

Engage360 | Episode 24: Holistic Ministry and Denver Seminary's Urban Initiative

- Introduction: Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life-changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.
- Dr. Don Payne: Hey, welcome back to Engage360, I'm Don Payne, your host. We're glad to have you with us, again. Before we get into our conversation with our guest for this week, let me encourage you to, as I always do, to visit us on the seminary website, DenverSeminary.edu/podcast or find us on your favorite podcast platform. And if you find an episode that has been particularly interesting or beneficial to you, you then please give us a rating or a review and even take the time if you would like to, to share it on Twitter or Facebook or something like that, just to get the word out and help us reach more people. Okay. To the business at hand. You know, there are some people who just make me tired. But not everybody who makes me tired does so for the same reason. Some people make me tired because they are what is often known as high maintenance people or they just rubbed me the wrong way, which probably says more about me than about them. But others like our guests this week make me tired because they are so busy on so many fronts that I'm exhausted just thinking about everything they do. And now, to be honest again, it probably makes me feel guilty too for being so lazy. And it makes me envious because it highlights my own limited capacities when I observe their enormous capacities. So this week's guest is not only really busy, but he also occupies a variety of very strategic ministry roles in our area. So I want to welcome to the podcast, my friend and colleague, Dr. Felix Gilbert.
- Dr. Felix Gilbert: Hey Don, good to be with you. Excited to be here.
- Dr. Don Payne: I am glad you are here. Dr. Felix Gilbert, he joined the faculty of Denver Seminary in 2013 as Director of the Urban Initiative and as Assistant Professor of Pastoral Leadership and Ministry. He received a BA from Colorado Christian University, an MDiv from Denver Seminary, and also a Doctor of Ministry from Denver Seminary in 2017 with an emphasis in leadership and preaching. And I'll insert a little plug here, Felix is a pretty well known as what some would call a preaching machine. I think you want, when you graduated with your MDiv, I think he won the preaching award that year. Did you not?
- Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah, that's the year that. Yeah, I got sick, but opportunities yet. It was great. It was great.
- Dr. Don Payne: So you won the preaching award while you were sick?
- Dr. Felix Gilbert: No, I didn't get to do it that year. I spoke before, but that's the year I got sick, so I wasn't able to participate in that.

Dr. Don Payne: Got it. Right. Okay. Okay. Okay. Well Felix also serves as the Senior Pastor of Restoration Christian Fellowship, which is a congregation that he and his wife, Ketani, planted in 1999. Yes. He is the founder of Restoration Christian Ministries, which is a community development corporation that serves the Aurora, Colorado area. And recently I believe, launched Restoration Christian Academy, a Christian school that provides an alternative to the public education system in the Aurora community. So again, Felix, we're just really glad that you're here.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: It's good to be here.

Dr. Don Payne: And before we get into other matters, give us a little overview of your own background and how you found your way to Denver Seminary.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah, this is a very interesting journey to get here. I was born in the Caribbean, that's where I was born and raised. My actual birthplace was Guyana, South America. And my parents were just migrants looking for a better life. They were born in St. Lucia and my dad was doing gold mining in Guyana, believe it or not. And so he wanted us to have a better life. So he figured out how to, what we call island-hop, to make his way up to the us Virgin Islands with the assumption that if we can get there, I can create a better pathway for my kids. So he ended up making it to St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands where I went to school, where I got my primary education, high school education. And upon graduation from high school is where I joined the US Air Force to get off the Island and began my United States journey. So it was while in the military, I went to college and started my, you know, graduate education process there. And, I worked as an electrical engineer for a while for IBM and was pastoring bi-vocationally in a town called Tucson in Tucson, Arizona. But you know, doing that, you realize, man, I am ill equipped. I am not doing a good job teaching God's people, preaching to God's people, and I always wanted to go to seminary. But being in this place in Tucson, there's no seminaries there. There's nothing there. So my company, IBM relocated to Colorado and they asked us if we wanted to come to Denver or stay with the company in Tucson area. Well, I chose to relocate because I knew Denver Seminary was here. And so that's how I got here, to Denver Seminary. And so I worked bi-vocationally for.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Via IBM.

Dr. Don Payne: Via IBM. I never new that part.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah. I say the people all the time that God caused my company to relocate because of his divine providence to get me here. Yeah. So I did my MDiv here. This is why I went to Colorado Christian University, finished up all that undergrad work and all that good stuff, and then did my Masters of Divinity, and then came back to do my doctoral program here at Denver Seminary. And now I'm here, right, now here as part of the faculty, loving every moment of it. Yeah. Cause it just keeps stretching me. It keeps growing me. And I think anytime a

person can position themselves to learn more, they should. Yeah. And so I get to hang around with great guys like you all. So it's all good.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, clearly, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Right, right, right, right.

Dr. Don Payne: Hey, one of, you've got kind of a dual role here, in your teaching and then your oversight of the Urban Initiative. So, we'll talk maybe about both, but I want you to tell us a bit about the Urban Initiative. What's that about? What goes on in that arena?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Sure, sure. The whole idea behind Urban Initiative is Denver Seminary's intentional attempt of what I'm going to say, one of their core values of diversity. And so the whole premise of the Urban Initiative is to kind of create opportunities. It was really birthed out of, at least when I got engaged with it. Mark Young, being a person with a missions background always had a heart to make sure that as many pastors within the urban context is equipped, properly equipped for ministry. So when he brought me on board with the Urban Initiative, what he really said to me, Felix, I have this dream that we equip every leader within the urban context. Every person that wants a seminary education within the urban context. So what we did with the Urban Initiative, we had this threefold goal. We wanted to extend the resources of Denver Seminary within the urban context. We wanted to also enhance what a person that came from the urban context, let's say a person of color, that would come to Denver Seminary being that is located in suburbia. What's their experience? Right? So can we create a atmosphere or a platform on the campus where people can feel as if I belong and they can fit in? So that's all part of that. Extend, enhance, and then to just really make sure we can equip people within the urban context, so what we've done is we started a lay ministry program within the Urban Initiative to create a pathway from the urban to the suburban. The whole vision is the term I use, you want to make Denver Seminary, Denver's seminary. So when you think about a seminary in Denver, it's not only relegated or restricted to people that's out here in suburbia. If you, within the urban context, you can have access to the education as well. So, it's created a pathway where we can get some of our great theologians like yourself and Craig Blomberg and some of the big ones, right? That can come into the city and really teach and help people from a lay perspective be exposed to what really goes on here on the seminary campus. And the result is, it's a year long program when people graduate from the program, a lot of them matriculate to Denver Seminary because it didn't realize I can compete at that level. I can make it at that level. I can learn at that level. So for the past, we've been doing it for five years now. It's been very successful. We're getting students to matriculate and we actually had our first graduate last year, a lady by the name of Shantel Seymour. Yeah, you know Shantel. She graduated with her -

Dr. Don Payne: Hi Shantel, if you're listening.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. Masters. She think of Masters of Art, so we're proud of her. She's like our yay baby, you know, and so it's great to see that happen.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, it's great to, it's great to see the Urban Initiative graduates. Every year at our commencement.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yes. Yes. I think that's one of the most admirable thing that the Seminary does, is that it doesn't allow those students to feel less than they literally feel as if I'm part of Denver Seminary. The Seminary values me, the Seminary honors me, and allowing them to walk across that platform and to have the chairman of our board shake their hand and to have our president shake their hand and to see that platform of faculty in their color garments right?

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, they're a parade of peacocks, Mark Young loves to call it.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Right, right, right. And Mark with his bling and all that. So I think though that that's, those are just impactful moments for those students, I mean it brings tears to their eyes. It's just, because some of them didn't get a chance to graduate from college. Some of them did, some did not. And to be able to walk across that platform with thousands of people cheering them on, it's just the most amazing thing.

Dr. Don Payne: Oh yeah.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah. That's the most amazing thing, so it's just beautiful to see that happen.

Dr. Don Payne: Man. I love, I love what you're doing in that area.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Oh, bless you. Thanks for the support. Thanks for the support. Yeah.

Dr. Don Payne: So, you have coming up pretty soon a big event. Blacks in Theology, and the gala that goes along with that. Tell us about that.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yes. Yes. This is another thing where I will say I really appreciate Denver Seminary for being innovative and for being cutting edge in being intentional in making sure that it's a seminary for all people. Right. And I love that about it. So what we're doing with the Blacks in Theology is that, traditionally when I first joined the team at Denver Seminary, we would have a, once a year there would be two chapel services that was relegated to, let's say the Blacks home campus. Right? And so what we did was we realized that February is Black History Month. So what would it look like if Denver Seminary took the initiative to say, you know what? Let's honor those black theologians who have contributed to the theological framework that we study today. Most of the times when we're sitting in the classroom, we don't learn about blacks who may have contributed. So what would it look like if the Seminaries were, especially during Black History Month, the first week of that month, to take the initiative to say that we want to honor those contributors. We want to honor those black theologians who

have shaped our theological framework. And so what we've done on campus is that we've taken the first week in February to say, let's put this event together. And what we do is a big gala. It's another peacock event. You know, blacks, people, black people like to dress up, right? So it's a chance to dress up and to come and enjoy some good music, good food, and just hear just great stories. Now, the premise behind the gala, it's all about fundraising to fund what we call the Blacks in Theology Endowed Scholarship Fund. And the purpose of that fund is to make a theological education accessible and affordable to people of color. Because you notice quite well when you're within the urban context, you might not have the financial wherewithal.

Dr. Don Payne: Often under resourced.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Exactly. Exactly. And that really is the truth, right? People aren't aware of the importance of a theological education. They don't know that it's accessible and available to them. And more times than often when they become interested, affordability becomes a real issue. So what we do with the weeks of Blacks in Theology, it culminates with this gala that raises funds. And what we're trying to do is to develop a scholarship fund, which we've already started, to make any person of color within our urban context that want to go to Denver Seminary. We want to eliminate the issue of I can't afford it, as long as they qualify, as long as they meet the academic acumen to be accepted into Denver Seminary, Denver Seminary is committed to put in their hands to the plow to make sure that that student is not turned away because they don't have the resources. Yeah. So it's awesome. So the first year we did this, we raised \$160,000 with Denver Seminary.

Dr. Don Payne: That's a great start.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: That's a good start. That's a good start. Here's the thing that spoke hugely to the Denver community, right, was the Seminary said we're going to put the first hundred thousand dollars on the table toward this scholarship. And then the advancement department took the initiative to go raise that money. So it was just the most amazing thing, I think it's a beautiful picture to see that the seminary is saying, Hey, we're in it for diversity and we're not going to wait for it to happen accidentally. We're going to be intentionally, and then more importantly, we're going to put our money where our mouth is.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. So give us the dates and specifics for the upcoming gala and how those people get involved.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yes. The dates for the gala this year is February 7th, it's a Friday evening. It's going to happen at Restoration Christian Fellowship, which is located in Aurora. The address is 15660 East Sixth Avenue, it's going to be seven o'clock that evening. We have a great speaker coming in, Dr. Ralph West from Church Without Walls in Houston, 20,000 member church that we're looking forward to him. And he's in ACA addition himself in that he speaks of colleges and university. We're going to have a gospel singer, Carolyn Trainer. You don't want

to miss that. So bring your light shoes and get ready to just tap and dance. It's going to be awesome.

Dr. Don Payne: Going to have a dance floor right there in the church?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: We have a dance floor in the church. And then we're going to have some great entertainment by this jazz musician, Tony Xom. So of course, a full course meal. So anybody who wants to participate, they can go to Denver Seminary's website, Blacks in Theology and register to come and be a part of that event.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay, tickets?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yes. Tickets are, it's \$100 per person, of course, the proceeds. So people might say, that's a lot of money. We're raising money to make a theological education accessible. So it's an investment.

Dr. Don Payne: So that's part of what goes not only to cover cost, but right into the scholarship.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Exactly. So proceeds from all of that goes towards the scholarship fund. If a person wants to sponsor, like buy a table for example, I think the range is anywhere from a thousand to \$1,500, but you get a seat, a table that seats eight, you can bring people in. Once again, you're contributing towards the scholarship fund. That's the big thing. Yeah. That's the big thing that you're doing.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Yeah. Okay. What else would you want to say about the whole Blacks in Theology week? Anything else going on? Or how does that fit with the overall ethos of what we're trying to do here?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah, I think it's very, very important. This week plays a critical role cause what the week communicates to the Denver community that Denver Seminary is not just a school that's relegated to just a suburban context. And it's saying to our community, just like we do with the Hispanic Initiative, right, that we are intentional in being a school that's serious about its core competency of being diverse. And so I love the fact that it's taking steps to reach people of various ethnicities. So within the Urban Initiative for example, we not only deal with African Americans but Hispanics and people from any of the African diaspora. And so it's a very, very diverse group of people. And I think by doing this Blacks in Theology event, what the seminary is really communicating, we are interested in bridging the gap. We are interested in bridging the divide, and we are welcoming people of various ethnic backgrounds to be a part of our Seminary community. I think it's important. And then more importantly, the Seminary has taken the initiative to make sure that underprivileged people have access to a theological education. And that is so huge cause it's easy to say, I received mine, you figure out how to get yours. No, the Seminary was really extending a hand. And I love the fact that it's taking the initiative. Normally when you talk about fighting for diversity, it's the urban context fighting

outward. And what we have going on here is a Seminary saying, no, we're going to start from out here, but we're going to fight inward with you and we are willing to walk with you together to make sure that the Seminary education is both accessible and affordable to anyone who wants to attend.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, yeah. Well said. Well said. Let's revisit this notion of accessibility and that's a huge issue. What are other than maybe finances. Some of those more tangible resources, what are some of the barriers to accessibility between under-resourced communities of various sorts and the theological education they need?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Sure, sure. I say it this way, Don, I say it this way, that within the urban contexts, the majority of people are hopeless. Right? And what hopeless means is that we're trying to make it, they're trying to survive. So it's like every day is survival. And so what you have happening in churches within the urban context is you have, I'm going to use the word, going out on a limb here, prosperity preachers and teachers, right? That will take advantage of that, and preach a doctrine that presents a false hope. To say that if you believe this and do this and do that, and it all becomes about you can become rich, you can get prosperous. And they try to present this hope that really has no substance on it. And a lot of that is because of people aren't educated theologically, they don't have proper hermeneutical tools and resources to properly exegete Scriptures, right? And so it's, it comes very, very important because what happens is when people try that for a while, they become disillusioned and then they feel, well, why do I need to serve this God that's not bringing this hope that I'm putting my life in, into reality? And so they end up straying away, turning away, not being committed to God or the gospel anymore. So the importance of a proper theological education teach people that prosperity is not always about finances. And that's always about this, these secular things. But it's about a relationship with God, knowing God for yourself, knowing who he is, right. And so equipping leaders to teach people properly makes all the difference in the world. And under-resourced people, they're just grabbing at straws, they're grabbing at straws to try to make it. So if we can equip people, then they can read scriptures for themselves. They can study scriptures for themselves, they can interpret scriptures for themselves, they can apply scriptures for themselves, and it creates a healthier community overall. So I think going into under-resourced communities and just equipping people theologically, it makes the church healthier overall.

Dr. Don Payne: That's a pretty good segway, actually to let me ask you about your ministry at Restoration Christian Fellowship, because I know that's the other kind of primary or that's another primary expression of the multifaceted ministry you have.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah. I must be crazy.

Dr. Don Payne: No, you're just a high capacity guy. Tell us about Restoration Christian Fellowship.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah. Yeah. Restoration Christian Fellowship is a church that my wife and I started 20 years ago, believe it or not, 20 years ago.

Dr. Don Payne: When you were a young man.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: I was a young man. I am old now. Amen. Oh yeah. Older. Yeah. And the whole premise behind Restoration Christian Fellowship, I think it's part of my journey where we started Restoration a few years after I started then being at Denver Seminary because once again, being at Denver Seminary, I realized the importance of a proper theological education. I understood a lot more how to minister more effectively, and the importance of equipping God's people for effectiveness. So my wife and I started this church. And then we quickly saw the need to for effective ministry within the community. So you'll see, it seems like we're doing a lot, but I want to say that's like the cultural norm when you're administering an urban context. Right? People are hurting. People have needs.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, there's a lot to do.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: And there's a lot to do. Exactly. And so the church has to be holistic. So Restoration Christian Fellowship really has an holistic approach to ministry. Meaning that it's not just Sunday morning where you come and have a good worship experience, you have to live life Monday through Saturday. And how do I do that? Right? How do I do it effectively if I haven't been educated properly, if I haven't been trained properly. And so we adopted a holistic approach to the ministry where we're meeting the whole man, whole woman or you know, mind, body, spirit to make sure they're brought to an effective relationship with God.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. What does that look like? Give me some examples.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Okay. So you, you mentioned earlier about Restoration Christian Ministries, right? Which is a, we call it our Community Development Corporation. So we have this approach where, when we say holistically, we want to target people in six areas of community life where they live, learn, work, play, thrive, and worship. So that means the worship of course is the Sunday morning and Wednesday evening church service that we do. But the remainder, when we talk about Restoration Academy, the school that we just started, that's the learn portion. So how can we provide an alternative to secular education? Because we see what's going on in our community. Our kids are going to these public schools and they're not being educated properly. They're not receiving a good education, at least with a good biblical foundation and our base. So we provide that. And then the other part of that, here's for example, I love this illustration, right? You go on the streets and you witness to the prostitute. Let me just use that example. And you bring the prostitute to a relationship with God, and she comes to church Sunday mornings and she gets saved. But now keep in mind her whole life, she's been prostituting. So what do you say to her? Go back to prostitution Monday. That's her job. So part of what we need to do is figure out how do we train her to do something differently? How do we give her skillsets

so she can survive? So part of when we talk about where they work, we have this entrepreneurial center where we train people with different skills and we give them, if they want to start businesses, we help them start businesses. Those are just some examples of how we minister to people holistically, to provide an alternative that will cause them to go back into the world. So you get a feel for what that looks like.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. You know, that reminds me of the example from Acts chapter six where the first deacons are installed and you know, if you don't know that that account, the presenting circumstance was some inequity between food distribution with different ethnic groups and their widows. And what is so, intriguing to me is Peter's logic when, when he says, choose seven from among you who can do this, who are wise, and they are filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, and I, and I use this example in a number of my classes, but the question I love to pose is, well, why does somebody have to be filled with the Holy Spirit to set up an equitable food distribution service? I mean, you know, you'd think that anybody with a, you know, an average amount of common organizational common sense could do that, right? So why did being filled with the Holy Spirit, why was that so necessary for those deacons? And the best I've come up with is that the gospel had to be embodied in their life together. It had to be enacted holistically. As well as proclaimed faithfully. And it takes the work of the Holy Spirit and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to do that in both ways.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yes. Let me give you a real life example of that. We just finished this - every month, on the first Saturday of every month. We partner with the food bank of Rockies and we have about 400 families from the community to come to Restoration Christian Fellowship, food bank of the Rockies, pull up with this huge tractor trailer and believe it or not, our deacons.

Dr. Don Payne: Who are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Who are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Don Payne: They better be.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Right, are responsible for the food distribution. Now here's the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit. We have deacons walking out, walking amongst the people in the congregation, praying with them, okay. Ministering to them, sharing the gospel with them. Right. And it's just the most beautiful thing to see because that's like some, some of those individuals, that's the only time they grace the inside of a church because they have a tangible need. We don't know where we're going to get grocery for the month. And so we're able to provide those groceries and at the same time, because they're filled with the Holy Spirit, they can proclaim the gospel in a good way. So it's the most amazing thing to see how that work, how that works out. You know, they put their faith into action and it's almost like a Hebraic and Grecian Jew thing going on. Right. But the deacon's a handle on it. So it's a beautiful picture.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Let's kind of move this out even a little more broadly. I want to draw upon some of your pastoral experience. What are some of the most significant lessons you've learned over your years of pastoral ministry about pastoral ministry?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Pastoral ministry is hard work, as you well know. When you start off as a youth 20 years ago, you're full of fire and you think you know it all. Man, you think you can conquer the world and that's when you make a lot of mistakes. I made a lot of mistakes in my youth, right? I think the dominant one I would say is me thinking I can do everything by myself and not realizing the importance of needing to surround yourself with people who are smarter than you and stronger than you, and better than you in your areas of weakness. So the biggest lesson I've learned as I'm doing this in my latter years is raise leaders. Raise leaders, mobilize leaders, empower leaders to mobilize people so the gospel can be advanced. So I'm learning a lot from Jesus's model of coming to the earth and calling 12 and spending his life with the 12. And then when he's about to depart, he says, go into all the world and make disciples and you and I here today because of what those 12 did. Right? So I would say the most valuable lesson I've learned, and I'm putting it into practice more now, is to just equip people and invest your life in a small group of people and raise them up to do the work of the ministry and teach them to replicate themselves in others.

Dr. Don Payne: Is that difficult or challenging for a lot of people in their church to accept?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: It is, it is.

Dr. Don Payne: Why?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Because of the concept, if I use the word of this idea of call, right? People think that, traditionally we've been taught this. If I'm called to ministry, I'm called to the clergy, right? I've got to be licensed, ordained, or whatnot. They don't see that the call is extended to everyone who've accepted Christ as their Lord of Savior. So there's an apprehension to want to step up to a higher level of leadership. Because I'm not called to ministry, I'm just a lay person that we've created this huge divide. So part of what we're endeavoring to do at Restoration Christian Fellowship is to tear that tradition down, tear the divide down, to say, there's such a thing as a marketplace ministry. You can do it in your marketplace. You can do it in the place where God called. You don't have to be upfront standing with the Bible proclaiming, thus said the Lord. You know, just where you work, where you do things and you can be used effectively to equip people. So it's a challenge. It's been a lot of work for us.

Dr. Don Payne: A real mindset change.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Dr. Don Payne: Let's talk about preaching for a minute because you're pretty well known, at least in this area for the way the Lord has gifted you and the skills you developed in preaching ministry. And I'm really curious whether, and how you have seen your own preaching change over the years. What have you learned about preaching? How do you think you have, I don't know, grown? As a preacher over these years.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: I would say, I'm going to sell Denver Seminary again. Scott Wenig, Dr. Wenig, right. He was my preaching guy when I took preaching here at Denver Seminary. And true story, I credit everything I know about preaching to Scott. When I was in his class, my first year as a student here preaching as, I think it was preaching as listeners like it or someone speaking as listeners like it, he heard me speak and I was doing my traditional black gospel thing. And he came up to me after class and he said to me, Hey dude, if you come back in my class and you preach with notes again, I'm going to fail you. And I had no idea what he was talking about, right? He obviously saw something in me that I didn't know about myself. And he taught me this idea of expositional preaching with the big idea concept. And once I learned that, I committed myself to that. So the guy that you hear speak today is not the guy that would speak way back when. What I've learned here on campus has really shaped my preaching. Now what I've done is I've learned to contextualize and keep my own cultural context to it, but the idea of just going to scripture and grabbing that big idea and being able to apply it and illustrate it, and then make it contextually relevant to today, that's really shaped and formed me. And I will say that I am continuing to grow because every day it's a learning experience. It's a learning experience.

Dr. Don Payne: You know, you said something, I'm really curious about it. I have only heard you preach in your church context a little bit, mostly on YouTube. But merely in snippets. I've not heard you preach very much in your context, right? So how, what does that look like? How can you describe that? How that gets contextualized? In your context.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yes, yes. In my context, there's a call and response, right? So, if I say something that's meeting the need of a person, I'm going to hear "Amen." Or, I'm going to hear, "That's right." I'm going to hear, whatever. So then in that context, you realize you're speaking directly to a person. So once again, filled with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit moves and the conversation continues, if that makes any sense. Right. It continues because you're meeting the need and then the Holy Spirit starts to reveal more of what's going on in your congregation at the time. So the sermon really takes on a completely different form.

Dr. Don Payne: Kind of a life of its own.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: It takes a life of its own.

Dr. Don Payne: Where you have to sort of hold it loosely and be maybe a bit more extemporaneous.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Exactly. So I say this to students here on campus, right when I'm teaching, homiletics, is that I'm the guy that will do all the exegetical work. I'll have my movements, I'll have everything, but I'm the guy that will stand in the pulpit without a preplanned illustration. Yeah, no preplanned illustration. I'm that guy. And in the moment I'm saying, Lord, show me my audience. Tell me what the needs are. And so this is where the call and response come in. So when I'm preaching and I'm expositive in the passage and I'm saying something about the text, and I can hear the response, it's as if God starts to say, there it is. And then the illustration comes on. It's the most amazing thing.

Dr. Don Payne: Which also means that you have a pretty good bank of illustrations and stories at your disposal for the Spirit to point out. Right?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah, yeah. I do. I do.

Dr. Don Payne: Either that or you're just making a lot of stuff up.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah, I pay, I pay. No, I walk around paying attention to culture. That's the thing. I think that's where I get my illustrations right, is I live with the people. I walk with the people. I keep my ear to the ground and so, the joke at my church is that if I'm in a group with somebody and something happens, here's what they'll say, "Oop, that's going to be a sermon illustration one day." Some people say, yeah. So I, I, I don't pre-program it. I just, I guess I have a bank. That's a good statement, that there's a bank somewhere.

Dr. Don Payne: And the Lord works with you.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: The Lord, works with me. He graces me. That's what I'll say. He graces me.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, sure. That's a good word. Yeah. Hey, what's the best book you've read this past year?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Oh, my goodness. Being a leader and with my doctoral leadership, the book, it's a leadership book. It's a book called *The Four Disciplines of Execution*. And that book has really began the process of revolutionizing my leadership. Because when you have a lot going on, sometimes you can procrastinate and to be able to have now the discipline to keep things in order and to have a cadence of accountability when you're meeting with your board and when you're meeting with your staff, when you're meeting with people, and to keep regiments in place to make sure you accomplish your goals has been extremely helpful.

Dr. Don Payne: What's the title again?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: *The Four Discipline of Execution*.

Dr. Don Payne: Who's the author?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: I think it's Dan Mccheesy if I get that correct. I think that's who that is. I could be wrong on that, but I think.

Dr. Don Payne: *The Four Disciplines of Execution.*

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Excellent book. Excellent. For anybody that's into leadership. That's become the number one for me right now. It's a good, it's a good book. Yeah. Very, very good book.

Dr. Don Payne: What would be your number one piece of advice to young pastors or aspiring pastors?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah. Get the theological education. There's no other way for me to say that, is that if you have not as of yet gone to a theological school, be the Seminary, I would say do it. And then I would also say get some older mentors in your life. Mentoring is extremely important and don't just get people who will tell you what you want to hear. Surround yourself with people that will tell you the truth about yourself, the truth about your leadership, the truth about your marriage. And they will, their goal is just to grow you up. So if you can surround yourself with good mentors and invest in great training, I think they'll make it.

Dr. Don Payne: It's time for your stupid question. Hey, your SSPQ. Your stereotypically stupid podcast question. Who's your favorite office neighbor in our hallway?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Oh wow. You want me to say you, huh? Yeah.

Dr. Don Payne: Oh, is that, is that what you were going to say? I'm surprised. We're only across the hallway from each other.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: That's it. The guy across the hall. That's it. That's it.

Dr. Don Payne: Now, here's the serious stupid question. Okay. What do you do that makes your wife's eyes roll?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Oh my, roll in a positive or negative way?

Dr. Don Payne: You choose.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Oh wow. Wow. Oh my goodness. I don't know what I do that makes, my goal is to keep her happy.

Dr. Don Payne: You got to have something.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: I know, I know.

Dr. Don Payne: Maybe I should bring her in and interview her.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah, she'll tell you. She'll tell you. Here's what I do. I leave stuff on the ground at home and she doesn't like that.

Dr. Don Payne: Oh, okay. That's what I've heard called not putting stuff away. Just putting stuff down.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Come in the house and take your shoes off and leave it there and go to bed and take your clothes and just leave it on the floor. Not good.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Okay. All right. All right. Well, I got one more. What do you think is the funniest thing about you that others simply do not find funny?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Ah huh. I don't know.

Dr. Don Payne: Or is it all funny?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: It's all funny to me. I'm just a goofy person, you know? Yeah. So I don't know any one thing that, that is funny about me to people, I just love having fun. I just love engaging people and I love to laugh. Yeah. That's about it. Yeah. I love to have a good time.

Dr. Don Payne: Is there anything about your preaching that typically falls flat?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah, at least to me. Right? Cause you know, you're the person delivering it and you're like, Lord Jesus, help me in this moment. This is not going good. And the beauty of what I have is we have two services. So in between services I'll sit with my elders or my family or something and say, Hey, how did that go? Right? And they give me immediate feedback. But you know, as a speaker, more times than often, I'm like, man, this sucks right now. This is not going good. But people say otherwise. And I'm like, no, I don't feel this one.

Dr. Don Payne: So if people are going to visit Restoration Christian Fellowship, they always want to visit the second service, right?

Dr. Felix Gilbert: Yeah, yeah, yeah. All the corrections have been made.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. The main bugs had been worked out, right.

Dr. Felix Gilbert: That's right. The person's practice. Right. Okay. Yeah, that's it.

Dr. Don Payne: Hey Felix, thanks. We're so glad you could be with us. This has been Dr. Felix Gilbert, and we are really grateful to have him as a colleague here, directs the Urban Initiative at Denver Seminary. And again, he's also Assistant Professor of Pastoral Leadership and Ministry that teaches preaching here. And just a great friend and colleague and resource here. This has been Engage360, we are here every week. I want to thank you for listening. Want to thank our production team for all the work they do to make this happen. We are grateful to be some

part of your journey as a podcast and hope you will communicate with us. Podcast@denverseminary.edu is our email address. So please let us know what's being helpful to you, and even if you have something you would like for us to pray for, we would honestly be privileged to do that if you'll let us know. So, my name's Don Payne, your host, and we look forward to another conversation with you next week. Take care.