and they're like, we're going to get people in here in the office who truly value what we all do.

I also think a pivotal moment for us was we went through a lot with our adult children. And I think when you have like a family crisis or a family that Really whether it's a health a health crisis or relationship issues that really kind of makes you step back and look at prior your priorities And are you going to stay on the hamster wheel? mean, what is that extra crown or that extra? Propy how much does that mean to you and according to your health or your relationships?

And so when you get everything Prioritized how it should be. I mean, I believe god takes care of the rest and so, you know, we're never going to be no way I have a bible verse and my operatory that says no weapon formed against me will prosper. So I know that we're getting attacked spiritually because of our faith and that we're firm in our faith and we're not going to waver and we're going to be attacked for that. So I think that, you know, just your priorities get in order when life starts to happen and you realize that it's not worth being on the hamster wheel at all.

And I feel that, you know, all the choices that we've made and the decisions we've made, some people would be very shocked. And it's not that it wasn't scary, but from a production side, from a business standpoint, we're having the best year that we've had in our entire 32 years of dentistry. So we've gotten rid of insurance. Have we had some slow days?

Yes. But we're up 20 % from last year. then and that doesn't matter to us. Money does not matter because we also have our family and we have our health.

And that is what is important.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

Yeah. You know, I think one of the things that I love about freedom founders is so many investment groups, though the entire focus is on money. But, you know, when you think about people in your lives, I know a lot of really wealthy people that are absolutely miserable and they're on their third or fourth wife and they're cheating on them or, you know, they're just or their health is blown out where, yeah, you're wealthy and you're married, but you're sick and you can't do anything and you know what a shame that is and so you know we're trying to do everything we can to make sure that we're working on all of those freedoms at the same time and and that has been super powerful.

Jennifer Kelly:

Right, and you know, even though we've achieved freedom and freedom founders, it's not over. I mean, it's just totally evolving. mean, is our family reconciled? Yes.

Do we have a great relationship, a beautiful relationship? Yes, but it is not perfect. But we've also learned through this, like how to handle situations, how to give grace, how to have

forgiveness. And it's really a beautiful story of reconciliation and forgiveness.

Dr. David Phelps:

Absolutely.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

I will also just say that, you there is no growth without struggle. So I've had people say, well, don't you wish that didn't happen? Or do you, you know, how could I avoid that? And quite honestly, I wouldn't want to avoid that.

You know, it was again, it was one of the most painful things I've ever gone through. And especially to watch my wife, because she was the focus of a lot of the attack and to watch the hurt in her and want to take that away, but not being able to. It was, it was awful. But we came out the other side of that so much stronger.

The two of us, our relationship with God, our relationship with our family. So I wouldn't want to take that away. But I think where a lot of us make a mistake, whether it's in our business, whether it's in our private lives, is we don't talk about it. And we internalize it all.

want to, you know, it's like they call it the stained glass masquerade when people go to church and like, how are you? I'm great. You yeah, you fought all the way to church, but yeah, you're not great. And but it's It's not kind of PC to talk about it.

And I think what we've learned is by being transparent, by sharing those, you realize how many other people are hurting just like you were. And it may not be the exact same situation, we got through that journey. We actually went and got rebaptized and we shared our story. And when we did, think we had like a dozen people come up to us after service and like, oh my gosh, my sister's going through this same thing.

Or I went through this with my kids and Again, people just don't talk. And I think we do such a disservice to each other when we don't, because when we're real and when we kind of share where we've been and where we are, and, you know, it gives an opportunity for others to learn and grow and just feel like they're not alone.

Dr. David Phelps:

100%. There's so much struggle in the world today and we tend to feel like we have to play this pretense, as you said, like it's all good, it's all good. You go to church or you show up at your dental CE meetings and it's like, what should be all good? All good.

you know, that's not the place where you even feel comfortable talking about that because you feel like you're gonna be judged, but the willingness to tell your story, to provide your testimony to other people is what- what helps them and your willingness to do that. And I want to go back to something you said because there's two things I want to tie together that you've already really brought out, but I want to make sure that people can feel us and see this, because I think this is so important. Again, very successful in your career, your profession, not that you haven't had struggles and grow through that, you made changes there. Obviously, family dynamics that who doesn't have those and you're willing to share that and show the pain, but also the reconciliation.

You had to together create enough, in my opinion, create enough peace of mind, and that's a big part of your faith. You stayed strong together, it didn't separate you. So you have peace of

mind that it was gonna be okay, that you can make some changes in your working dynamics to free up some time. I say free up some margin.

What do you do with that margin? Well, I know for you, ■ having the opportunity to be ready and available to your family, including your parents, by the way, to be available. Not to force yourself in, but being patient. Oh my gosh, how hard is that to do?

Being patient, waiting for God to open that door. It's like, come on, I'm ready, know? But that patience. But you two had to do that together.

So Michael, I know you said, you want to be able to take it away. Well, we do, but you're glad that you couldn't. But I would say that it wasn't about taking it away, was providing, together, the two of you providing the ability to create the margin of space, the openness, the peace of mind. that allowed you both to take the steps as they opened up.

Otherwise, we feel like we have to keep grinding. You said with removing insurance that it's reduced the patient numbers, but my gosh, you can spend more time, you can see the patients you wanna see, you can do the treatment you want to, can feel like you're stressed, you can have some holes in the schedule. Oh my gosh, you have holes in the schedule. I mean, that's almost heretical in dentistry.

I mean, you wanna have a packed schedule, right? I that's what they tell you, right? If you're not packed and you're not full. These are the myths that I love to try to dispel because I went through the same thing in my own life and I love to see couples like you do this.

So I guess where I'm going with this long intro here, sorry, but you said so many great things is dispelling the fact that we need to keep grinding because there's always a... Go back to financial. There's also, there's always a financial number, whether it's monthly production or net revenue or net worth or something that we think we have to hit. And every time we maybe hit it or do better in our lives, we move the goalposts.

We're big fans. I know we are in freedom founders about living below our means. And the more we can live below our means, means we have the ability to create some additional assets or some wealth to whatever extent we want to use that. But a lot of people think it's about, I need to take this wealth, I to sell my practice and get the equity, and I need to make some really, really great, great investments.

And that's what a lot of people want to do. And I know that's why a lot of people come to Freedom Founders initially, but I'm really trying to change that. Yes, we need to be, we need to shepherd and be good stewards of what God's blesses with, no question. But to hang the hat on, come in and shoot for the moon because I just need to, or I should.

Give me your context. I laid out mine, but give me your context, because I know that's where you're at.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

was a huge aha moment for us. We had the blessing of being able to go back and redo a blueprint ■ at the three-year mark to go back, reback through the blueprint weekend. And it was so cool to remember where we had been and then look at where we were and the new challenges that we're facing, but all of the, I think it's really important to celebrate success, to focus on what's... what you already have achieved.

I was honestly a little surprised and I almost felt like I didn't really belong in Freedom Founders for a while because we were going through and almost everybody that was around me were like, I can't wait to get out of dentistry. I just want to my office and get out of this. I

hate what I do. I'm like, I love what I do.

■ I just didn't, like I said, I didn't like the way I was doing it. And I wanted to make some changes to that. But wherever you are in that, yeah, I think I came to the realization and it was Candice that just made it kind of finally sink into my brain. okay, yeah, I could sell the office. Let's say our office is, we'll just make up numbers, our office is a million dollars. I could sell the office and invest a million dollars and get a 10 % return and make 100 grand. Great. Or I can keep that office.

And right now where we are, just, if I'm able to get \$250,000 clear after all of our expenses are paid for five years, and I still own the asset. for me, it was kind of a no brainer, like, well, yeah, I'm going to keep doing what I do the way I want to do it. And even if our numbers drop a little bit, I don't really care because I'm doing what I want to do. And we've seen some really dear friends that have retired recently.

And they're going through this identity crisis because it's like, I don't know what I'm going to do with myself. ■ For 30 years, I worked, and now I'm not. And they're really struggling. Like, I play golf every day.

Well, great. What's your purpose? There's got to be more of a purpose to life than that.

Jennifer Kelly:

And for me, not that I don't, not that he doesn't share with me. We're very transparent about numbers. I have access to everything, but I don't work for money. I don't work for numbers. So I work because of the relationships. And so for me, yeah, the numbers are important, but I'm not like checking like what's our production or what was our daily, what's the deposit or I mean, I make the deposits, but I don't, I don't, that's not my focus. And so For me, it's very freeing because I don't worry about that because our needs are taken care of. We live below our means.

I mean, we have had the big house. We have had the fancy cars. We don't need that stuff. know, what we want is time.

We want freedom of like, if we want to be with our grandkids or we want to go see my elderly parents or our daughter, or for us, we do like to travel. But for me, it's not about designer clothes or getting the material things. It's not what is important. And being at the office, don't, you know, do I clock in?

I set an example for the girls, you know, clocking in, clocking out, but I don't even know what I get paid. It sounds irresponsible, but that's not why I'm there. And I know that I can look at this. It's very, it's accessible.

I can look at it. I can log in, but it's just, it's not. The priority why I'm working is not for a paycheck. And because I know that we've worked hard and all that is taken care of if we live within our means and just take care of what needs to be taken care of.

Dr. David Phelps:

Yeah, you show up and take care of your team as you do, and you take care of the patients who are privileged to see you. You don't have to stress.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

We just, we don't live for things. I don't think anybody on their deathbed says, you know, I really wish I had gotten more things. We all want more time. want loved ones around us. We want, we want the peace that you can only know in a relationship with Christ. And I think, you know, when we have that and you've, you know, you've known love in your life, I think those things just make things not matter.

Jennifer Kelly:

I think when I think back to when we were a young couple, young married couple, and when life was so simple, we were so happy. And we're very happy now. But it's like, when we didn't have all the things and all that responsibility to pay for them, we were so happy. We had our own stresses getting through school and the young family.

And we did do the private school route, for example, when our kids were little for a few years. And we had a situation. We weren't there. I ended up homeschooling.

I mean, I had the freedom to homeschool and that is something I have absolutely no regret. Best decision we ever made for our family. And that's another reason why I didn't work, you only work very part-time. But I just think it's about, you know, those relationships and, you know, growing the next generation and those value systems.

And I just knew that no one would love my kids or educate them better than I could. And they're both successful. So, but I think... Not having all the things, not being strapped with all that.

It's so refreshing and not keeping up with the Joneses.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

think for me, one of the fun things is watching other couples that we've gotten to know in Freedom Founders also come because if they're like us, I went expecting a how to invest in real estate seminar and it changed my life in every aspect. It was so much more than what I was expecting. And I think people get in there and they're like, oh, I'm to learn how to invest. And yes, you will.

You're going to learn a lot. You're going to get an education. But I love watching couples when the lights come on that this is so much more, that this is about living your best life, living an abundant life full of freedom, of family relationships and friends and health and being able to take time off and not feel guilty about it. And those type changes, it's fun watching those lights come on when people realize that it's not just about money.

Dr. David Phelps:

Michael and Jennifer, so great for you to be able to share your lifelong experience, starting out when you were just meeting for the first time on the college campus and then going through your career, your family, and the revelations that you have today about... where you are in the ministry, the peace of mind, and your family, and setting out your legacy through the ministry you do. Thank you so much for sharing it with everybody. Your willingness to be open and vulnerable is a testimony that many others can really, I think,

Jennifer Kelly:

Well, we really appreciate you even thinking about us and it's truly been our pleasure.

Dr. Michael Kelly:

We've really been blessed by getting to know, the organization is only as good as its leader, David, and we've been blessed to get to know you and, your leadership and the people that are underneath you are such great human beings in addition to being good at what they do. And we've really enjoyed this process.

Dr. David Phelps:

If you're inspired by today's conversation and you're realizing it's time to take ownership, not just of your health, but your time, your practice, and your future, then you're not alone. At Freedom Founders, we help dentists and professionals like you build a life where freedom isn't just an idea, it's a reality. If you're ready to explore what that could look like for you, schedule a discovery call with our team. Let's talk about your goals, your vision, and how we can help you create the roadmap to get there.

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I'll see you next