

Something Extra EP 004 – Steve Green

Lisa Nichols: Today we are so honored to have Steve Green. President of Hobby Lobby and chairman of the museum of the bible in Washington D.C. with us. Steve has authored 3 books, Faith in America, The Bible in America, and The Stranger's book. Steve Green became president of Hobby Lobby in 2004. He's helped his family grow the business to more than 800 stores in 47 states with over 3,200 employees. He is a national speaker on both business and philanthropy. Always focusing on how his faith intersects with his life endeavors. Steve, it is so awesome to have you with us this morning.

Steve Green: I'm glad to be here. Thanks for having me Lisa.

LISA: I'm glad you're here. You and I got to spend a lil bit time with one another last night. I would love for you to just talk a lil bit about your story. In your story, I would love for the audience to hear about Marie.

STEVE: My story is I grew up in a typical home, parents. Took us to church. Love the Lord. We graduated high school. Went to work in the business. Knew what I wanted to do, Started working there. As I have said, my title over the years has changed. I still just work for Dad. Graduated and went to work for Dad. I still work for Dad. He's still involved. I've been involved at Hobby Lobby in all kinds of aspects throughout the years. And have gone a little bit of a detour over the last few years. That is, with our bible museum project that we saw God take us on that journey. Opened that, November 17 and has been exciting to see the response to the museum there in Washington DC. I've been blessed to be impacted by this book in a variety of ways. One is my family and through our business which we strive to operate according to biblical principles and being in a country that has been built on principles found in this book. None are perfect, my family, our business, or this nation. But have been tremendously blessed by the impact of this book and why we want to inspire people to take a look at it, to consider, to know it, and engage with it. That's the short of my family history.

LISA: I want to talk a lil bit more about the museum of the bible. What led you guys to do that? We were very blessed and honored last year to be invited twice. One for the grand opening and it's just phenomenal. For our listeners out there, it would be an awesome family vacation for you guys. Go and see the sites of Washington DC. Make sure that you put the museum of the bible on your stops. It is really an incredible place. In fact, I remember them saying that it would take you 9, 8 hour days to get through the whole thing.

STEVE: There is plenty to see. One of the common comments is that they didn't have enough time. Be sure to plan as much time as you can.

LISA: Tell us about the origins of Hobby Lobby. Like I said, go back to Marie.

STEVE: Marie is an interesting story. Marie was originally a preacher's kid. Her father was an evangelist. He would go around and evangelize. She would go with him and would sing, play the piano, even speak and that was her life. One time, a gentleman by the name of Walter came to the event out of curiosity. Was going down the street as I understand and saw this event going on. Came in and through the message, felt convicted and came forward and accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior. Also, felt called into the ministry at that time. Marie and Walter wound up connecting, marrying. Marie went from a preacher's kid to a preacher's wife. He did pasture churches, very small, never over 50. They wound up having 6 kids, 3 boys and 3 girls. There is not much to go around. Some of the kids would go to school without shoes. There was times that, I understand, if they're going to have friends over they would put empty Tupperware bowls in the refrigerator so that they wouldn't realize there was nothing in the refrigerator. Marie continued to have a passion for missions and for sharing God's word. She would crochet dollies to raise funds during a fund-raising effort for missions that the church would have. There was times that if she didn't sell her doily she bought her own doily even though she didn't have much. Was giving though they never had much. If some of the church members would bring food from the garden, she would value what that was and pay tithes on that because she wanted to honor God and pay a tithe and all the increase that she had. She just continued to have a love and a passion for God. She had line of a poem that she loved to repeat and she repeated it often. It was "only one life soon will pass, only what's done for Christ will last". In that vision, in that passion passed on to her kids. All of them wound up going into pastoral ministry. Became pastors, or married a minister.

LISA: There was 6 of them, Right?

STEVE: Yes, there was 6 of them. All went into the ministry, all but one of them. That one was my dad. Marie is my grandmother. My dad knew that he wasn't called into the ministry. Story of him at school where he was in a speech class and he was told he had to have a speech in front of the class. He said, I'm not going to get in front of the class. Teacher says, no you're going to have to, you're going to get a 0. He said, that's easy. Give me a 0. He wound up speaking to her after class by himself because he just wasn't wanting to get up in front of people. That was not his calling, he knew it. In high school, started working in retail. Took to it well. Had a good teacher/trainer.

LISA: Had a knack for it right?

STEVE: Yes, just had a knack for it. That passion, that love for God's word, and forgiving my dad got from my grandmother Marie and has been an influence in our family. If you go the lobby of our offices, they'll be a picture of Marie there. We say she's the hero of our family. If you ask Dad today, if he's out giving my grandmother, he would say no that doesn't make sense to a lot of people but when you

understand how that Jesus was in the temple and saw the wealthy give of their wealth, the widow gave her 3 mite. He said an interesting comment, he said, she gave more. God's not interested in big numbers. He's interested in our heart. They had given out her wealth she gave when she had nothing. That's kind of where my grandmother was.

LISA: You talked about that last night. There's a difference in giving out of your abundance. Then giving when you don't have much.

STEVE: Again, God owns it all. Big numbers don't impress him but when we give out of a heart. He knows those that have given more. My grandmother on her dying bed, my aunt was there. My aunt says that when she was about to pass away, my grandmother said to you, see them. She said, no, what are you talking about mother? She said, the angels were coming to get me. I believe that God rolled out the red carpet for my grandmother. She didn't have all her theology right. She had a heart and a passion for God and He recognized it. That is what I think God notices is, does he fully have our heart. That's what he wants.

LISA: I love that. Talk to us a little bit about when your dad started Hobby Lobby. I kind of know the story but some of our listeners may not know. What precipitated that and just talk to us about the beginnings of Hobby Lobby.

STEVE: Dad started his retail career in high school. Decker program distributed education part of the class. You got a job and that counted as your class. Continued in his retail career. General Merchandiser. Wound up at a company called TG&Y based in Oklahoma City which is where we are. Was very successful, one of the youngest managers given a store and again, just had a knack for retail. Did well. It was in 1970 when he started manufacturing some mini frames. Design trend. Saw an opportunity. Borrowed \$600. Bought a chopper, some molding and started manufacturing frames. Me and my brother would glue frames for 7 cents a frame.

LISA: Cheap child labor.

STEVE: Yes, Cheap child labor. But yeah, it got us some bubblegum and baseball card money. That's how we got started. It was 2 years later in 1972 when he opened his first retail in a 300 square foot space. About the size of average living room, maybe. Called it Hobby Lobby. The back, There was a total of 600 square feet. It was where the manufacturing operation was moved to. It was 3 years after that in 1975 that he left his day job for this new startup. My mother was working for free to keep the thing going. Dad had his day job. In 1975, left that to go full time and has been growing it ever since. God has blessed.

LISA: What time did you come on board? I know that you were working when you were young for 7 cents a frame but talk to us a little bit about your background. How did you prepare to go into the business and you are now the president of business.

STEVE: My title as president, that's still involved as CEO but my title as president. During elementary when we were 7 and 9. My brother when he started the manufacturing, we were making 7 cents a frame. When we got into high school, we would work at summers down at the store and work on weekends. We were used to working done. Taking out trash.

LISA: Whatever needed to be done.

STEVE: Yeah, displaying things, whatever needed to be done. I remember in high school, sitting in the auditorium about what do I do. Am I going to go to college? Or go to the business. I knew that was what I wanted to do. I decided to go straight to the business and told dad I was ready to work full time. He gave me job when I graduated 1981 and have been there ever since.

LISA: What was your first job? What job did he give you?

STEVE: First job was travelling to the stores. My title was a liaison. I'm a high school graduate. Didn't make sense for me to be a supervisor over managers that have been longer in retail longer than I've been alive. I was just called a liaison. I would go between the stores and the corporate office. Communicate and had some buying duties. Over the years, have done a variety of things but my first job out of school was travelling, communicating, I was at each store at least once every 2 weeks. Communicating back and forth between the stores and the corporate office.

LISA: I love that because you were on the front line. You were there with the front line people and probably could see and learned a lot about the business.

STEVE: Lot of learning. When we setup new stores, there's always lots of learning there. I was in the middle of a lot of that. We had 8 stores when I graduated and have over 800 today.

LISA: That's incredible. I know that family is really important to you. This is what, 4 generations?

STEVE: We have the 4th generation, Gen 3 is starting to work into the business and are old enough. Gen 4 not young enough at this point but they are 4 generations.

LISA: I think that's so neat. What a legacy. Talk to us little bit about your particular family.

STEVE: I got married couple of years after I graduated high school. My wife was a senior in high school when I proposed to her. Graduated in May, we got married in August. Couple of years later, we had our

first child. Our only son, and then we have 5 girls. So I got a total of 6 kids. The first 4 are all a couple of years apart. I've said that our 4th child was our first last child and then seven years later we decided to have Grace, our second last child. Then 5 years after that, we adopted our last child, Gabriella, she's from China and has been a blessing to our family.

LISA: This story that your kids were the ones that really were encouraging you to adopt. Correct?

STEVE: Yeah, We had already our 2nd last child. We thought we were done and that my wife's birthday at dinner, one of the kids started saying we need to adopt a girl from china. Again, we were done for the 2nd time. God led us into the adoption process. It was very clear that that was His plan for our family. We share about that in our book. This dangerous book where God loves on that journey and has truly been a blessing to our family. She's going in as a 7th grade this year.

LISA: I can't imagine life without her.

STEVE: Exactly, She's a ball of energy. She's a delight to have in our home.

LISA: As I had said, we were so blessed to attend the grand opening of the museum of the bible. Talk to us a lil bit about that. How that started and just tell us that story.

STEVE: It was an interesting story. We were approached by a group that wanted to put a bible museum in Dallas and wanted to know if we would help them acquiring a location. I said, if the right deal came up we would consider it. We looked around, nothing really developed. Then they mentioned an artifact that we could buy a real good deal. I said, we might be willing to buy that for your museum project. We never did acquired that item, but it opened the door for them to start asking around. They were in that world. They knew the collectors, the dealers, the auction houses were. Our first artifact was bought in 2009 and the economy was struggling. They were opportunities that presented themselves. Not having any idea that we would be able to collect as much as we did, as rapidly as we did. The collection grew and at some point, we just felt the sense of responsibility. Maybe, we need to make sure that this dream became a reality because we've been entrusted with an incredible collection. It kind of became our project. I say, God kind of tricked us into because it wasn't ours to begin with. We had the resources to get it launched. We had a collection that they had neither. We kind of took it on and we'll make sure that it happens. That's when we opened it up, when we said, what if God doesn't want it in Dallas. I looked at the top 10 metros, the other 2 that stood out to me was NYC and Washington DC. We looked in all 3 cities for a while. We did a survey and it showed that it would be best to tend it in DC. Which just makes sense.

LISA: With the Smithsonian there, there's so many awesome museums already.

STEVE: Yeah, It's the hub of museums in the country.

LISA: Right! I agree.

STEVE: So that just makes sense. We focus there about 18 months later, the building that we are in went up on the market and we acquired in 2012. Started the renovation in 2014, there were tenants that had to move it. In 2014, started the renovation and opened in Nov 2017.

LISA: Has anything surprised you?

STEVE: What the experience for me along the road is I had been able to rub shoulders with leading scholars in the world. What I continue to be blessed with is the more I know about this book, the more incredible I understand this book to be. The more appreciation I have for this book. I grew up loving this book. Reading it and studying it. Never formally, but going to church. I always have loved but the experience has truly been a thrill to me to say the more I know about this book, the more I love it.

LISA: Your faith has grown through this whole experience. Right?

STEVE: Exactly.

LISA: Everyone's faith in the family has grown. It only made sense because I think you said before you founded the actually building, you had 30000 artifacts. Those don't all fit in the garage.

STEVE: That's right. We also started doing temporary exhibit because we had this sitting in our closet and as I've said, our family, we're not collectors. We were not buying these artifacts because we're collectors. There are collectors and we bought items from collectors that's just kind of in their blood. That wasn't necessarily our family. We bought it because we wanted to tell a story. When we had this collection growing before we ever knew when we would open, or where we would open. We were itching to tell these stories. So we started temporary exhibits. Started in OKC, went to 6 cities around the US. It opened doors for international exhibits. We had exhibited at the Vatican and Jerusalem. We were in Cuba, twice with an exhibit. We just wanted to tell this story to as many people as we can. Our purpose line, is we want to invite all people to engage with this book. That is what we want to do.

LISA: Right, Exactly.

AD: We're going to take a quick break and we'll be right back with more of Steve Green.

LISA: So, I'm thinking about your dad. 5 of the 6 kids went into ministry, your dad didn't. I say, your dad is ministry. He's in marketplace ministry. Your family has been because of some of the organizations that you've supported.

STEVE: Yeah. It has been pointed out before so I try to adjust what I say. I say into pastoral ministry, or church type ministry because yes, dad is clearly in ministry with what he's been able to do. With our giving from Hobby Lobby, which a lot of it boils down to the bible. Translating the bible, making it available on your phone to distributing it around the world with ministries in over over 100 countries around the world that we have worked with. We have been blessed to be a part of spreading God's word to people all over the world.

LISA: Right, Is it Every Home for Christ?

STEVE: Every Home for Christ is one of the 2 ministries that does that a lot. Then One Hope being the other one. We started One Hope first, and then a few years later, Every home for Christ. 2 that we have significantly given to to help spread God's word around the world.

LISA: I can't remember which one but your Dad had a big hairy audacious goal of reaching a billion people or a million people?

STEVE: It was 100 million people in a 5 year plan. The family can't agree to that and had the schedule of what our giving would need to look like for that 5 years, every 6 months increasing the giving to a point where that 5 year period we would help the funding the distribution of 100 billion book of hopes of the ministry that's called One Hope. Dad tells us later that, he kind of came up with that schedule, my brother came up with the same thing. He would say that he kind of would chuckle and would say that we won't be able to do that. That would accelerate our giving huge in I don't know how many fold 5-6 year period from where we're at. We're not going to be able to do that. And yet, we were able to and has continued since then and so there have been today, over a billion one hope's that we had been able to fund the distribution of. In that 5 years, we did the 100, since then it has far exceeded that. It's been just a thrill to see how God has blessed the efforts when we didn't even think we could but God blessed it.

LISA: There's so many different things that we can talk about. When I think about the Greene family, there's a couple of words that come to my mind. It's certainly extreme generosity. I know that you've said, you had some periods of time where you struggled. You weren't even sure if Hobby Lobby was going to make it.

STEVE: Let's say for the first 25 years, the primary focus was just making the business successful. Striving. There were challenges. One of the big challenges was in 1985 because of 85, my father invited the family over in the spring 86 to sit us down. Told us that he didn't know that how we would survive.

He'd always been able to figure out how we'd pay the bills and it was tight at times but got to a point where he didn't know how we would be able to make it because in 85 we actually lost money. The only year in history where we lost money, because the oil boom had busted in the oil patch. All stores in the Oklahoma, Texas area. There were businesses going out right and left and we were struggling and a possible candidate of that as well. Dad talks about this in his book. More than a hobby, where he spend a lot of time crying out to God. Avoiding the phone, because the calls weren't good. Saying, God if you want this business to survive, you're going to have to intercede. And he did, that year our profit in 86 were almost twice the best year that we had ever had. There was really a lesson that dad continues to even teach us to this day, that this is not our business. This is God's business, we are stewards of what he has entrusted with us. At that time, he talks about how a certain amount of pride would creep in because of the success. Look what I can do. He felt like, God said, let's see what you can do without my blessing. Didn't go so well. Again, a great lesson for us to realize is that we just been entrusted with whatever God's given us. And we're stewards of it.

LISA: Tell us Steve about something extra that you've noticed in maybe in one of your team members? Or a family member? What is that something extra that makes them extraordinary in what they do?

STEVE: I think that what comes to my mind is that we are empty of our self. We understand that it is God that makes whatever we are. Our abilities, our skills, whatever success we have. We understand it comes from God. Going back to the lesson that dad learned when God takes his hands off us, our life is a mess. With God's hand, with our efforts to seek his face. That something extra that is something all that we are about is God in his blessing on our life. That doesn't mean success though. It goes back to my grandmother, Marie. I believe God rolled out the red carpet for her. She lived her life faithful. She did what God called her to do which didn't mean that this world took notice of her. She never wrote a book. She never did anything that this world would recognize her for, and yet God rolled out the red carpet because she lived her life. Her heart was fully committed to Him and when our heart is committed to God. God blesses us and her kids all are serving the Lord. A great family that is a blessing.

LISA: That is success.

STEVE: God is the extra in our family and has been a blessing for us.

LISA: He's the something extra. I love that. When you were saying that I was just reminded there's a verse in John that I love, it says "we must decrease so that He may increase" and it's like empty. Everything we have comes from you and we can do nothing apart from you. I just love that. I just think too. I look at your family and I just think you guys have been very faithful stewards to obey and to really seek God's will in things. Right And just obey.

STEVE: I think again, there's times it's easy for us to say that we operated our business according to biblical principles. The first statement of purpose within the business but it's easy to say that. Sometimes, God says are you sure that you mean that? That's where some of the challenges that we face specifically. The supreme work challenge where we were told why the HH is mandated, we had to provide a board of product. I think it was God saying, you say this is my business. You say you're going to operate according to my principles. Let's see if you really mean that. That was a challenge but when the family met together. The decision was pretty much unanimous. We can't be a part of taking life because if this is God's business, we need to do it this way. I don't think he would, we're just stewards of what he has entrusted us to. Unanimously we decided that we had no option but to sue this government that we love and led us on that track that ultimately wound up winning it at the Supreme Court.

LISA: I'm sure some of our listeners out there have been times where things have come up that maybe challenged their values. Challenged what they really believed. I love the fact that your dad called a family meeting. And called everyone together but said very little.

STEVE: Right. He wanted to hear from everybody. It really started with the Gen3, there was about 18 of us at our brother's home. We shared some didn't have a lot to say, some had some questions. There were honest discussions about the ramifications and are there some alternative opportunities or is it just either we have to sue. Is there any other options. Really, when it really boils down to. There was really no option that we had because it had because the government was requiring it. It was one after the end of the day, there was a certain piece in knowing that no matter what happened, we were in good hands. Not guaranteed that we would win.

LISA: You had to go into knowing that you may not and there were some heavy penalties.

STEVE: Exactly, The fine is 1.2 million a day which we knew was not sustainable that was part of the discussion but my brother did the moving in of the spear which talks about 5 missionaries that were martyred in Ecuador jungles. They were down there doing God's call and it cost them their lives. Sometimes, God allows tragedy. We didn't know what God was going to allow to happen. We knew that the fine was sustainable. There was a just peace of knowing we know we're doing what's right. We can't be a part of taking life.

LISA: The world was watching and knows that our faith based businesses are an awesome example during that time.

STEVE: We owe a great deal of gratitude to people all over the country because everywhere we went people said they were praying for us. And we appreciate the prayers.

LISA: That makes a difference.

STEVE: Absolutely.

LISA: So, Just a couple more questions. What is the something extra that you feel like every leader needs?

STEVE: Looking at our business, we kind of started, I remember one of our family meetings and dad wrote up on the board that God owns it all. If you start with that, it's easier said than done, what are the ramifications if God owns it? That means that I don't just decide to do whatever I want to. The family doesn't. This is not ours to do with what we want to, we're stewards of it and so, we actually apply that concept. Not just say it, but apply the ramifications of what that means. That then, it makes the hard decisions easy. We know what we can and can't do because it's not ours, God owns it. To me, it starts with that.

LISA: There's all kinds of spokes of that wheel I would imagine because I'm thinking if God owns it, if this is not our business, then how God would treat our employees. How would he act in this particular situation? It could not only what you guys face, not only what you guys face but i'm thinking every aspect.

STEVE: Right. Treating the employees right. Again, when it gives a lot of answers to a lot of how you do business.

LISA: Absolutely, I want to give you the opportunity. Is there any exciting that just happened or something that you want our listeners to know about? Like a book that just got released?

STEVE: My wife and I just finished a book that came out November, coinciding with the opening of the museum. This Dangerous Book, is what it's called. It tells about our journey of that opening of the museum. It talks a bit about the bible stories as well. How the bible influenced our life. Talks about our adoption story and how God directed us there. We have that book. My wife and my daughter have also come out with a book called Only One Life. Which ties into my grandmother's favorite line. "Only one life, soon will pass. Only what is done for Christ will last." In it, it talks about women of legacy. Talks about leaving a legacy.

LISA: I love that, I'll be downloading that today.

STEVE: Yes, another great opportunity for people.

LISA: Only One Life.

STEVE: Yes, Only One Life

LISA: Alright. Very good. Well Steve, Thank you so much. This has just been a true joy to have you here.

STEVE: My Pleasure.

LISA: It's been fun. Take care.