

## At 16 years old asking God where to serve

SPEAKER\_01 1:00

Take me back to when you were 14 years old and you committed your life to the Lord.

SPEAKER\_00 1:05

I grew up in a Christian household. I was very involved, I guess, in church, as one often is when you're grown when you grow up in a Christian household. But you reach that point where in some ways it's easy to be a Christian when you're six or seven years old, in some ways. But you get to your teenage years and suddenly there's this thing called peer pressure, and actually you start having to make more serious choices about what it means to follow Jesus. And it was around that time, around I was 14 or so, that I think God really spoke to me and He said, You can't have one foot in both camps. You're either all in or you're not in at all, in terms of following him. And I think I wrestled with that, but God really took me on a journey, and I got to the point where I said, Okay, I'm all in. I'm all in. And of course, that then sets a direction for so much more, including thinking about the future. And so from that point on, you know, I'm really thinking, what does it mean to follow Jesus? And what does it mean for me to follow Jesus? It means different things to different people, you know, as he leads them. What direction does my life take or the journey of my life take now? And I think I, during that period or after in the following couple of years, I ended up, for whatever reasons, reading a number of mission biographies and hearing some missionaries speak, and that kind of stirred things, and I began to say to God, okay, so what are you saying to me in all this? If you want me to go overseas in some kind of ministry, where do you want me to go? What does that mean? But there's a few distinct memories I have on that journey. One of them was at the age of 16 when I was studying for some exams that I had coming up, and you know what it's like when you're studying for exams. Anything else seems more interesting than the chemistry

or the physics or whatever else it is you're studying at the time. And I took this atlas, a world atlas, off the shelf, opened it, flicked through it, and I got to one part of the world, which I didn't know anything about, and looked at it and thought, okay, that's interesting, and then put it away and I guess carried on with my studies. And over the following year, that part of the world, I'd always, for some reason, it would always pique my interest. I'd see something on TV or hear something about it, and and I would take more interest. It kind of came to my mind quite a lot, and I was really wondering, you know what, what is this? You know, again, is this just me? Is it from God? What does it all mean? And a year later, so when I was 17, I went off to a summer camp, which was a whole bunch of different organizations got together. It was like 12 or 13 different organizations got together, had like a week's conference, and then they all went off and did their own outreaches around the country. It was the first time they tried this kind of thing doing it jointly, and I think it was the last time for whatever reason. But um, three things happened at that conference as a 17-year-old. One night, Louis Pellau spoke, and I can't remember too much of what he said, but one thing he said was if there's a people, a place, part of the world that keeps coming back to your mind, take it seriously, because maybe God's speaking to you. And at that moment, I just felt this weight lift off my shoulders, actually. I felt the Holy Spirit just took this burden off my shoulders, and I was like, Oh, okay, that is God speaking to me. The other thing that happened was George Ver was there one evening and he was leading this prayer evening, and he, you know, George Ver, he's got this big inflatable globe, and you know, and he'd turn to one country and get us all praying for 10-15 minutes for this country, and then we'd switch to another country. And I'd never been at a prayer meeting like it. I mean, of course, growing up in church, we prayed for the world, but it was usually either because there'd been, you know, a disaster somewhere in the world, or a conflict, or a famine, or it was people that our church had sent out to parts of the world. And so, of course, we prayed for the world, but just this idea of

just taking a globe, taking a country, praying for peoples, it was a whole new way of praying. And then the third thing that happened, I was there with a Youth for Christ group, and I remember walking through the site. We were camping, walking through the site one day, and I was just happened to be walking next to one of our leaders. And I said to her, I said to her, How does this work? You know, how's it going with all these different organizations getting together? What you know, what do you think? And she said, Oh, it's good. She said, but you can always tell who's with what organization. I said, How do you mean? And she said, Well, and then she named one organization. She said, you know, they're the ones who in in the big auditorium in the evenings, they're all sitting together down the front, and they're the most, you know, expressive in the in the times of worship. And then she named another organization, and this was the 1990s, you know, when and she said, and they're oh, you can tell the guys with that organization because they all have these perms at the back of their hair and a single earring, you know. And then she said, Oh, and you can always tell who the OMMs are. I said, Why? And she said, Oh, because they're the ones who serve everybody else. Well, I was like, Well, what a testimony. I mean, like, I don't know who those OMMs were, right? But what a testimony. You know, the greatest amongst you will not be the most successful or the most fruitful or the most strategic or the most exciting or the most articulate. The greatest amongst you will be the servants of all. So those three things, Louis Palau, George Vrower, this conversation with this Youth for Christ leader really put me on this pathway. Or it took me further down this pathway of ending up overseas and serving with OM.

SPEAKER\_01 6:03

I wish we could just talk about this for the rest of the time. I would love to just go step by step and hear the details. I know we don't have time for that. That was 1991

## Resting in God, and working hard are not opposites

SPEAKER\_01 6:12

1991, yes.

## First OM Year And Identity

SPEAKER\_01 6:17

And when did you first arrive overseas on the field?

SPEAKER\_00 6:20

I so I was 17 then, and then I did another year of school. And then between school, high school or secondary school and university, I did a year with OM. That's when I first joined OM and served with OM for that one year.

SPEAKER\_01 6:32

In that one year, did you think I want to do this for the rest of my life? This is a calling I have.

SPEAKER\_00 6:36

I went into it thinking that this is what God was calling me to. And I deliberately chose to do a year with OM before going off to university just to kind of understand what is this pathway that I seem to be on, you know, what's it what's it like in real life? Yeah, and of course it turns out to be very different from how you might expect. And in some ways, it was a it was a great year, but it was a tough year. I I think God strips stuff away from you, you know, when you've got to learn a new language and it's difficult and you're struggling with it, when you're adapting to an international team, to a local culture, all these things, and you feel actually pretty useless. For most of that year, I felt pretty useless. Well, I was pretty useless for most of that year. But God uses that. And his message to me and his work in my life at that time was actually listen, I'm not actually so much interested in what you do

for me. I'm more interested in my relationship with you. So work on that, prioritize that, and the rest will take care of itself. That he's more concerned that I become increasingly conformed to the image of his son. And that's much, much more important than what I achieve, even if I'm trying to achieve it for God. And so that's uh, I mean, it's a lifelong lesson, right? But it was a real learning during that year, and it's one that still have to go back and keep learning. And of course, in that year, I just began to understand much more what would it mean long-term in this kind of cross-cultural setting. And of course, that sustained me through university. It was really helpful, you know. You go back to your home country, you go to university, and it's kind of okay. This is where I'm heading, this is what it might look like, this is how I can prepare for it. This is people I'm now connected with in that wider missions community, global missions community, and it was great.

SPEAKER\_01 8:22

This is the struggle almost every cross-cultural worker has is trying to prove to himself or prove to God or to his supporters or whatever that he's worth the investment, that he's doing something meaningful and big and good for the kingdom of God. But it's true, like we can put all the energy into you know saving the nations or whatever that we that we can. But in the end, what God wants is for us to be close to the heart of the Father.

SPEAKER\_00 8:49

Yeah, and and those two are not exclusive in any way, and we have to be careful that we don't do those as a trade-off, right? I mean, because the heart of the father is for the nations, that he doesn't want anyone to perish, but for all to come to him. And he wants us to be part of that. That's clear, you know? That's the role of the church is to be, is to live that out. So it's not an either-or, but it is an ordering, it is an understanding of first principles, an understanding of priorities, an understanding of how it all goes together, that one flows from the other. And I think we have

to be sometimes careful that we don't get into this thing of, well, it's just God's work, I can't do anything. Well, naturally, he does call us to work hard, he does call us to learn, he does call us to change, to adapt. But at the heart of it all, at the at the fundamental heart of it all, he is working in our lives that we might reflect his glory more in in being conformed to the image of his son. And everything else flows from that.

## Feeling weak and useless is the path to trusting God

SPEAKER\_01 9:44

Do you ever struggle with that?

SPEAKER\_00 9:45

No, I don't think so. And I think it's God's grace. I am really grateful that God has taken me overseas, that he's put me in a different culture, that I'm always feeling a little bit unable, a bit useless, always feeling a bit weak. I look back and I think if I had stayed in my home country, I would have got involved in so much stuff. I would have been so effective and I would have been so proud with it. So actually, I I genuinely think it's really God's grace that He took me from where I was and dumped me somewhere else. And it's just his kindness to me, actually. I really feel that. So, and because of that, of course, I long to see more people coming to know Christ. I I absolutely do, it's a passion, but I don't feel the pressure in that sense. I can trust that God is at work and he's doing what he's doing.

SPEAKER\_01 10:37

What would you say to the cross-cultural worker who does struggle with that?

SPEAKER\_00 10:40

Yeah, of course, different pressures can come from different places. So sometimes we put pressure on ourselves, right? To achieve, to see success. And of course, and some, you know, we we genuinely do, we want to see the fruit of the gospel. Of course we do, right? Because the gospel is a beautiful thing.

unknown 10:56

Yeah.

SPEAKER\_00 10:56

And it's the heart of God. If we're putting the pressure on ourselves, I think we've probably misunderstood about how this works. You know, 1 Corinthians 3 talks about, and God gives the growth. And sometimes that growth comes right here, right now. Sometimes it comes at a later date, sometimes it comes somewhere else, not where we are. And we rejoice in the growth wherever it's happening. And whether we're involved or not involved, we give thanks and we rejoice in that growth. So if the pressure's coming from ourselves, then that's quite a dangerous place to be in, I think. Sometimes, of course, you get pressure from others. You might get pressure from people who are supporting you, people who are funding projects, all this kind of thing. And that's a, you know, they sometimes it's unrealistic or sometimes it's realistic. They also want to be stewards of what they're giving, especially when it comes to finances, you know. So it's an understandable question as well. That's a different pressure to navigate, and we have to try and navigate that as best as we can. And I think I've always been very blessed that those who personally pray for me, those personally support me, I'm not feeling pressure from results from them. Or not results in terms of numbers and all this kind of thing. So, in that in that in that case, I, you know, I'm hugely grateful for that. But I think if if we're putting the pressure on ourselves, oh, we've maybe misunderstood how the gospel works a little bit.

SPEAKER\_01 12:14

And what would you recommend for that person who's putting the pressure on themselves to do? What do you think it looks like to get out from under that pressure and to experience the joy of the gospel?

SPEAKER\_00 12:24

I think preach the gospel to yourself daily, the gospel of grace, preach it to yourself daily. That you are not where you are because of your achievements. You will not stay where you are because of your achievements. You are not loved more or less by God because of what you produce or don't produce. Preach the gospel of grace daily to yourself and live in it. If we don't, then we risk our pride when we do see results, so to speak. Our pride just increases. Or we risk our despair increases when we struggle. And actually, the gospel cuts both of those down. That's the first thing. And secondly, uh, like I said, you know, God gives the growth. That's not an excuse for not trying, it's not an excuse for not working hard, it's not an excuse for not learning and changing, but God gives the growth. He sends the rain, he sends the sun, and we work in his harvest fields.

SPEAKER\_01 13:12

And that takes the pressure off the sovereignty of God over these things, takes the pressure off of my works or enables me to work with all of my might and then sleep like a baby at night. Absolutely. Absolutely. That the sovereignty of God actually propels us, it doesn't hold us back. I think another thing, and you alluded to this, is that God uses means. God almost always uses means when he wants to do something. So he brings George Verver and you know Lewis Palau into your life when he wants to send you out to the mission field. And God uses means, God uses missionaries to bring the gospel to people who've never heard it before. So that also gives us that motivation to work hard as we rest in God's hand over these things.

## How missions has changed since the 1990s

SPEAKER\_01 14:00

When you think about you know going to the mission field in the early 90s, I know a lot of things have changed in missions. They've changed since I've been on the field. And when you think about what it was like back then, and then kind of what it's like now, what are what are the changes? What were the emphasis? What was OM up to back in the early 90s when you came out? You know, now we're talking about VCJFs and DMMs and DBS, but all of that, that language didn't exist, you know? You know, what was the vision back in the early 90s?

SPEAKER\_00 14:31

Back at that time, I mean, of course, I was, you know, I didn't have the bigger picture of OM so much in those days, but you know, just the team and the country I was in. But from that and from the other interactions I had, I would have said that OM was a community of people who were passionate about Jesus and passionate about making him known. And that was the heart of it. How that worked out. And OM was very varied across the world in those days. We didn't have some kind of common mission or purpose statement. Every country, every field kind of had its own things that it was focusing on. And so really it was a kind of, you know, whatever God has called you to, we'll find somewhere that fits in OM kind of approach. You know, which is perfectly valid. It's different from how we do it today, but I mean that's how it was then. Things like church planning were fairly new on the scene in OM, beginning to take a bigger emphasis, as it was in other comparable mission organizations as well. I mean, you know, OM doesn't stand in isolation. Uh it's part of a broader mission community, mission movement. So those changes affect us all. So church planning was certainly beginning to take more of a place. And OM, of course, still at that time was it was a lot of short-term work, a lot of young people, as well as longer-term workers, pioneering spirit, being thrown in at the deep end,

prepared to take risks, and just some amazing people as well that you get to meet.

SPEAKER\_01 15:55

I think the emphasis on evangelism, as opposed to church planting, as well, you know, uh earlier where it was like we just want to, you know, with literature, literature and tracks was a big thing, and just getting it out to everyone. And this idea of like everyone in the world having at least one opportunity to hear the gospel before they die, work some motivating passions as well. It is interesting to see how those change and develop and become more mature, where now we want to see people not just evangelized, but also disciplined as well, right?

SPEAKER\_00 16:30

Yeah, absolutely. I talked to some old-time OMMs, and they're like back in, I don't know, the 1970s or whatever, they're like, we're just getting the gospel into people's hands, sharing Christ, people coming to faith. But we didn't think about what happened after that, right? I mean, seriously, it seems incredible to us today, but they're like, yeah, but then we didn't think about, well, this person needs to be disciplined or followed up or something like that. It was all about evangelism, evangelism, evangelism, which is a beautiful thing as mass evangelism is a beautiful thing, right? And I think we've learned over the years that, okay, but you need to build some mechanisms for follow-up, for discipleship, for community and all these things as well. And I hope we don't lose that desire to get the gospel out as widely as possible, to give people the opportunity to encounter Jesus and at the same time have clear ways in which they can be followed up, disciple, part of a community, and so on.

SPEAKER\_01 17:22

You know, I just think of George Verver. Like, of course, the DNA of OM is going to be just get the gospel out. Who cares about the next step when George Verver is at the helm? You know, he's got

that entrepreneurial spirit. Let's just make it happen. People are dying, let's just get out there. But as the organization, in a sense, matures past George, if I can say that reverently, we move into okay, what comes next? On that same subject, I want to ask you about like the DNA of OM. When you think about the DNA of OM, some things have changed over the years, and some things at the very core of who we are haven't changed. Do you have any thoughts on that? Like, in what areas do you think the DNA of OM has developed and matured? In what sense, in what ways do you think it's stayed the same?

SPEAKER\_00 18:10

Yeah, I think in a lot of ways it's it hasn't changed tremendously, but it's developed. So I think this basic, you know, I talked about OM in the 1990s as a community of people who are passionate about Jesus and about making Jesus known. To me, that's still very much the very heart of what OM is about. We're increasingly diverse. I mean, we there's always been a cultural diversity to OM. We're now 125 different nationalities. We have more longer termers than short-term. And we still do a lot of kind of, you know, one-year, six months short-term stuff. But we also have many, many more people. I think maybe the majority now are, you know, five years or more. So that's a that's a shift. We probably have, well, I'm pretty sure we have greater intentionality on investing in our people than maybe sometimes we didn't necessarily have beforehand, although it was probably mixed. We've got a common mission to see vibrant communities of Jesus followers amongst the least reached, rather than 70 or 80 different purpose statements around the organization. So in that sense, are we, of course, one of my questions will be are we are we more cautious now? Are we less prepared to take risks? And is that a good thing or a bad thing? We probably are a bit more cautious. It's it's the way the world is, but maybe the way we are. Not everywhere. I mean, I mean, some, you know, it's not true everywhere in OM, but maybe there is a bit of a trend towards less risk taking, perhaps. We don't need to be foolish in these

things, but let's not at the same time not be prepared to take risks where it's appropriate.

SPEAKER\_01 19:40

One thing that has stood out to me from the beginning of my days, back on the ship, and then through my time in the Middle East is uh the humility of our leaders. I think, or just OMers in general. I think, you know, you mentioned this in the beginning when you talk about being a 17-year-old kid and uh it was the OMers who were serving at this conference. And I think that this is a real mark of OM leaders. Of course, we have some knuckleheads, but I think in general, God has blessed us with humility. I think it's a real part of the DNA. You know, you can be in a group of people, and there's somebody who's there for six months, and then you know, somebody who's running whole areas of the globe, and you would never be able to tell the difference between the two. There's a lot of humility, and I think I really appreciate that and love that about OM.

SPEAKER\_00 20:30

Yeah, I really appreciate the people in OM. It's what keeps me in OM, but I think also as I engage more and more with other organizations, there's some beautiful organizations and beautiful people and very humble people in other organizations. I think we're not special actually in that respect. I mean, we appreciate an organization, but I don't think we're special.

SPEAKER\_01 20:51

One of the things, you know, I've done over a hundred interviews now on the podcast. And one of the things that amazes me is just doing this podcast as you get rid of the Elijah syndrome of like, I'm the only one out here, I'm the only one who cares. I'm like, man, there's a lot of people who really love the Lord doing a lot of amazing stuff. So yeah, maybe, maybe, maybe we're not. Maybe I'm not as special as I think I am.

SPEAKER\_00 21:17

Yeah, maybe humility is not our our the point we should be most proud of, right?

SPEAKER\_01 21:21

I'm not a I'm not a leader. I said in the in our leadership. I have no leadership responsibilities. Speaking of leadership,

## What Makes A Trustworthy Leader

SPEAKER\_01 21:28

you know, when I think about you, I think of you obviously have some real leadership abilities and skills, whether God-given or naturally developed, you know, you went from serving over a few teams, then a field, then an area, just ever increasing in the leadership that you have within the organization. I'm just wondering like what have you learned about leadership? What are the characteristics that you think for me as a leader this is really important? Or for the leadership people I want around me, I want these characteristics are really important. What have you learned about? Being a good leader, especially in our context, this super diverse organization.

SPEAKER\_00 22:05

I'll talk a little bit about myself and what drives me in leadership, and then just more general about leaders. It's difficult to kind of assess yourself in leadership. But I think I I've always been a bit of a reluctant leader. I didn't join OM, I didn't go overseas to be a leader, but I've been asked to take on leadership at different times. And when I've, you know, and when I have, I've embraced it and been willing to do it, but it comes at a cost. For me, the cost is you're involved less locally in what kind of was the passion that got you here in the first place. You withdraw from that to some degree because you have these other leadership responsibilities. In my most recent leadership role that I've taken

on, just you know, some months ago, I was one week in, and then I met with my leadership team for a number of days in person. And we had to, you know, it was great, but we had to deal with some quite heavy, heavy stuff as well. And I came out of those meetings feeling the burden and the heaviness and the weight of that. And then I flew home. I got home in the early hours of one morning, and then that afternoon I went along where we had a field prayer meeting. And I walked in, and I was a bit late. I walked in. Just at that point, everyone was singing, and they were singing this song of worthy is your name, Jesus. God really touched me right there and then. And I was like, Oh, okay, this is why I do this leadership thing. This is why it's okay to have the heaviness and the burden and everything else. Because firstly, Jesus is worthy, right? And secondly, I looked around that room and I thought, if what I do in my leadership possession helps in some small way the people in this room, and some people have been, you know, in that room have been serving with us for 15, 20 years, and some people for just two weeks. If what I do in my leadership helps them in some way thrive and flourish and be more effective, then I'm happy to do it. So those two things really kind of, I think, what are the motivating factors for me. Understanding that God's put me in this place at this time, and these things kind of keep me going. The people and knowing that Jesus is worthy. In general, about leadership, over the years I have learnt that character really does trump everything else. Now, we've always said that, right? I think we always say that. Oh, yeah. But we almost say it to the point of it's just a given, but we don't focus on it sometimes. When we say it's about character, we have to really mean it. So if I'm appointing somebody as part of that process, I dig a lot more into character issues than perhaps I did before. I mean, I always ask about it, but now I really dig into character questions. I think in Christian organizations, sometimes we we're all for extending grace, right? Which is good. We should do, right? Because there's always room for repentance, for forgiveness, for learning, for growth. But sometimes we extend to the point where we don't expect people

to recognize their faults or to apologize or to repent. We just say, oh, that's just extend grace, that's the way they are. Or we put it down to like a quirky personality. Or sometimes we're just a bit unsure if it's in a cross-cultural context. We're like, is this a cultural thing? Is it not a cultural thing? Sometimes we have people in leadership because, like in a in a in a largely volunteer organization, well, who else will do it if they don't do it? But usually what I've learned over the years is when something really does blow up and it comes down to a lot of it comes down to character, like you reflect and you're like, oh yeah, we should have seen that years ago. But we kept saying, Oh, it's okay, we'll we're we'll we're given another chance without really addressing the question. So I think character does trump everything, and we're all on a journey, you know, we're all imperfect, we're all weak, we all are growing, we all need correction, but these fundamental character traits actually in leadership, and I don't say that just because you have to say it, I say it because I really believe it and I've seen that. Another character another aspect of leadership, it's connected as well that leaders, we need to be continuing in our walk with Jesus. I mean, of course, if you're pointing somebody to leadership, you this needs to be some track record or proof of some basic competencies, including vision, communication skills, ability to build a team, strategic thinking, you know, self-awareness, people development. But a key question is is that person have they dried up? Are they drying up or are they still walking with Jesus? And so and I think sometimes we talk about what God has done, what we've seen him do, what he's done in other people's lives, but how often do we say, oh yeah, but this is what God has been doing in my life in this last six months, or this last year, or these last two years, or since I came here? And so often we talk about what he's doing elsewhere, what we've seen him doing, but how often do we talk about oh yeah, and then God gripped my heart, and then God did this, and then God led me in this way, or he spoke to me in this way, ministered me in this way. So an ongoing walk with Jesus, which sometimes can get sidelined with all the other

amazing stuff we see. And then I think when I think about, I mean, I'm thinking about from an OM context largely, of course, and I'm thinking about more senior leadership in OM, as well as those kind of basic leadership competencies. I, you know, I think leaders need a deep alignment with our mission and our vision, an understanding of that and living it out themselves in whatever context they're in, and the ability to lead others in alignment to that and lead change towards that will be one aspect. So this whole alignment with mission and vision, another one would be we need leaders who can develop other leaders, they can support those that they're leading and raise up more leaders. If somebody has been in leadership for a long time and there's no obvious option for somebody to succeed them, you've got to ask why. I mean, circumstances can cause that, but like why have they not been raising somebody up who could take things further than themselves? Ability to work across boundaries within an organization, outside an organization, um, not building our own little mini organization. So the vision, the destination is clear, there's clarity around that, but ownership is more shared, and the roots and pathways to seeing things happen can be shared across organizations, across peoples, across teams. I think being able to live in that cross-boundary space becomes increasingly important in today's world. And then I think we're always in a cross-cultural context in OM. I hope we can increasingly appoint leaders, senior leaders who have a track record of leading people in cultures other than their own and being led by people in cultures other than their own. Both those things. If we're going to actually operate in a multicultural, diversely cultural community and organization, I think that becomes more and more a requirement for leadership. And I love being part of this international, like I said, 125 different nationalities. I love being part of it. I love a local team being so multicultural. It kind of knocks the edges off yourself, your own cultural edges. It kind of challenges yourself. What's cultural, what's biblical, what's important, what's not important. And we learn so much from each other. I would say

that's those are the key things I would be thinking about. And yeah.

SPEAKER\_01 29:16

Amen. I love it. I remember when I was, you know, in my early 20s, I was just getting started. I didn't know my right hand for my left hand and the culture and the language and anything. And there was this old guy, this old O Emmer, who would come up from the neighboring neighboring country and then do ministry in the country where I was living in. And he would stay with us while he would do that. So he'd stay with us for a few days, visit all these uh local leaders and whatever, then go back down. I remember he would sit there in our living room at night and he would just share with me and the two other guys who lived with me what God was teaching him at this time in his life. And I just remember thinking, like, what? You're like one of the most mature Christians I've ever met in my life. And God is still like teaching you stuff. Like I was blown away by that. So yeah, that's man, I love that. Is God still working in your life? Are you still freshly following Jesus? I love that. And also this idea of not being afraid to develop people around you, not being threatened by somebody under you, becoming a better leader than you. You know, seeing that as this is a positive thing for the organization. This is what we want, actually. We want people to be developed. I've known you for a long time. One of the things I think that marks you is your as you have a kind of optimism. I have a kind of cynicism. Like I kind of like lean.

## How to avoid cynicism

SPEAKER\_01 30:34

My natural bent is a bit towards complaining and cynicism. And interestingly enough, I think cynics and complainers are interesting people, right? They're interesting people to listen to, but they but nobody wants to follow a cynic or a complainer. We

want to follow people who are filled with hope and vision. And that's something that uh I've always noticed about you is that you're not a cynical uh person. I was with you the other day and somebody asked you what have been the biggest challenges that you've experienced over the years. And do you remember what you said?

SPEAKER\_00 31:05

Yeah, I think I said something along the lines of you know, one of the biggest challenges has been we haven't seen more fruit. And how do you keep going when you don't see fruit?

SPEAKER\_01 31:13

Yeah, and I I was struck by that, by that answer because you aren't a cynical person. So there's these two things going on. One is that maybe you haven't seen the fruit you want to see, but you've also maintained a sense of optimism and hope. How do you keep yourself from becoming cynical?

SPEAKER\_00 31:34

That's a fair question. I I guess in general, I'm not that cynical, and actually, I I don't think we should be cynical either. I'm not sure that's a biblical trait.

SPEAKER\_01 31:44

It's not a fruit of the spirit, is it?

SPEAKER\_00 31:46

Asking asking asking questions is fine, you know, and and things like that. But cynicism is different, right? Because it it assumes certain things. Yeah. We need to take God and what he calls us to do very seriously. We need to take people seriously. We need to take the work and the ministry seriously. We should not take ourselves too seriously. That doesn't mean we're casual about our responsibilities. It means it doesn't mean say we don't care about our responsibilities and we don't care about the fruit we

are or are not seeing, but it's a deep understanding of this is not about me and it's not dependent all on me as well. And I think to me that's a key aspect of this. Uh going back to 1 Corinthians 3, God gives the growth, right? We have responsibilities, God gives the growth. And my identity is not tied up with the fruit I do or don't see. And maybe maybe it's God's grace to me that I don't haven't seen much personal fruit uh in the areas where I'm working, because then uh maybe I would think it's somehow connected with me and my achievements. But I'm really grateful other people are seeing the fruit. I mean, I I I want to see I want the fruit to be there, right? Because it's it's about people, it's about God's glory. And maybe it's his grace that I don't haven't seen so much myself. You never know how God is working, of course, in people's lives and and where that comes out in other places, but uh maybe that's part of his grace in my life. I don't know. But I think it's not about us, it's not dependent upon us. So we take the ministry seriously, we take the work seriously, we take the gospel, the work of the gospel seriously, we take other people seriously, but it's not about us. We don't have to take ourselves so seriously. We can we can rejoice when others see more fruit, we can rejoice when others are smarter than us, we can be comfortable when other people are shining, and we can rejoice in that. It's not about how I come out of this, it's about how the broader work of the gospel comes out of this. That's how I can embrace where I am in this.

SPEAKER\_01 33:39

I don't want to sound like a sycophant, because obviously I know you have flaws, uh, but I do think I do think this is that's a whole nother podcast, extended version when we get to the flaws. You have to pay for that one. That's the subscriber-only section of the podcast. But I do think it's a sign of integrity that on the one hand, you know, you talk about uh, you know, we started off talking about it's God who gives a growth. Uh, it's not about us. We work hard, but we rest in what God is doing, not in what we've done for God. And then the fruit of that is living a life of

hope, regardless of what's going on around you. So I see this line, this line of integrity through what you believe on one side, and then how it actually shapes you on the other side. So I think it's really cool.

SPEAKER\_00 34:25

Yeah, and I think it's just this understanding that we you sometimes you need to stand back and take a 2,000-year view of history. Yeah. And say God is at work in his world and he's raised up his church and his for his purposes and he's doing it. And if in some tiny, tiny, tiny way, at some tiny segment in that history, he uses me in some tiny way, wow, what a privilege. What a privilege.

SPEAKER\_01 34:52

Amen to that.

## The History of Missions and Innovations Cycles

SPEAKER\_01 34:53

And you know, I think one of the things that's really easy for us to do is to forget that we are standing on the shoulders of the people who've come before us. Sometimes we feel like we are pioneers, but actually we're not pioneers at all. You know, we're standing on the shoulders of hundreds of years of Protestant missions. You've been thinking about this a little bit, just about the development of Protestant missions over the last few hundred years. Where we've come from, where we're going, what does it mean? Where do you think is a good place for us to start when we're thinking about how God is moving and changing and some of the innovations that we've seen in missions over the years?

SPEAKER\_00 35:34

Yeah, I think when you get involved in missions in different ways, you know, when you start out, you often think the way things are and the way you're doing things is just like that's the normal way, and it's always been like that. I got involved in the 90s and this idea of contextualization. I mean, there were debates around it, but this idea of we need to contextualize, this idea of church planting, you know, they were just taken as where I was, they were taken for granted. Or that you would join an organization. The fact that you joined that we even had missionary organizations, right? You just take, well, that's that's just the way it is, and you don't realize that all these things stem from somewhere, right? So you take uh what's often called the modern mission movement from the time of William Carey. We have to be careful with that because it's the modern Western mission movement. I mean, there were other modern mission movements happening elsewhere, right? Around the world. And there were things prior to Carey as well, out of the West. This idea, I mean, he kind of set up the first missionary society. And it was to do with a challenge, it was a theological challenge. You know, his church back in England was saying something along the lines of we don't need to get involved, God will save those heathen, as they called them, uh, if he wants to do it. He can do it by himself without your help. And then a logistical challenge of how does somebody or people go from somewhere like England to another part of the world? And because a local church doesn't have the capacity or the to facilitate that. And so even the concept of a missionary organization is an innovation in response to a challenge that was there. And then, of course, you know, beyond that, over the over the decades, you had things like what was then called the three-self movement to do with, you know, self-propagating, self-leading, self-sustaining, which was a reaction to this earlier mission movement that was post-CARY, when all these different missionary societies were set up, you know, in the decades following CARY, but largely along kind of colonial pathways and in colonial contexts, which created a lot of dependency on the outsiders. So you had this kind of movement,

a response to that. And then you had great fragmentation because of all these different missionary societies often working in the same place, not necessarily working together. You had things like Edinburgh 1910 conference, where they try to bring some of that together to be a bit more cohesive, a bit more coordinated. So all these things are a response to what's gone before, and those things that are gone before are a response to what happened before then. When I joined or got involved in missions, people were talking about people groups the whole time. You know, it's people group thinking. And then you look back and you realize that really came out of Luzanne 74 and Ralph Winter. And that was a response to this idea of we're trying to reach all the nations and this realization that actually in a nation you can have a strong church amongst one people group, but another people group can be completely ignored by the gospel, and there's been no response or no engagement, and therefore this people group thinking really came to the fore, and it's a reaction to what went before. Then you had church planning, you know, rising, and then you had church planning movements, CPM. And then we really get into the acronyms, right? Um This is where it starts. And so church planting really picked up in some parts of the world as uh amongst people groups, maybe in the 80s, maybe in the 90s and beyond, and then you had church planning movements. How do we see, you know, the growth of the least reached is increasing every day. So we need rapid church planting. And church planning movements led to then DMM disciple making movements and so on. And these are all kind of responses to what's gone before. And it and it's just the way that the missions world works and has done for 2,000 years in many ways. Always innovating, always responding to what's gone before, pragmatically responding, but not separate from scripture. You know, always going back to the scriptures and trying to understand how things worked in scripture, how does that apply today? So dealing very pragmatically with challenges and bringing scriptural reflection into that. And on some of these things, there's perhaps more

scriptural reflection than on others. But it's it's just the nature of missions that there is no normal that's been there for all this time, or very few things that are normal, but always innovating, always adjusting to, and any innovation can set up a future constraint or a bottleneck which needs a future innovation. And often, and maybe this is a bit of a Western worldview cultural thing of like, okay, now we have the silver bullet that is gonna solve everything. If we just do this, we fix everything. But that's never the case because it will throw up its own constraints that need something that's something more.

SPEAKER\_01 40:08

I was talking to this guy who's who's over like a 10-year period has seen thousands of people come to faith and all these house churches and this DMM movement and generation after generation, and everything's starting to mature. And then he said, now we're starting to see our need for trained pastors, you know. So it's like it comes back around one constraint leads to innovation, which then leads to further complications, which then need uh more.

SPEAKER\_00 40:37

Yeah, more innovation or more changes or or whatever. And I think, and that's true, and that doesn't mean that the innovation was a bad thing. Just because any new way of doing things, any innovation throws up further challenges, it doesn't mean to say it's a bad thing. It just means you it's natural that further adjustments come along. And I think also with some things, uh it's going back to a bit of a uh for those of us from the West, we sometimes don't contextualize things the way we need to. So what happens is you see some amazing work of God somewhere in the world, and then, or in a few places, and it's a very Western thing to go and study it, observe it, analyze it, abstract it, write it in a book, put a training program together and export it elsewhere in the world. And I don't mean that in a yeah, I probably phrase that a bit more cynically than I should have

done. But what then has to happen is that then has to be recontextualized for new contexts. You just cannot do a copy paste. This worked here, therefore it will work somewhere else, right? I mean, you look we need to learn. Absolutely, we need to learn, but we always have to do the hard work of how does this play out with scripture and in the context in which I'm in.

SPEAKER\_01 41:49

When you think

Understanding where we came from helps us address the the challenges we face now

SPEAKER\_01 41:50

about the passion that the church has, our vision is nothing less than world evangelization, that every man, woman, and child would bow their knee to Jesus, which obviously has a lot of constraints in bottlenecks, which leads to innovations, which leads to more constraints and more and challenges we didn't anticipate. What do you think is the importance uh for us? Why is this topic on your mind?

SPEAKER\_00 42:15

I I've been reflecting on it in recent months. I mean, partly just part of my own journey and what what was assumed to be normal and why were those things assumed to be normal in missions, and what today do we take as normal? Why do we do things in the way that we do things? So reflecting on that, but also looking ahead. I think we are getting to the point where you know there'll be a new convergence of innovations and innovation possibilities. Of course, digital technologies, artificial intelligence will be massive. We have unprecedented patterns of migration, urbanization. How will we respond to that? What innovations is the church taking on in response to that? Growing

instability in the world through conflict, political fragmentation, what will that expose about the current way we do things? What pressures will that put on how we do things? How will we respond and innovate in the light of that? And within missions, a continuing shift towards a post-Western global church and polycentric leadership. So all these things are gonna cause us to continue to innovate as we respond to how these things interact with our current way of doing things. And I think we need to embrace that change. We need to embrace the possibilities, we need to understand where we came from, why we're at where we're at, in order to innovate the new the next stage well. And we need to always be engaging with scripture as we do so and keep reflecting. It should force us back to be reflecting in scripture. What does the scripture say? What patterns are there? What examples are there? And that's an exciting place. Challenging, but exciting as well.

SPEAKER\_01 43:50

Do you ever think about the challenges of pragmatism with all of these things? So the danger is that we calcify and we become useless. That we're no longer able to pursue our vision of seeing men and women come to Christ at places where they've never come to Christ before, people hearing the gospel where they've never heard the gospel before. And so the danger is if we're not innovating, if we're not thinking about these things, then maybe wars and political issues and technology and all these things might actually derail us because we're so stuck in our own pathways and ways of doing things that we can't change or innovate. But then maybe the other side would be the danger of pragmatism, where we're so interested in seeing our results. You know, maybe we think, you know, I've got my best practices, you know, don't really need the Holy Spirit anymore. Yeah.

SPEAKER\_00 44:39

Of course, there's always a danger of self-reliance and pragmatism. I think the Apostle Paul, when he said, I've become

all things to all people, that I might win some, that's a highly pragmatic approach in many ways. But of course, what he'd done in the midst of that, he says he's under the law of Christ. And what he'd managed to do was to really sort through the essentials of the gospel so that you could be highly flexible and true to the gospel at the same time. And that's always the challenge for us. As we make pragmatic choices, as we respond to things, we've got to do it in a way which is consistent to the centrality of the gospel. So we know what we can innovate, what we can't innovate on, what we can change, what we can't change, how we can adjust and what things we cannot adjust. And that's the that's the work of the church. It's the work of the missionary, actually.

SPEAKER\_01 45:28

I'm encouraged and I'm challenged by what you've shared. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you would like to cover?

SPEAKER\_00 45:35

Uh no. So it's a pointing answer, but we've covered quite a lot. Well, I mean, unless we want to talk about your uh your latest appraisal and uh whether you're gonna oh wait, I'm losing you.

SPEAKER\_01 45:51

I uh I've really appreciated this uh time together, Ian. Thanks for being on the podcast with me.

SPEAKER\_00 45:56

Yeah, thanks for the invitation. Great to chat.