

## Something Extra EP 052 – Tim Ezell

**Lisa Nichols:** I'm so excited to have Tim Ezell on the show today. Tim is the host pastor, and co-creator of the thread and is a feature reporter on Fox 2 news. Tim, I am so excited to have you here with me today.

**Tim Ezell:** I'm excited to be here. Always good to get together with you.

**Nichols:** We've been friends for several years. I always have so much fun when I'm with you, and just learn things and so I know that our listeners know who you are, but they may not know parts of your story that I kind of want to talk about today. Let's dive on in. So tell us a little bit because you grew up in Fort Worth, Texas.

**Ezell:** I did. I grew up in Fort Worth, Texas. My dad's from Greenville, MS. My mom from Baton Rouge, LA. They met at LSU and my father moved to Fort Worth to attend seminary there, South Western Baptist Theological Seminary, graduated from there, and was a professor there for years, that's where I grew up. Born and raised in Fort Worth Texas.

**Nichols:** So you went to what it was at the stockyards?

**Ezell:** We had stock show holiday you get a day off of school for the stock show. They give you free tickets at school, it was beautiful.

**Nichols:** So talk to us a little bit about how you grew up, and I know that you had what I call a life interruption, but in the eighth grade and I like for you to talk a little bit about that.

**Ezell:** So I grew up a PK, pastor's kid, was raised in, in a very solid family atmosphere we went to church every Sunday we read the Bible and as a family, and then in seventh grade, my parents separated and eventually divorced when I was in eighth grade, and my father was kind of the spiritual anchor in the house, and when he left, that was a big void in my life, and I was at an age where pretty rough age for that, for that to happen. To lose the man of the house and not have my father present. I grown up with the deep faith, but at that point, I was like, "You know what, I'm going to try this on my own terms. I'm like, If God's going to allow this to happen, and

what next, let me try this. This isn't working. Let me try my own terms. And I started drinking at that point the first time I drank I blacked out, and that became a pattern of mine, it was a regular thing for me to black out and that continued through high school and on to college, and around my senior year of college, I finally, just hit a bottom I had a place to where I couldn't imagine living with it with that alcohol and I woke up once again, in a strange place with strange people.

I don't know how I got there, my car was out front, which was a regular thing. The two places I should have been should have been either dead or in prison by the choices I made those years by the grace of God, by the grace God I wasn't, I got up from that morning and I just was at a bottom out place and then my uncle Andy who had always been a real close relationship of mine, I used to visit him in Baton Rouge, when I was in middle school for spring break. I'd go and stay with him and he had moved to LA, and I just moved back to Baton Rouge he was going through a divorce himself, and he moved back to Baton Rouge right when I hit my bottom. And he had two years sobriety and I called him and I said, I don't know what to do, and he took me to a meeting that morning and I... It was November 3rd, 1991, and I've been sober ever since, but I walked into that meeting. Just a broken person, I just was done, I didn't have anything land there wasn't anything great that I did to get myself there, I was just broken and had nowhere else to turn, and God put my uncle right back in my life right when I needed.

**Nichols:** So when you say you went to a meeting, I'm assuming that was AA, Alcoholics Anonymous and do you really believe that they gave you the tools to help turn this around? I've heard that a lot.

**Ezell:** Absolutely. I just felt like admitting his powerless over alcohol was a huge... just in my early 20s a lot of people would be like, "Oh you don't know what you're talking about, you're too young for that. And my friends, I found out who my friends were and who my drinking buddies were... I'll never forget my first weekend sober, I went to an LSU football game and I was a trainer for the basketball team, so I had an athletic pass, I went through the pass gate and then I could sit in the student section for the games. I knew if I went back, where I normally sat it was not going to be a good place for me.

Drinking was what the football games, evolved around when I was... During those days sure and I walked into the stadium and I just froze because I didn't know what to do. If I go where I usually go, it's not going to be good and I don't have a seat to sit anywhere else. And right at that time, one of the assistant basketball coaches walked in and he's like, Tim, what are you doing? And I just said, "I don't know, and he said you not have a place to sit for the game. I said

I don't... And he said come sit with me and another just huge gift. And I sat there, and for the first time in years, I was able to enjoy the game for the game and the event for the event rather than for the party that was around it.

I kind of get a piece of your childhood back. So again, another guy gift of him walking him when he did because I don't know what I would have done, I guess, I would have just walked out and gone home, I don't know, but yeah, so that was... At that age, I fog was beginning to lift and I really felt God's call on my life to come back to Him. This is who you really are, it's like, that's not who you were, right? It's like in the parable of the prodigal son, it's like when he came to himself... It says in Scripture and that's a great compliment we're given because, who we really are, is with the Father. And so that's kind of what I felt in my life. And the fog is beginning to lift. I didn't know ministry was in my future at all at that point. That's what my dad does. And so and I still thought that even after that moment, but God began to work in my life in some amazing ways.

**Nichols:** When did you decide that you wanted to be in television?

**Ezell:** So I'm in college is... Well, first semester in college when I took zoology kind of took me out of the pre-med state of mind. This isn't for me. I went into communications and broadcasting and I worked with the basketball team. I love sports, and I thought sports broadcast, and that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to be a sports broadcaster, I'm going to work on ESPN, it's going to be the goal. And so that's where I was aiming for, and when I got out of college, I didn't have a job, I didn't have a chance to intern in college, because my job was working with the basketball team took on my time, so my first job out of college was I was just working part-time at a station in New Orleans. As a freelancer with their high school football show, so I go out with the photographer.

I logged the place and pick them, and then I choose which ones would go on the air and that was it, and they slowly gave me more and more responsibility there, and I finally got a tape together so after three and a half years, I started sending tapes to whoever take one, and I got my first full-time job in Panama City, Florida as a weekend sports anchor at a station there and I'm like, this is it... And I was making pennies. And the people in Panama City which is a small market, they're like, "Why you leaving NOLA to come here. I'm like, "I don't have a job in NOLA. I'm just a freelancer, I'm just trying to get my foot in the door. But my first year out of college, I made 9000 total for the year and then now I was, I was making more than 10000. Now that is huge... Is so I did that for a year at my year review I did a bunch of goofy stuff, on sports. I know

you find that hard to believe. Not at all. LSU was playing Miami in the College World Series and LSU won in the bottom of the ninth, so I had that highlight pop-up throughout my news cast like Oh, I'm running PGA highlights and then that homerun would popup.

We must have a tape problem back there. It popped up like seven times I got called the office for that. But the news director, I give him all the credit in the world he's the one that came to me and said, "What would you think about coming to The Morning Show, to break up the news and weather? We've never had this position before. You'd have to make it up as you go along. I'm like Great. I said, "But let's try it. And his consultants, the station had consultants to tell them what's good what's not. They told him, bad idea, bad idea. And he's like... No, I think there's would work. And he gave me the opportunity to do it, and that's how I got into doing what I'm doing now.

**Nichols:** So you were kind of the comic relief between the news and the sports in the morning.

**Ezell:** There really weren't positions like that. You see feature reporters now it's more common, but back then it was new. And he, took a chance on it. And we went from number two to number one in the ratings on The Morning Show and I fell in love with it. I'm like, "This is what I want to do. So I started putting a tape together and I said, I'm not putting any news on not put in any weather, and I'm putting the sports, I know this is what I want to do, I'm... And I'm not going to hear about jobs like this, so I'm going to send it to agents, who will... So I got a list of all the agents that I could... And I sent every one of them a tape and I got... Man, I got a stack of rejection letters my... Not what we do, great energy, but not exactly, not a fit. And I had tons of those, and then I finally got one agent that said, "You know what, I want to take a chance on this.

So I'm like, that's all I'm asking for. And they sent a tape to St. Louis to Fox 2 and she called me and she said, sent the tape to St. Louis yeah, what they think. Well, they thought it was different. I'm like Okay, and they said well they want to see more. So I put another tape together, I put even more wacky stuff on there, I'm like... because if I get the job I want them to know this is what I want to do. I don't want to hidden agenda. Send it to him. They go, Well this time, they showed it to the general manager, what he think, and they thought it was different. They want you to come in for an interview. I came in, I interviewed with John who was just moving from channel 5 to channel 2 at the time, and the news director and I got married June 20th and '98 and I started in St. Louis July 20th of '98. So Kim and I started our new life together right here in STL.

**Nichols:** Well, there's so much that's packed in there. I mean, you had to have some courage, because it was different. I mean it had to take cards to kind of put yourself out there. The other thing you said you got a stack of rejection letters but you didn't quit. You just kept going. And there's some really good lessons in there. I think.

**Ezell:** My friends were all moving on in careers long before I was... because it took me three and a half years out of college just to get my first job right, but it was like, "you know what I want to do what I want to do, I want to be in the right spot. It was just such a gift, worst case scenario. I'm still in Panama City doing it, for pennies. But, I'm doing something..

**Nichols:** that you love and they're passionate yet and you're gifted at. I mean, you figured out, that you were gifted at that

**Ezell:** and then that was my thing, and I was the comic relief at home, I was groomed for that job because when things got tense the household when things between my father and my mother or my sister, I would just... hey, here comes the comic relief so I was kind of groomed for that right, you know, It was a huge opportunity, I was given here in STL. Who knew how it was going to go it could have been really rejected here.

**Nichols:** We're kind of the Show-Me state. That's a little oxymoron because certainly it's like, "Well this has never been done this way before, so that's really interesting. What kind of challenges have you faced in your career? I'm sure that there's been some challenges along the way.

**Ezell:** Well, you're kind of constantly inventing now because it's never been done before, you're trying new things. It's trial and error, and you see what works be not going to win over everybody. When I first started at the station, there was this woman who would call every... All right, I'm done watching Tim Ezell I'm done with him, and then she called the next day. You could just stop watching that. Just change the channel. I think one of the lessons I learned through that and through the negative responses you get is that you gotta be careful who you give authority to speak to your life. Like if they have to earn that authority, then just brush your shoulders off, who I give an authority to define who I am.

**Nichols:** I think that is really a valuable lesson because I was just talking to somebody this week about that and I said, "Here's the thing, not everybody's going to like you, they're going to

say mean things, but just you have to consider the source and then you have to move on. So especially for somebody like you, that is so out there in the public. I'm sure that you've had people, you know, say "I don't like how you do this or do that, but you..."

**Ezell:** I still have a guy that emails on a regular basis. How anybody keeps watching it's like, Oh, you know. Yeah, and in this world of social media now, well, we met people who we don't even know define us and we let them get under our skin because they've said some insight, are you giving that person authority to speak in your life? because if you don't give him the authority then they don't, it has no effect. Don't give them rent-free space in your head.

**Nichols:** We're going to take a quick break and then we'll be right back with Tim. I want to talk a little bit about this because I know you've got a huge heart, you've got a heart the size of Texas, but you have a heart for young people. And I know that you have a concern that there is a real tech addiction with our kids, and... And you talk a little bit about that and what you see as the challenge. How can parents navigate that world.

**Ezell:** One of the things I worry about is just our interpersonal communication skills. If we're doing it all on a screen and never face-to-face and people will say things behind the screen that they never say face-to-face. We allow these people that we may not even know very well, define us or speak into us or validate us or invalidate us, which is the bigger problem in so many ways, and we put so much emphasis on that, that I worry about our young people really having positive influences in their life. People that are steady. Yeah, okay, your social media says you have 5000 friends, but how many would be there for you in a pinch? What is a real friendship look like? So yeah, I worry that they can get into that world, into that social media world, and not enjoy the riches of relationship true relationship, because it's so superficial on social media, and that's not the bash social media, there are some great things about it, it's great that people in another state can keep up with their family members and see family pictures and that sort of thing, but when it becomes a substitute and it becomes the main source of interpersonal communication, and relationship I just think it's dangerous and I think it can be real harming.

I don't think we even know the full extent of it. And I think young people want something that's solid and grounded I think they're kind of longing for that because everything's so temporary, everything so and the ability to find out information immediately, it leads to a lack of patience too when that's something that's really necessary, especially when things go bad because we see young people making rash decisions without waiting out the long the long game because this is as good as it gets, it's bad now, it's never going to be better.

**Nichols:** Yeah, well, you have three kids of your own. You and Kim had three children of your own. Oh and so how have you guys... what are some practical things that parents can do to limit screen time or whatever, the case may be?

**Ezell:** Well there's times when we just take them up. We just kind of say... And that means us too, though. Let's all put down our phones and let's relate let's just be family. We went on a float trip in steelville Missouri, and there was no cell service. What a beautiful thing, you know what a gift? Yes, and we're sitting around a campfire, we're talking, we're playing games, that kind of thing, and we do a lot of board games, card games, that kind of thing, in our house, just to try to get off the tech and get away from that. But yeah. Do we do it right all the time? Heck no, I was still struggling, we're still figuring out how to do it right. But I think limiting that time and drawing our kids out when they isolate, in the room on that thing. Let's come on out, let's get around the family and let's get some time together.

**Nichols:** But like what you said, you play board games you play yeah, okay, give them other options, yes. And if you are doing that as a family intentionally then maybe they don't feel like they need that as much. They love it.

**Ezell:** If you can get them to separate from that device and they realize the way there is some other things going on. I'm the first one to go to bed at night because I get up so early so a lot of times about the time I'm going to bed everybody's on there, and we're just talking and visiting, and I love that time.

**Nichols:** You have to get up at what, 3 am daily. So I want to talk about this a little bit. 2013. You were approached by Virginia about an idea.

**Ezell:** So, Virginia was a feature reporter on Channel 4. I was on Channel 2. That's about all we knew of each other. We see each other at the same stories occasionally. And she came to me probably early 2013. Say we meet with me. I gotta talk to you. I'm like, Okay, so I met her and she's like... I got this great idea, I want to do a show. It's going to be called The thread, and it's going to be all about people who are serving others in our community. And what do you think it... You're supposed to be a part of it and I'm like, well, I know I'm...I got a job right now, full-time. I got kids at home. And she's like, "Well just think about it. Well, you can consult on it. I'm like, "Yeah I'll do whatever I can do, then I leave the station, I planted a church.

Well, I plan a church in 2013 before I left the station, and she approached me then, and I'm like, "Well I got two jobs right now, I'm doing the church and this and then in 2014 I left the station, they went full-time with the church, and she's like, "Oh you've freed up from that job I'm like yeah but still in seminary, and in... And she's like... Oh, and she kept at it and finally in 2016, she goes... Alright, I really need you. I really think guys tell me that you're supposed to be a part of this show. There's a pastor is supposed to be involved and I believe you're it. Will you do it and I said "Yeah I said yes because I felt like God's call on it. I see being drawn to that. And I had been in the church for a few years, and it was apparent that that wasn't the place I was supposed to be and I feel like God kind of said... Alright, I know you thought your ministry... was going to be four walls and a steeple but I got other plans, for you and I'm going to get you back on that platform, that I gave you for 16 years in STL and now you're going to speak for me instead.

So I was like Okay and so that's when I stepped into the thread in September of 2016, we launched and we had no clue what we were doing, we knew everything about being on the show, nothing about owning one running one the business side of it, a steep learning curve, but we muddled our way through it. We had a lot of lean times that April of the first season we were about done... We had nowhere else to go, it was Easter and we're like, you know, let's just give the gospel, at the end of the show. This is what this is all about, is really... Well, we're here and we did it and he comes God stepping in, and we get a little bump up and we just started doing that we give the gospel, at the end of every show, that's who we are, it's what our show is about and how John 13:34 as I've loved you, love one another as we've been loved through Christ, we go out and love our community in the same way. That's been a mission of the thread and the mission of the thread is to thread together our community.

We're so divided, that we need to address the problem that we're actually stronger together than we ever are apart. One of the most disturbing things, I learned when I was in seminary in that there's 20000 denominations of the Christian faith worldwide and that's dividing over everything from the color carpet sanctuary to the type of music or doctrinaire but that's a division. And instead of coming together, and what we agree on we're dividing over our minor differences. If we could come together, and link arms and pull together man, what a difference we can make.

**Nichols:** And there are those unifying threads, for STL. STL'ians love STL. They want to see us thriving, we all care about our children. We all care about those that are coming after us. There's a lot that we are unified on and so I really love that about the thread. But the thing is, people may know your thread the actual program that's on Saturdays and Sundays. But Tim, I know

that your vision for the thread is so much bigger than just a television show, right? Can you talk a little bit about that?

**Ezell:** Virginia took lesser role in the show in Season 2. And then I ran with it, all of Season 3, and we're doing 26 episodes a year, new episodes, which is basically six straight months of shows and that's a lot of work. And we had very few people working on it, we got a great team, but I, I... It's a small team, yes, but it's a small team, it's a back as well to... And I went to the board as we ended near the end of this season. And I said, "You know what, I can't do another season like this. I had gone back to the station, which was great, I went back to FOX 2 in October, which allowed me to kind of do my tent-making, that was my job and it took some pressure off the thread, and then I was able to do...they've been very supportive in me continue the thread as well. But I said, "I just can't physically I was sick three times in between Christmas and New Year's, my body was just not.

What I told the board was early in Season 3 and I got a call from a Hospice Organization and they said Look, we have in-home hospice care for individuals who need it, we also offer spiritual guidance if they wanted, and we just got a new client. And he said the only person he wants to talk to about those things is you. Well, you come see him and I said, Absolutely and I got to walk with him, through his last days, and walk his wife through his last days in his funeral and officiated his funeral and made everlasting friends through that. And I told the board, if I got that phone call today, I don't know that I'd be able to do it because I don't have time.

I said, that can't happen. I was brought on this show to pastor and to be that part of the show, and if I don't have time for that because I'm doing another piece, then something is wrong. And so what we've done this season is we're trying to grow the overall ministry, the thread the show was part of it, but also our presence on social media trying to reach people who are behind those screens and try to introduce them to what community looks like, and then our public outreach where we're getting into the community, so we want to be able to eventually have these once a month events. We were able to be in a specific community and thread together that community. So we bring churches, organizations, non-profits together. Then we say, "Hey look, are you concerned about homelessness? Well, don't reinvent the wheel. Rubbers on the road with Catherine and join what she's doing to make it stronger instead of us being territorial. Let's figure out how we can be communal. So that's a big part of it.

So we've got our production costs in half because we're cutting our season from 26 to 13, but we're going to do concentrated runs with her instead of previously, we've gone for two new

episodes and then we have to catch our breath into a re-run and then we do one and we have to do two re-runs to catch our breath. We're doing six straight episodes in a row from mid-October through Thanksgiving plus a Christmas episode, so seven episodes by the end of the year and then another run for March through Easter. And that allows us in those other times to really grow our presence the communities on social media. Yeah, I'm excited about it because I think it's really going to allow us to really grow and we're getting someone to come on board and take over the admin that I was doing, which I'm horrible at that man she can do in five minutes who takes me five hours. And then we're also trying to bring on a producer, editor, so that I'm out of the edit bay, and I'm handing off the show and then I'm done, and then I'm building relationships, I'm getting out in the communities, I'm able to do the things that I need to be doing on the show, to really have the mission to grow and not just the TV show.

**Nichols:** What do you think is the unique leadership lesson that you have learned in front of the camera?

**Ezell:** You know one of the biggest... I learned early on being in a small market, being in Panama, City, and Florida where you have to do everything. So I had to shoot my own stuff, right? Write my own stuff, edit it. You get an appreciation for everybody else's job, and you know that it's not just because they see me on camera. There's a team, behind that. Sometimes you are the team. Absolutely, there's a team that's got that done in an appreciation for everybody else's role. And then the other leadership is, don't take it for granted what an amazing platform were given. Don't take it for granted, don't abuse it. The fact that people welcome you into their home each and every morning was a huge thing for me. And then when I get a phone call and I get someone who would email me or call me and say I've been on chemo therapy for the last six months, and you're the one smile I get a day. Mindblown right?

That's what a privilege that's why you do it, and that's your motivation for those folks who in front of that screen and you're the one opportunity, you got to put a smile on there. I think that's a huge privilege. So taking the position seriously and I see... Yeah, I don't take myself seriously at all. By the grace of God, I am who I am. So, it's not about...

**Nichols:** Well, let's move into something extra. So I know you have a story about where you say something extra was missing in you, and I'd like for you to tell that.

**Ezell:** Yeah, so again, we hit the skids on the thread. And Virginia had taken a back seat role to deal with some things that she needed to deal with, and I just took on the motto. You know when the going gets tough, the tough gets going, and I buckled down and I said, I'm going to do this, on my own strength, and I started taking things and I can do this and I can do it. Yeah, can do it. I just don't work harder about white and uncle "the show into the ground, because I was doing in my own string and we had always said Virginia and I said, "This is God. So, it's not ours, we just get to be a part of it. He's taking us on this ride. And so I when things are about to blow up, because I have white knuckled into the ground God says who's show is this? I said well yours got it's always been yours and he goes... So, you're going to back up from a little bit. So I get in there and do some more and, and in my... Again, yeah, so it done well said. And so I had to back up and know that my strength isn't sufficient, I don't have the strength to do it.

**Nichols:** But Tim, you bring up a great point. Because especially type A people they are get it done. Kind of been like I'm just, I'm a work harder, I'm going to work more hours now. So practically, though, how do you take your hands off because it's like if you're not doing it in your mind, you're thinking not getting done,

**Ezell:** And that's part of the leadership thing is you gotta trust other people, you gotta trust other people that they're in the position they are, because they're doing it and you've gotta take your hands off of and let them do the production company work with the spot media production group and their amazing... And Rick and his brother Lynn run it and Rick was the first photographer I worked with a fox 2 when I first got hired there, and rick would tell you, when I was in the edit bay. I'd be like, can you turn that a little bit? Okay, maybe two more frames there just a little bit there. He's like, get out, you... Yeah, you go out. Let me do my job, cast the vision let people follow it. Yeah, that's what I had to learn. I can't sit there and micromanage it, even though the control freak in me says do that. I've gotta say, that the control freak in me that gets me in worst positions. I got a surrender, let go another. There's more freedom and more strength and surrender than there ever is a white knuckling it.

**Nichols:** That's such a great lesson, a great advice. Well, tell me this, what do you think is this something extra that every leader needs?

**Ezell:** I think servant leadership is the deal. I think you gotta serve those you're leading, you gotta be willing to be in the trenches with them, you gotta be willing to lead by example, if you're not willing to do it. Would should they be willing to do it? I think just knowing that as a leader, your first goal is to serve cast vision and serve. This is where we're headed, this is what we're

aiming. And then link arms with them. Don't be at a distance from them. Where you, it's a, "I'm here they're here, right there, with them. You're walking beside them. Yes, do it together. Exactly. And knowing your weaknesses, it's so important.

I know we needed this admin person because I'm a horrible multi-tasker. Number one, when I'm in production, I just feel like I gotta get this done, I can't step out and do this. And structure for me, is another one. A lot of people look at what I do on TV and they say, Man. he's unstructured yes, within structure. If you tell me, Tim, go be creative in this space, I can do that all day long, but if you say Tim go create the space and then be creative in it. I don't do well with that, right? Give me some parameters and I'm good. Fence me in a little bit.

**Nichols:** Well, I want to give you the opportunity to talk about something that's coming up, and I want you to be able to tell our listeners how they can get involved. So go for it.

**Ezell:** Absolutely. So the thread is about to kick off season four, we started it kicked off the campaign we got this an amazing gift of 40000 that they wanted to pair with that a match challenge. So we're trying to match that 40000, and look, it's not the big donations for the thread, it's the individuals, a ground swell. Well, one of the things the Bible verse that thrives and pushes this ministry is John 13:34-"A new commandment I give to you, I love one another as I have loved you, love one another.

So, we're, we're asking people, Hey, how about if you made a gift of 13-34 a month and you get that on your bank statement number one reminds you love others as I've been loved. But then it also remind you got supported the thread and this is what my mission is, but the next person who crosses your path. 13.34. and so we're working on way towards that, we're hoping to get that and everything that we're trying to do is just so we can grow that mission, so we can thread up our community and that new season kicks off October 19th, and we're excited about it, it's going to be an amazing show. Focusing on event, it just took place here recently and it displays unity organizations coming together, to make an event happen, and I think it's going to be huge.

**Nichols:** So Tim, what I want our listeners understand is your own Fox 2 but what Fox 2 is given you as the platform, the thread has to raise its own funding right to continue.

**Ezell:** We're a 501 non- profit and we are blessed with the platform we've been given. Fox has been so supportive of the show, but we've gotta support it, we've got a growing support for it,

that's what we're seeking to do with this match. And I really believe God's got big things in store to do in and through it.

**Nichols:** I know your vision, this big, and you're already making such an impact. So if we can just continue that. So, if listeners get involved. So, Tim this has been so much fun. So thank you for being here.