Speaker: 00:10
Welcome to the Practical Missions Podcast. I'm your host. My guest today is a long-term worker in the Arab world and has seen it all, from waves of women coming to faith in Jesus to wars and regional instability. When I asked her if she thought it was wise to raise her kids in such an unstable environment, she said, I get the question all the time from well-meaning people. But I like to turn the question on its head. I think in the West, our kids have become our idols. I think in the West we have overprotected our kids. I kids live in a country torn apart by sectarianism and war, but they get to see miracles. They get to live in the book of Acts. Oh man, I love that answer. We cover a lot of ground in this episode, and I think you'll quickly see that I really do have the perfect guest for you today. So stay with us.

Speaker: 01:00
You've been in the Middle East for a long time now. You're married, you have a family, you have kids. What's it like for you? What has it been like for you to live in the Middle East? What are some things you love about the Middle East? What are the some of the things that you hate about the Middle East? And what has kept you from going crazy living in a place?

Speaker 3: 01:20
I'm gonna start with saying that I feel like my perception was really off when I before I'd visited. Actually, that's not fair. I'd visited a country here, and I had a very strong perception that women were really basically just oppressed and in their houses and they couldn't interact with us. And so I that was when I was in my early college years, and I thought, you know, I feel so sorry for anyone who ever would live their life in the Middle East. And I'm very much an Africa dancing person. So I was like, I'm gonna go to Africa or India. I don't even know. But I will say that there is nothing like some fun Arab women. I mean, Arab women are so strong, and they actually in some ways kind of hold the power in the household. I would love to debate with someone what is it actually a paternal culture or not, because the women have so much power. The mother-in-law has so much power. I think being here for so long, I have really close friends from all different types of different nations, and I love, I love it. I think they're strong, I think they're hilarious. So the things I love about living in the Middle East is I love that they just, especially the country that I live in, they know how to have a good time. They know how to make everything. Uh, there's a word in Arabic called zhao. So they know how to make everything uh like a vibe, basically. They know how to turn on music, they dance, uh, they smoke argile. Like it is just every hangout, every play date, every graduation, every like everything you can imagine is just like 10 out of 10 killing it. That's what's really fun.

Speaker 3: 02:52
But what's really hard is especially this area that I live in, it's very lawless. And so there's just no regulations. There's no, and and that would be in every area. So the restaurant you eat, the place you buy your food, the building that is getting construction on next to you. So it's like the anything could fall on your head or you're as you're walking by with your stroller. Uh, there's no traffic um regulations. So people drive the opposite. They drive like at you head on all the time, even though the speed is not in the middle of the highway. So the the fact that there's no law and no regulations is actually so stressful. I can like be in there with the best of them and be like a lawbreaker. And I also can get be very, I can kind of swing. I can swing and be like, no, I'm gonna sit at this red light and everyone else can pass me. I don't care. So I feel like it's kind of an undermining stress that gets to you. And after a while, we we had advice really early on that like to get out, to leave the our environment every couple of years, every year, just to like decompress. And I think that was actually really healthy advice because we couldn't, we, my family, my husband, and I, we love it so much here that we almost don't need it. But then when we get out, it's like our whole body is just kind of calmed down from this like high-level, high-level live-in of both the vibe and the fun and the interaction and then the stress of like, there's no law, there's no actual regulations. And that kind of just applies, even like the school our kids go to, which is great. Like there's horrible communication. So we don't know when we don't

even know the last day of school. We're in June, we don't know the last day of school. We don't, we definitely don't know the first day of school when it comes into the fall. So there's just, it's just a very literally, you live in the moment, you live in the day, which is really catered to my personality. I'm that kind of person, but it is over time, it's hard to, you know. Yeah, I haven't found, especially where I'm living, I haven't found that like I myself as a strong woman feel like suppressed or oppressed. In fact, I actually feel extremely welcome. And I feel like even the men really respect me. And so I haven't felt I haven't felt

Speaker 3: 04:53
that here.

Speaker: 04:54
Do you think that that is something you've grown into over the years as you became more and more familiar with the people with the culture with the language?

Speaker 3: 05:02
I would say the two major things would be learning the language and culture. So, like I remember my first rebuke in Arabic, and I felt like, wow, I really like nailed it. It was too much men. You know, I was running a clinic and they were trying to do something, and I was just like, I just started like yelling in Arabic, and they all listened and they all were just like, you know, and but it was, I mean, obviously it was loving and funny, but it was like firm. And but it took a couple of years for me to know when I could say something when I couldn't, what what was a I would say the first few years, I definitely was like, oh, what is this culture? Like, I can't even talk. And, you know, the men and women sit in different rooms. And, you know, I was just very overwhelmed. But I think that as I understood the culture more, as I watched cultural cues and as I learned Arabic and I could I was able to speak it, you know, enough to understand what was being said in the room. Um, I think that for sure helped. And then honestly, I do think having kids at least gives you some authority in the culture. Unfortunately, that I think that when you don't have kids, even if you're married and you don't have kids, but especially if you're single, I think there's a thing about a married woman that that they sometimes receive more from, which I don't love that. But that is what happens,

Speaker 3: 06:16
you know.

Speaker: 06:16
Tell tell me more about that. What have you seen about or around marriage and having children and how you're perceived and viewed in the culture?

Speaker 3: 06:25
You know, when we first moved, we didn't have any kids, and obviously I was still learning the culture and learning Arabic. And we moved to a different country that we currently live in. And I just I felt like, well, first of all, and I think any person you talk to who is single or doesn't have children yet, that's what how every conversation starts.

Speaker: 06:41
Are you married? Do you have kids?

Speaker 3: 06:43
Are you married and do you have kids? Like the first three questions, two questions, you know. And so it's obviously it's really frustrating. And even if you're like a newer mom, there's a lot of like advice giving, a lot of, you know, this is how you do it, this is how you do it. And then I think as you, as you kind of prove yourself, I'm sure there's a maturation that happened because it's like I both proved myself that I was someone who was willing to stay in the in the

culture in the country, and I was raising my kids and my kids were turning out normal. You know, they weren't, you know, so I think part of them is they're afraid you're your kids are gonna die or they're gonna freeze to death or they're all gonna get infections all the time, they're gonna be in the hospital. But as you like kind of prove that you can raise kids and that you can stay and that you understand the culture and all those things, it just almost like you get more and more respect. So we've been in the Middle East for 17 years. And so I think that I now when I even start conversations, especially if it's it's it's a formal setting or I'm like having to really talk to people, I can say that and I can tell them all the different things I've done. And and all of a sudden I just get respect because I've been here for so long. I've raised my kids. I've, you know, so I I do feel like it's just different. And I think in some ways, and I'm saying this is really wrong, I think Arabs have a concept that if you're not married, you're you're in a waiting. You're you're just kind of waiting. And so they don't realize that like there can be so much calling and so much authority and so much that people can bring that are not yet married or don't want to be married. Um, but I just don't think that culturally we have arrived there in the Middle East. I think there's still a role for singles for sure, but I think that there is something about being married that that kind of opens doors for me. And definitely my kids have opened doors for me over the years. I think that even, I don't know, I feel like I've I don't know if this is true, but I feel like I can even I had a I've had so many debates with um a particular group of men. I was gonna say the country.

Speaker 3: 08:32
Um, but I was had so many debates um about multiple wives. And I always win. I always win. I mean, they like laugh, but they're like, no, you're right, you're right. No, so I was just gonna say, like, I think it's funny. Like, I like I I don't feel afraid of it, and I just like take it full on. And and at the end of the argument, there was like, okay, yeah, no, you you I get it, I get it.

Speaker: 08:52
You know, what do they what do they say? How do they justify having multiple wives?

Speaker 3: 08:56
I mean, for them, they're like, no, like my old wife is tired and I need a new wife, and she doesn't even care. And and then the old wife will be like, Yeah, I don't care. And then the young one, you know, there's this whole thing of like everyone's kind of accepting it. And I was like, You guys, have any of you been raised by two, like, did any of your dads have two wives? And anyone in the room who says yes, you know, I'm like, how was that? Was there jealousy? Was there frustration? Was there pain? And your mom, every single one of them says yes. I'm like, so it's so sad. I was like, you know, God created us, man and woman, to live, to cling together, to like have a family, to love one another, to grow in our love for one another. When there's a when there's a third person, there's jealousy, there's pain, there's rejection, and they're all, every single one of them is always like, they say in Arabic, my ha, like you have a like you have truth. You have truth what you're saying.

Speaker 1: 09:42
Yeah, you're right.

Speaker 3: 09:44
Yeah, you're right, you're right. So I think that is like um, yeah, I think that's the they always kind of justify it. I think culturally and honestly religiously, they have reasons to justify it. But um, but I feel like as soon as I start pointing out, I'm like, I've talked to so many women, every single woman who has a second wife is in pain. Every single, like it's never easy. And her poor kids, and they're just I just give all the examples of things I've heard and all the clinics I've done, and they always are like, okay, no, you're right.

Speaker: 10:12

I've talked to some guys as well who, when they were little and their dad took a second wife, how painful it was for their mother, and then how confusing it was for them. One guy told me that he got beat by his mom when he went to his dad's other wife's house and he had no idea what was going on. Why is my mom beating me?

Speaker 3: 10:33
Exactly. No, and there's all these, yeah, and I would because there's a lot of like they tell like they would tell their sons to go spy, and like there's a lot of like secrets and there's a lot of like betrayal and I mean there's a lot going on there, and they all lived it. So when you like, when you just know a few stories and you say them, then the whole room's kind of like, yeah, it's they can't deny it.

Speaker: 10:54
Arguments all break down because everybody's experienced the negative realities of having multiple wives. Yeah, and one of the problems obviously is that it's baked into the it's baked into the religion. So they feel like they have this kind of like divine right. This is my divine right, they will even say, the men will say, but that doesn't mean that it's good, even okay, even if they believe that they have this from their religion. You mentioned when you first started talking that uh women actually kind of it is a patriarchy, it is a male-dominated society, but that women somehow still hold some power or some keys.

Speaker: 11:27
Tell me more about that. What have you seen there?

Speaker 3: 11:29
So I do think I understand that like kind of depends on, which we're not going to go into here, but I think it depends on what country. So I I've worked really closely with three or three or four different people groups. And so there's a few people groups that you can see the patriarchy more. Like you get in really sticky situations where fathers are abusing or both their wives or their children. In the actual kind of home culture of where I am, it's it's actually, and but even then, I still think that wives wield a lot of power. It's not as like black and white as you would imagine. And so I think, and it depends on the women, but they really, there's a real as men use like fear, the higher the manipulation goes and the lies. And so I feel like, but in the culture that I'm living in, I see it even more. Like I see the women carry a lot of power and they make a lot of the decisions and they decide. And they actually, so something that's really interesting is that a lot of women are in really horrible marriages, but they do everything they never leave because they'll lose the rights to their children. But they um basically poison their kids against the father. And so the kids are extremely loyal to the mother. And so the kids will get tattoos about their mom. It's certain certain places get this happens. The kids will um will do anything for their mom. They will die for their mom. Male and female. Boys love their moms, teenagers love their moms. I mean, they're like you know, obsessive with their moms. Um, men, men love their moms more than their wives. The men that in the different countries I've worked with, they all say, I love my mom more than I love my wife. I'm more loyal to my mom than I am to my wife. And so the mom can say to the, to the son, do this to your wife, and then the and then the son can do it. But then obviously the wife has her own power. She can withhold sex, she can withhold, she can do all kinds of things in order to get what she wants. And so I would say, even there's all types of ways that women manipulate and figure out how to get what they want. In different cultures, you have like the kids are loyal to the mom. So the kids are kind of persuading the dad that mom knows best, or you know, and then and then and essentially, like at the end of the day, once the kids are adults, they will always go kind of the the line is I I raised you, your dad was horrible. I raised you. And so then the kids will stand by their mom and then kind of everything goes back to her and her decision. So that's to me a lot of power. Like you end up having your grandkids and your kids, and um, so you may or may not be

divorced, but you you still get what you want. It's very dysfunctional, but it's it is what I see play out a lot.

Speaker: 14:02
Yeah, it sounds, I mean, it just sounds super dysfunctional and it doesn't sound like a reality I would want to live in.

Speaker 3: 14:12
I know.

Speaker: 14:13
Do you feel like these kind of giant social topics or issues are things that we should be addressing? Or do you think as cross-cultural kingdom workers that we're looking at something else? You know, we're looking at gospel, like the gospel, and then that that kind of has ripple effects, or how do you how do you look at these things?

Speaker 3: 14:34
All of these things come up in discipleship, all of these things. So, you know, family systems are a huge part of discipleship. So I've discipled so many young people over the years, and it all how I know what I'm saying is because what the kids are telling me, how I know what I'm saying is from the moms that I've worked and walked alongside and and and we've done all types of like inner healing prayer because of things that they've done or said. Yeah, I think social systems, I really kind of go back to like the model of Jesus and kingdom and how he starts so small and believes that the kingdom will is like a seed. It's like a mustard seed and then it will grow. And I think that as we see people take root, get as they believe in Jesus and it takes root in their faith, and then they can be the change, and then they can help change the systems. Um, I'm not against systemic change. I love it. I think it's amazing when people put up shelters or do, you know, marriage counseling, you know, or marriage retreats, all the things that you could do to help address societal needs and changes. I'm not against them. I don't know how they will take root ultimately without Jesus at the center, because it is a pretty, it's pretty rooted in this, in the in the society, in the in the systems that are. I mean, I I think discipleship is kind of the answer and like and and people getting getting invited into a new kingdom, into a new way of relating, into a new, a whole new system of how of parenting, of loving their parents, of you know, of forgiveness, like all these things that are foreign.

Speaker: 16:04
Yeah, forgiveness is huge and it's such a foreign category to the culture and society here, but definitely is something that the gospel speaks into and is able to change. I was talking to a family the other day, and I mean they were they called me up, they're like, get over here now. I came over and everyone was like screaming at each other and threatening to leave and all these things. And I was like, yo, what the heck is going on? But you just see that there's been no option given to them to learn to listen or to learn how do I respond without hurting the other person. You know, the old adage like hurt people, hurt people, you know, everyone's hurt and everyone's trying to hurt each other.

Speaker 1: 16:49
Yeah.

Speaker: 16:50
The real need is for gospel transformation. I guess that's the foundation, and then everything else is

Speaker: 16:56
built on that.

Speaker 3: 16:57
But I do think, like as you're saying that, like, um, that's been something that's that I would say a big challenge of raising my kids. My kids are in a school that is 95% Muslim. So like all of their lives, they've they kind of they're normative, like they are friends with other worker kids, but they also their social circle is Muslim kids. And I mean, some of them are secular, some of them are conservative. It just kind of depends. There is no construct for forgiveness, and really, really, there's not a construct for humility. Yeah. And I you can talk about humility and people can say that's a, you know, yeah. And if you explain it, but as far as like, is that what parents are parenting? You know, I haven't raised my kids in the West. So I'm sure that people in the West face similar challenges where their values are completely different than where the, you know, the kids are at school. But it is really challenging because when my kids get in conflict with other kids, there is no idea about forgiveness or reconciliation and even humility. So there's no lit, like you're saying, there's no listening. Something that you have to get used to in the Middle East is yelling and threatening. And they don't always mean everything they're screaming at you, which as Westerners, we actually listen, we choose our words. And like our family culture is that I don't threaten and we don't scream.

Speaker: 18:13
And so amend to that.

Speaker 3: 18:15
Yeah, and I choose my words, you know what I'm gonna say to my children. And so my children, when they talk to each other, they're not allowed to scream or threaten, you know? And so, but then they go to school and their friends are screaming or yelling or breaking things, or I'll never gonna talk to you again or block you or whatever. And so it's like we've had to really, that's been a part of my kids' discipleship process is like, how do you model forgiveness? How do you model humility? And they're like, I look like I'm just getting walked on. I look so naive, mom. I look really bad. And I was like, you know what? You're not, and you are, and so I think it in certain moments it's been really hard for them. In certain moments, it's become really natural. Um, but it's always had an amazing result. It over time, not always in the moment, but over time it's always had an amazing result. And so I can say that my kids are like are so different. So kind of when we're saying, like, can you take society, like, do you take on this issue and society? Again, I'm not against programs, I'm not against it, but as we live kingdom lives, wheat among tares or whatever, you know, then people see the difference in my children, the difference in our family culture, and they get to ask questions. And that's one of the ways you invite people into knowing Jesus is your kingdom culture that's so different than the c the culture all around them.

Speaker: 19:27
The whole idea of parenting in the Middle East or parenting on the field is so interesting to me. And just I just want to double-click on what you said about going about the school your kids are at. How did you guys decide to send your kids to a school of 90% Muslim? Why didn't you send them to a missionary school or a school with more foreigners or homeschool them? How did you guys make that decision?

Speaker 3: 19:49
Okay, so that's a great question. So I was homeschooled my whole life. So I'm like, and then my husband was the opposite. He went to a huge, like amazing public school that's like you would see in movies or something. And we had very obviously different um experiences, but it really like shaped his faith. And then I was homeschooled. So I had a great family. And and so it's funny because we come at the the question with really different values sometimes and even different thoughts and all the things. But so my husband actually teaches at the school that my kids go to. So that's that's number one. It's it's a it's easy and it's we get a huge discount.

Yeah, um, it's an evangelical school, so there's Christian values and Christian faculty, faculty as in, like administration, not most of the teachers are Muslims, but like 95% of the kids. So it's a missional, it's a missional concept. I think also we heard really early on when we've, you know, especially in the early years when you're raising your kids overseas and you're, you know, you're you're just wondering how can I do this without ruining them? Or how can I do this without, you know, causing a lot of damage, emotional damage. Something that we heard that really stuck with us was the more a part of the team, the more the apart, the more integral they feel, the more part of the team they feel. When you look like the study had shown that when you look across it and you see like kids who did things with their parents, who were a part of everything with their parents, who felt like they were a part of the team, essentially almost like a hundred percent of them basically adjusted fine to life, were well-adjusted kids. And the kids that weren't, that were either their father did ministry in a different country and came in and out, or didn't understand or didn't do, or were in more isolated settings, or in like communes or whatever, you know, or boarding schools, the the percentage was very different on the like were they still like walking in or still walking in faith and like still had faith in Jesus and stuff, and were how they had adjusted. It was really early on that we decided like as much as we could, like our kids are a part, as much as we could as our kids are apart. So I mean, my kids were raised in refugee camps. My kid we spent, I mean, three days a week in refugee camps. My kids Kids were from the beginning, and we always prayed before and we process after. And I, it's just a huge part. And so they are a part of our team at this school. Like they, their friends are who we're praying for. Like I, my older daughter's in 11th grade, and she like fasted for five days for her friends this year. Like she wants to see God break out as much as we do. And so I think it's been really cool to see them like as they've gotten older, they're a part of the team. I think part of it was like this is gonna like integrate our family, and this is a this is us inviting to this as us joining in this way together. And I think ultimately, the way that I'm wired, I knew that I would really want to do pioneering kind of access ministries, start new things. And I just don't think that I could do that in homeschool. Like I'm not, I'm not a super organized person. And so I got to taste homeschooling. I've actually gotten to taste it through COVID and through uh we've had multiple wars. And so I've had some tastes of it and I really love it. I mean, I love it, but I also like I'm like, oh, I can see how if I'm doing nothing, this is amazing. But if I'm like doing things, I can't do this, you know? So part of it was like practical in the in the or it was like discerning sense of calling and like who I am. Um and I think we are always open that if it wasn't working, that we would shift, but it's just been really, really great. Our kids love it. So that's been that's been a our part of our story.

Speaker: 23:26
Man, I have so many questions. Did you ever experience pushback from your kids? Like, why are we here?

Speaker 3: 23:32
So our I will say, like our youngest, my my oldest are very much like very flexible, adaptable, social kids. And our youngest for a long time, now I have four, but our youngest for a long time is a highly sensitive introvert in a family of crazy extroverts and in a very overstimulating culture and in a very over-stimulating school. So I will say that uh the first few years at the school, like especially like four and five, it was very touch and go. And I was like, am I gonna have to spend because the the other schools that are kind of more tailored to send to, I don't know, to foreigners or tailored, I don't know, they're really expensive. So I'm like, I'm gonna have to send her and like raise tons of you know, much more money to or homeschooler, like what am I gonna need to do? So it was definitely, I would say the first three or three years-ish, we were wondering and we prayed a lot. The thing is she would cry every day to go and then she would um, and then she would be so happy when she came back. So it was like we knew, you know, we knew it was part of it. It was like she was actually happy and she talked about it a lot. And she's it's actually, I do think, you know, nature versus nurture, she's a very, she's so different. Like her personality, I mean, she is still a sensitive person, but she is, I mean, she has been in a

washing machine of over of an intense Arab culture. And so she's she's got a very strong personality that that got nature that or sorry, that nurtured, you know, like through this through the culture that we're living in. So she's pushed back. There's been a few moments she's pushed pushed back. There's been moments where she has felt um, yeah. And so we've had conversations with her. The other two have never, they've actually never um, but I actually, this is a funny story. We we had a sabbatical in Switzerland, and my youngest was only four at the time. And the last day she was weeping for a solid hour, and she kept saying, I don't want to go back to Twashland.

Speaker 2: 25:25
She's like, here, there's cows and there's bees and there's trees. I don't want to take me back to Twashland. And then the minute we arrived, she's like, look at this Twashland.

Speaker 3: 25:37
Like it was really, she really like actually loves beauty. And so I think God has been really kind and we have uh tried to cultivate all the things for her that bring her joy. And um, God provided us a mountain house, and I think it was a huge gift to her because she loves flowers and nature and stuff. So I yeah, there has been that pushback from her, but for my other kids, no, actually, they've been like they're all in, they love it. They say that they're from this country. Like that's what I love that. Yeah.

Speaker: 26:06
What do you think the role is for parents in regard to how their children view the culture and the people? Have you guys thought about that? Like, yeah, how do you guys talk about the language, talk about the people, talk about the culture in front of your kids?

Speaker 3: 26:21
Yeah. So we and uh and early on, you know, for a while we led a team of foreigners, and so for about 11 years, actually. And and we had someone come and visit us who's uh was an authority figure over us, and they're like, just noticing, you know, that some of you guys talk about the culture and the people, and your kids are gonna pick up on that. But my husband and I really love, love, love the food. We love the culture. We love, we kind of exude that we're so happy. That's not the case for everyone. It isn't, but it is there's a grace over. I'm not, I cannot even say that this is for everyone. I'm just saying it's there's a grace for us here. And so I think our kids have fallen into that grace. And because we talk with that, and so, and we're really even in how we, you know, talk about the religion, what the way we talk about Muhammad, the way like all of those things is very like contextual and with respect. And and we're, you know, and then our kids are actually watching us and a part of a lot of like they're you know, at the school with us, so they're in our Bible classes to that, all their Muslim friends, they're doing ministry with us, so they get to see how we talk and how we handle hard questions and what is the Trinity and all these things. So our kids are watching us. We have a house church of MBBs in our house. So our kids are part of it, our kids are fully in. I think 100% how you talk about it is a big part. I think, I think we've we've realized that from the beginning. And so I think we've been really careful how we talk about it. So yeah, I think that's a great question.

Speaker: 27:44
Have you thought about what comes next when it comes to your kids? So they're going to be going to university, maybe in their passport countries or whatever. Have you thought about what it looks like for these third cultural kids to retransition into a place they've never lived in before?

Speaker 3: 28:01

Yeah, uh a lot. I read that this book, Third Culture Kids, when I was when the kid, I don't even know how many years ago, but I just actually wept. It was so hard for me. Um, and I think it's because I was really in touch with all the gifts that we were giving our kids, and I was not in touch with all the challenges. And so I read it and wept because there's a big part about a second adolescence and when they transition and how hard it is and their sense of belonging and how it kind of is with them their whole life. And um, so I've thought about that a lot and prayed about that a lot, and we have a lot of conversations. Yeah, I think we do have like our kids are wanting to go back to university. They want to do a gap year and serve in different parts of the world. They want to go back to the passport country and study. They actually don't want to, but we are encouraging them to do that. I think we have a lot of, we have the joy. I think that now in 2026, there's a lot of people who've gone before you. So we have some good friends who've gone before us and they're giving us a lot of advice. Like as they go back, here's some three, three things you need to think about when you're sending your kid. And and so one major thing is that to a university with international students. They just need to be around international people because if it's too monoculture for them, it will feel really odd. So that was like that's like a really helpful, like, yeah, that that makes sense. Um, so I my oldest is going into a senior next year. So she'll have one more year with us. And she does, she's really got a chip on her shoulder about our passport country. She likes this country we live in so much better. So we have to probably work on that or else she's gonna come off. And again, she'll even say things like, I don't want to come off, like I'm better than others just because I've lived overseas. I'm like, yes, you know, so I think there's a lot of conversations you have to have, a lot of, and there's just a lot of growth, you know, in both ways. So I'm sure, I'm sure that I think I'm very aware that they're gonna have their own struggles, their own journey into like what it, I don't know what what it means to like carry their own faith outside of their parents and um what it looks like to live in a different country. I do love that my this oldest I'm talking about, when she was probably eight, we were doing a time of family prayer and she had this moment and she was like, I'm gonna, guys, I want to tell you something and you're not gonna, I don't want you to get mad at me. And we were like, okay. She's like, I feel like God's telling me that I have to go to like a really hard country. And I I know you guys live in like an easy country, but like I'm gonna go to a hard country. And we were like, and she's like, and you can't be mad at me if I end up, you know, kind of like if I end up like sacrificing for God. And we were like just giggling to her. Of course, we like treated it with like that's amazing. We prayed over her, you know. We were just laughing that she thinks that like our life is like not hard.

unknown: 30:44
Yeah.

Speaker 3: 30:45
Because it's it is her life, you know. So we were like, oh man, this is this is funny, this is sweet.

Speaker: 30:50
Yeah, we talk about third cultural kids, but sometimes we forget that parents or that adults who've lived overseas for a long time and have really integrated into their host cultures change as well. Have you noticed any of that? Like when you go back to your passport country, like do you fit right back in, or do you feel like, man, I'm a stranger here? What's that like for you?

Speaker 3: 31:12
Yeah, no, for sure not. For sure. We're I mean, we've shifted and changed. I mean, I would say I'm now more Arab than I am Western. I'm more Arab than I am Western. Um, and uh in probably every aspect, but I think it's part of the gift of getting to live in a country and and be with the people and be so like in it, you know. I mean, incarnational is an intense word, but like, yeah, like we're living in a neighborhood and of all Muslims and a very crowded city, and we are like, that's who you know, it was we've taken it on. So I definitely feel different, and I think it would be very difficult to move back to our home country. I mean, I know the Lord could

always invite us to do that. I'm I'm I want to like surrender to that. I'm not, I don't want to be overly attached to things, but I think I do think it, yeah, it's it's crazy how much we change and how much we pick up and and let down. And so yeah, I think most people we meet say that we don't feel like we're from the our original country.

Speaker: 32:12
I love that. Your daughter was talking about how, you know, one day I'm gonna go to a hard country, not an easy country like this. But the reality is what she didn't realize as an eight-year-old girl is that the place you're living in is quite challenging. And one of the challenges is just like ongoing wars, social unrest, riots, governments that don't work, collapse of the financial sector.

Speaker: 32:35
Have you and your husband thought about the wisdom of raising your kids in a place like that? And if it's a wise thing to do?

Speaker 3: 32:43
Well, it would be hard not to with everyone that loves us.

Speaker: 32:47
Asking you the same question.

Speaker 3: 32:50
Asking us that all the time. Uh to be fair, her her little moment was before all of this really took off. So I think she probably would feel different now. I think it's a fair question. I think anyone who asks it is fair. It's an it's it's not always fun to talk about it in every coffee break whenever you're talking to anyone in any conference or you know, anywhere you're at. But it's fair. It's a fair question. And I think it comes out of a place of real concern. And we don't want, and I think that you um the I like why are we staying, right? Like, I think people want to know like, are you overattached? Are you like, is this your ego? Is this like what is making you think that you can like raise kids in a country that has such upheaval and and their schools interrupted and their social life's interrupted, and there's a lot of suffering. There's just there's no there's no electricity, there's no water, you know, all these things. Why do you think it's okay to put your kids through that? I flip it all on the head in the sense that I think that the West has like turned our children into an unhealthy idol. And I think all we think about is our kids and what our kids need and want and what's the most important thing for them. And I think that that is not how most of the centuries of living was. And I and I've over and over and over in in prayer received from God that as we follow his presence and we listen to him, that that the best thing we can do when we're in the center of his will, the best thing we can do is be in the center of his will. And like our kids get to like ride the wave with us. They get to be in the boat with us, they get to see, and my kids get to see miracles. My kids get to see people who've never heard about Jesus come alive. I mean, that's like incredible. So my kids get to see amazing, amazing, astounding things, things that are out of the book of Acts. But in the in a war or in crisis, I think it's fair to ask, like, okay, you know, so we have some major things. So one of our major things is are we a liability for our local friends? If our presence around our locals or our neighbors is a liability, we will leave. That is number one. We felt that actually a year and a half ago, and so we left. Uh, so that and we actually didn't have a safe place that we could be. Our neighborhood is in a very mixed neighborhood and it's in the heart of the city. And so it's like it's not actually a very safe neighborhood. It's not super dangerous, but it's not super safe. And so we've had to evaluate that. And then kind of the God did an amazing thing and provided a mountain house for us. And so we have a house in a very safe Christian village. So that means that there's no threat. And so we can go there and our bodies come down from any adrenaline, any any sense of threat. We actually don't even hear the sounds of war there. And we uh and our kids are totally fine. Their nervous system is fine. And I've had all three of my kids this time say to me,

I'm so glad that we were here during this war, and because God has used our family so much. I'm so glad we didn't go anywhere. And that's not always the case. But and and again, if you're I I think we were really quick to like, you know, tell people to like pray for their own family. So I think that if our kids' lives were threatened, I don't think we would at all stay. Like anytime it would come to like a threat. And we would even say if we can't before we had our mountain house in a safe place that we can eat and do everything, you know, um, there's there's food places there, there's ways to get gas, there's electricity there, like we can actually, you know, exist in this mountain village. Before we had that, we said if our daily life became so difficult that we couldn't even do our daily life, then we are probably not gonna stay because it's just us hunkering down, but we're unable to actually do things. So there were a few things that we kind of had as like our red lines. But I will say this. I will say that we definitely always make decisions as a family. Our kids are a little bit older, so we have a prayer of discernment we do. And so we make decisions as a family. We had to make the decision to leave at one point, and it was very much to the chagrin of my two oldest. They wept about it and they had a very hard time. And their friends actually told them that they were abandoning them. The friends accused us of abandoning them. It was very it was very painful. And my youngest that I talked about um was very needed it. And so I told our family, like, we are only as strong as our weakest link, and we make decisions on people who are actually not doing okay in our family. So we will leave and we will come back when we're able and it's not like threatening. And I did that because I had a fear in my heart and I felt like they'll I felt like God actually said, you don't want to stay and then this particular child who's more sensitive spin out so bad that you actually have to leave the field because they're like, you know, like, and so I was like, I will, I will leave for a bit in order for her to feel a peace and say, I want to come back, and this is a part of our calling. And she's not resentful of the fact that we're here in really hard circumstances. Now she's confessed to me in a lot of sweet ways, Mom, I don't know if I would ever be able to like live like you do or like do this with my own family. But she's like, But I I love my life. I love my friends. I don't, you know, but she, so I and I was like, that's great. And we talk a lot about the different people we know and who are living gospel lives that are not as extreme as mine. So I feel like she's actually very in tune, emotionally aware, articulate, which is amazing. She's also been, we found a TCK counselor that walked us through some stuff and it was amazing. Um, so we had to get some outside resources for her, and that was really helpful for me. It was amazing for her. So I do think uh it is, it's a it's a sobering thing. It's a real question, it's a real, it's a real decision you have to make. And I'm not even, I don't want to say this lightly, but like the verdict is out in some sense, as our kids might have to process what they've been through, right? Like they might end up going through counseling. At this point, we're really trying to stay, you know, in tune with that. We also have them sit with our oversight and our oversight ask really hard questions. We've given permission to our family members to do the same so that whenever we're making decisions to come back, especially when this country is like in crazy, which has been a long time. Uh, it's been about five years of crazy or six years of crazy. Some of our my like my sister, my parents have permission to really push at my kids and say, like, do like, are your parents making you go back? And every time people give us feedback, no, your kids are really happy. They're very well adjusted, they want to go back. So that feels like a that feels like part of our system, you know.

Speaker: 39:20
So many things a parent has to think about. But I I like what you said that, yeah, maybe there's going to be some residue in their lives left over from the childhood that they've experienced and the place that they've experienced it. And maybe there are some things that they will have to deal with, and that's just part of counting the cost. There's some things we're willing to say yes to, there's some costs we're willing to pay, as it were, but there are also uh limits that we understand and we

Speaker: 39:48

know. Switching gears just a little bit. You know, you talk about six years of turmoil and distress in the country, but also you're in a neighborhood that has been for even longer in turmoil in distress. I'm wondering how wars, civil wars, economic unrest, and all these things have affected the local people or the the people that you work with has affected their reception to the gospel.

Speaker 3: 40:16
In an unbelievable way. I was gonna say that, but I do feel like you have to like you have to give the family kid some weights. And then you can say, it's great, it was a great setup there, that uh the hunger level is like unprecedented. And the amount of people who have had dreams of Jesus unprecedented. So we've been visiting the country that we live in for 20 years, 21 years actually, this summer. And but we've only lived here for 15. And and we like what we see now compared to what we saw 20 years ago, what we saw 15 years ago, I mean, we it's just incredible. Even like with our kids' friends, and in in every way, there's just so much spiritual hunger because the systems that are have failed, whether it's the religious system they were following or the political system they were, or even the governmental system. And so there's so much spiritual hunger. And so, in some ways, I feel like the authority that we've received in just being enduring. I'm blanking on, I think it's in Isaiah, but it talks about being a like an oak in the house of the Lord and that people can come onto your shade. And I feel like us being like oaks, like we've been here for a long time, we've endured it with them. We've walked through all of this stuff with them, we've raised our kids here, but we want to bring people into the shade and into like his presence. And so I feel like the amount of kind of open and authority we have with this population in in every way. Like if you, you know, we have a lot of different, like you've got Muslim, you've got Christian, you've got all different types of things. And and in every way, we have people that will like want us to counsel and talk to them and coach them and pray for them. And I think it comes from enduring and being being here and just like enduring and having hope and pray and having faith even in the midst of everything.

Speaker: 42:10
An ounce of hope is better than a ton of despair, isn't it?

Speaker 1: 42:15
Yeah.

Speaker: 42:15
Most of the stories we hear, I feel like most of the stories we hear about people coming to faith are kind of like in the sphere of men. And I think for in some ways, there's more of the public sphere is more filled with men than it is with women in the Arab world. And so maybe that's just kind of natural that we hear more about the uh stories of men coming to faith. What are you seeing when it comes to women coming to faith?

Speaker 3: 42:42
Yeah, that's a great question. So I do it's it's been an interesting journey, even in that, because I've been in sit at I've sat in strategy rooms with you know 45 people from all over the region, and there's three women.

unknown: 42:56
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 3: 42:57
Why are there 41 men or something?

Speaker: 43:00
And 60% or 65% of cross-cultural workers are women.

Speaker 3: 43:04
Yeah, exactly. And then even like locally and internationally, I've been in these rooms. I'm like, why are there no women sitting at these tables? And I had one person tell me why. And he told me because this is a keeps messing up the word, but like a paternal or a you know, patriotic society. And so you have to have the men. I'm like, oh, okay, you know. Um, but we've actually had a very opposite experience. So in our 15 years of being here, the first I would say honestly, maybe 12, 11 or 12, we had almost, almost zero fruit with men and all fruit with women. So, and so it was like, and then, and then we and we actually had everyone, all our friends and families praying for men because because we want to see men come to faith too. But we've actually had incredible experiences of just women coming to faith and then leading other women to faith. And either there's been like uh networks of like widows or Or there's just been women whose husbands will allow it. Or the women are figuring out how to live out their faith and their really that that their faith in Jesus and their and their journey and discipleship is making them such a better wife and and mother that like the men are willing to overlook anything that will be. Yeah. So um so I feel like that's been a part of our our experience here is that that women and and we've actually batted around the idea that especially as we're seeing such a like such a response with women, young women, you know, older women, like you know, all ages. We were saying how in Islam, like men have a lot more to lose. Like they, if their promise of the afterlife is like virgins and power, and you know, I don't know. And even as even here on earth, they can just like be mean, they can order people around, they can abuse if they want, they can hit. They actually, it's all allowed. There, they can lie, they can cheat, they can do it all. And like women really don't have a lot in in in Islam. And so when when you start talking about Jesus, I mean, when you start talking about Jesus, it's like women start crying, especially when you start seeing how Jesus treated women. When you look at all these stories of women in the in the in the scripture, like women literally come alive and can see like a calling on their life. And uh, so I do think that it's just been like an amazing, it empowers them. It allows them to basically in a in a in a moment where they may have felt powerless. Maybe they can like control and manipulate their kids, but in like a societal that they don't feel like they can actually be powerful, they actually suddenly people are listening to them. People are gathering, they're influencing. They're they're their prayer is seeing changes. They're seeing like miracles, they're seeing provision. There, you know, we had a group of women that were in groups and they were praying. And this is before they were yet believers, and this army came and told them they had to all leave, and there were 80 uh refugee camps. And so this was this whole situation. These 15 women sat down and they said, We're gonna fast and pray. We're gonna pray in the name of Jesus and we're gonna see what he'll do. He'll do a miracle, he'll either show us a new tent to live in or whatever. And it ended up that they were the only 15 because they were fasting. They did not move their tents, so they didn't have to pay anything. And then the finally the army came back and said, You guys can stay. And so they were like, Because we fasted and prayed in the name of Jesus, you know. And so there's like, we've and then they all of a sudden see they have power, they have, they have things they can offer. And so I do think that it has been like such an amazing thing to see and to transformation for them and transformation in their lives. And part of the process that we always invite women into is we want to hear what they're discovering in scripture. And they've they so often they'll just say, I don't know, no, but I want to hear what you think. And then I've had, I mean, I cannot tell you how many women I've had say, no one has ever said that to me. They're like, not my dad, not my mom, not my husband, not anyone has said, I want to hear what you think, especially when it comes to religious things, but probably in anything, you know? And so that's been something that's been really like just getting them to use their minds, getting them to use their spirits, getting them to have faith for things. Um, it actually catapults them into a whole different way of being, which is kingdom. And it's probably why the early church exploded, because women also found that same thing. When you read like historical, you know, accounts of why did the early church explode. It's like, well, part of it was the rights they gave to women. Part of it was

the way that women could rise up into leadership in a way that no other society or no other yeah, was allowing them to do.

Speaker: 47:44
That's incredible. I love how the whole economy of the kingdom of God is so different and is so much better than the systems of the world. No better shown, maybe, than in these kind of situations.

Speaker 2: 47:59
Yeah.

Speaker: 47:59
What about? I mean, I know there is a higher illiteracy rate amongst women. Have you faced any of that? And if you have, how do you deal with that in discipleship?

Speaker 3: 48:09
Yeah, so um, no, absolutely. Like, so one of our goals is that we're getting people to interact with scripture because we want, because we just know that scripture is gonna like lead people into all truth. So we want people to have scripture, but if they're illiterate, that's very difficult. And I think maybe most of our listeners would understand this, but maybe not that um when we when we say like with the written Arabic is different than spoken Arabic. And so even if you listen to the formal, uh, whether it's the formal Quran or the formal Bible, it's different. Most illiterate people don't fully know what you're saying. Now they might, but they don't, because and this is why I say this, because I've also had experience, and when I say experience, I mean hundreds of times, where I've um we got we had a tool made by a teammate of ours actually, where um he recorded the scriptures and the formal to basically validate this is the word of God. This is the formal word of God. And almost every time I would play it for groups of women, I'd have six women, four women, eight women. And I did all I did hundreds and hundreds of these kind of groups for a while. And almost every time I did it, uh they would just completely tune out. They'd like fall asleep, they're like scratching their legs, like drinking their tea. And then as soon as we shifted, so it would, it would, you would tell the small story of like, let's say of Noah or of Moses. You tell the small story in um the formal Arabic, and then as soon as it switches to the spoken Arabic, and it basically is essentially translating, you know, it's it's in spoken Arabic, it's saying what happened, the women would like stop everything they're doing. They'd lean in, they'd listen to it. And then I had one woman, it was, I mean, this is like seared in my memory. She starts slapping her legs and she was like, I've never understood a story in my life, you know. She's like, I understand. She's like, I've heard about Noah my whole life, and I've never gotten to hear it with my own ears. And it was so fun. It was so fun to like get to show them truth, and then they get to hear it. And then the next step is like, so what did you learn? What do you think? You know, and and then to get them to talk, it took like one or two times, and then you can't get them to stop talking because they've never gotten to do that. So I think that you're like illiteracy is a big thing, but we've we've just basically had to work with people who are willing to make tools, and that's been the key for us. The key is getting the scripture in their hands, but in a way that they can understand it.

Speaker: 50:39
It's fascinating how Islam has preserved ancient classical Arabic because of the Quran, right? Uh, the Quran can't be changed, it has to be in this kind of archaic language, but then that has crossed over into Christianity, where the Bible is now in this archaic Arabic that nobody speaks as well. It's fascinating. I never thought about that before.

Speaker 3: 51:03
Yeah. Well, and I would say too, like, just to add to that, in the different communities I've worked in, there's been people who will hear what I'm doing. And so then they get a little bit

nervous. And so then they'll, and we're trying to be as contextual as possible, and then they'll get like a shaykha, like a religious leader that's a woman, to gather the women and do religious lessons. Because if this like foreigner is doing that, then we have to do this with our, you know. And so, and and I always am like, yes, go to her, like do it both, you know? And I always am like, yes, of course, of course. Because I'm confident that as they like, especially for the ones God's prepared, I'm confident that as you put these two things side by side, that the truth that it it resonates deep in our hearts, right? Our spirits come alive when we hear the truth. So, um, and this is what happens. And so they'll always say, like, she's so mean. Like this has happened, I think, probably four or five times. She's so mean. She like shames us. Like we ask a question and she just like shames us, tells us we're so stupid, and like, don't ask questions, just let me talk. And then she just tells a story and it's in this formal language, and we don't understand it. But then we ask her to tell it in like, you know, the spoken language, and she kind of does. And then she's like yelling at us, and then she embarrasses us if we're late. And they're like, it's so different than you.

Speaker: 52:18
Wow.

Speaker 3: 52:19
Wow, and so it just you're like, it's it's such a different experience, you know.

Speaker: 52:25
Yeah, the light shines and the darkness

Speaker: 52:28
flees. What about barriers to discipleship that you've experienced discipling women?

Speaker 3: 52:34
For sure, for sure. I would say barriers are the idea that you're you're meeting with women and you don't know if the husband will sign off on it. One of the things I constantly am encouraging the women to share with their husbands, I usually a lot of times, especially if it's a a while, I'll meet the husbands, um, I'll bring my family, I bring my kids, I show that I'm not I'm non-threatening. And then again, I I mentioned this, but I encourage people early on, like especially when they're doing obedience statements, I encourage them to do whatever culturally they feel is a response to God, even if it looks odd to me. So if they're like, I want to pray more, I'm like, which means Islamic pray. I'm like, great, you should do that. I want to go to the mosque. I'm like, great. Because to me, that's their response to God in the way that they know. It's like they're kind of using the path they know, but God's actually setting a new path in front of them. They just don't know it. And so, um, so in some ways, like I said, a lot of women who end up coming to faith start out, but then they say what was so crucial was in those beginning foundational times. I wasn't judging, I wasn't possessive, I wasn't jealous, I wasn't nervous, controlling. I was actually like, yes, I was actually, and so I've heard them now, I've heard them a lot of times, vouch for me and say, no, but she doesn't care if you, you know, go to the mosque, she doesn't care if you read the Quran. And it's kind of one of the ways that they keep from being persecuted. But we do end up getting to places where we're making hard decisions. And once we get to like baptism, and once, you know, there's so they they've counted the cost, but part of the way is that they'll kind of use that as like a covering, I think, is what I think. Um, and again, I'm kind of confident that the the Lord is big and he's like, you know, but that an obstacle is definitely figuring out how to how to work with women inside the construct that if they're, you know, if their family shut it down, that'd be number one. The other thing is that women are like, okay, this is one thing that we all talk. If you ever get a room of women who are discipling women into a room and all we want to talk about is how do we handle the kids?

Speaker: 54:40
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 3: 54:42
There's like 25 children for every four women, you know. And so you're like, how do I have this hard conversation or this discipleship moment? And the kids are like, especially depending on how parenting is, which is very different than Western parenting. It's like they're like smelling things and jumping and slapping your face. And so, I mean, again, my approach has been like embrace it. Like, if this is gonna be reproducible, we gotta, I bring my kids, my kids had crazy poopy diapers, my kids throw fits, my kids hit me in the face, my kids poured tea on things. And it's embarrassing and humbling, but it's also very real. And um, my kids ask for food from people who have no money, you know, like and this is but it's very real, you know what I mean? And so I think that it's it's if you really want this to be something that can take and take root and be reproducible and let women like share their faith with others, kids are a huge part of it. So it's just it is just messy. But there's little, you know, we have little tactics that we can talk about, and and some women are, you know, even better at it than others, as far as like locals know how to do things, you know. But yeah, kids is a big obstacle. The the like the the amount of time you can focus, and then just the responsibilities of women. Like off oftentimes you'll show up and it's like, oh, and then actually a major obstacle that you just wouldn't find in other cultures, like Western cultures, is um you have a time, you have a moment, you've like left your kids, you've driven an hour, you're like here for this thing that you know is important, and especially as they become like believers and they have intense discipleship issues, or they're gonna like have groups, they're responsible, and it's like you're creating this moment, this strategy meeting. And then guests come. So the guests come in and the women cannot say no. You know, they have to receive the guest, or guests have shown up the night before, whatever it is. So oftentimes the the interruption that is just so accepted and normal in this culture. Whereas Westerners we'd be like, I'm so sorry, you can come in two hours, you know. Yeah, you can let me hear it down. Um, that's actually a pretty, a pretty big, but you just have to receive it. You have to go with it, you have to learn how to flow. And it you can't get banana shape because it is the culture. So you just have to kind of work around it, or you know, work inside of it, work around it. So yeah, those are those are some of the main obstacles I can think of.

Speaker: 56:54
Sounds like it just needs a lot of flexibility and a lot of patience and a lot of commitment over a long period of time.

Speaker 3: 57:01
Yes, I would say yes to all of that.

Speaker: 57:04
I I find these conversations to be so, so, so interesting. And I feel like you've got such a a window into a world that I I don't have access into being a woman and being integrated into society and into culture. So this has been very fascinating. And uh yeah, uh, Lord willing, we'll have another conversation. Thanks so much for being with me.

Speaker 3: 57:26
Yes, thank you. It's really an honor.

Speaker: 57:28
Amen to that. Well, I hope you really enjoyed that. I know I did, I feel encouraged, convicted, and you know, just learning the power of enduring hope, the power of poopy diapers, and the power of learning to deal with chaos. Praise God, he can use all of us in all of our circumstances. And as we close, I just want to remind you that it's okay to be normal.