

SPEAKER_00 0:10

Welcome to the Practical Missions Podcast. I'm your host. Today in the pod, I talk to the author of the book, A Brighter Vision, rethinking the way we see missions, movements, and making disciples. You can get his book for just one dollar on Amazon Kindle, and the link is in the description in the show notes. My guest takes us through his journey of being a young and excited missionary, ready to see discipleship movements happen. He had all the right strategies and the right methods, but through a few paradigm shifting experiences, he started to ask if DMM, discipleship making movements, was really biblical at all. Today's pod will be especially helpful for any cross-cultural worker who wants to see God work but feels burdened under a mountain of methods and strategies. I really do have the perfect guest for you today. So stay with us.

Growing Up With A Missions Vision

SPEAKER_01 1:09

Yeah, so I grew up in a believing family, you know, strong, believing mother, raised me to love Jesus, know Jesus. And I I feel really thankful that I grew up in a really missions-minded church. You know, I can remember as a child, like these big missions conferences we would have every year. And you you come into the sanctuary and there's flags from all over the world, and speakers from all over the world, and translators, and accents you never heard before, and wild stories about jungles and that kind of thing. When I look back, I I feel like it just sort of got in my blood, you know, uh the the missions bug, the missions passion, such that when I was a freshman in college, uh it just kind of felt natural to go overseas. It just uh you know, looking back, I think the Lord was was calling me and working in me, but it just felt obvious in a sense that this is what I was supposed to

do. So I graduated college and three weeks later I was on an airplane to the Arab world to start learning Arabic. So that takes us up to 2015.

SPEAKER_00 2:02

Wow, that's uh that's incredible. I I love it, and I think uh one of the things that worries me is actually that in the West that there is a the the focus on missions is far less today than maybe it was 20 years ago in local churches.

SPEAKER_01 2:18

Yeah, that's an interesting thought. Yeah, I you know, someone told me I was telling them about our church's missions conference, and they said something like that. They're like, man, churches don't really do that anymore, at least a lot of the ones they they they knew of. I do think it's a shame. I I I wouldn't know a lot about why, but I I feel so thankful for that like global heart that was just and it wasn't just the conferences, you know, it's like a week in, week out thing, just the Great Commission, the Great Commission. I probably heard that phrase a thousand times before I turned 18. Uh, and just this this heart of God for the whole world. There's nothing sweeter for a child to get growing up.

SPEAKER_00 2:52

Yeah, amen to that. So you came out to the Middle East. Tell me about where your focus was, what your passions were, what your dreams were when you came out to the Middle East.

SPEAKER_01 3:00

I'm sure

Arriving With Movement Expectations

SPEAKER_01 3:01

this is something we'll get into, but uh when I came to the field, looking back, you know, uh 11, almost almost 12 years now, I I see like aspects of my desires, my intentions, my goals that are really beautiful and that I still cherish. And I kind of look back at that, you know, naive excitement that a that a 22-year-old has when they jump into some endeavor and and almost feel jealous of that guy, that that younger version of myself and his just you know zeal and excitement. And so there were some beautiful things in that, but but at the same time, you know, I came out, and I I think a lot of this came with some of the mentalities, the paradigms I had been trained in, that you know, the training I had received. I came out with very high expectations of myself. It would not be an exaggeration to say that I was expecting within two, three, four years, I'm gonna have seen a lot of manifest visible fruit in the Arab world. I'm gonna have started a movement or multiplied a bunch of churches. I just kind of had this real confidence in myself and my team that we were locked and loaded, you know, we we had we had learned the trainings, we knew what to do. It was just a matter of time, and not much time at that either. So I see like beautiful, naive passion, but also some like pride and cockiness that I look back and say, ooh, I I I wish I hadn't come over with that.

SPEAKER_00 4:20

I resonate with both of those things, the passion and excitement in the beginning. Sometimes, yeah, sometimes I miss that.

SPEAKER_02 4:27

Yes.

SPEAKER_00 4:27

I miss the excitement. But also this I this thought, of course, nobody wants to go out into the mission field and and quote

unquote not be used by God. Of course, we all come out because we have a passion to see people come to faith. We want to see men and women bow their knee before the gracious, good, and kind Lord Jesus. Where do you think, when you look back, where do you think some of those ideas of like, man, we're gonna see a movement, two, three years tops? Where do you think some of those ideas were coming from?

SPEAKER_01 4:56

To be very blunt, I think it was I I don't know if that was ever explicitly stated to me, uh, but you know, a lot of my training and reading was from the kind of movement methodology camp. I'm sure probably a lot of your listeners will be familiar with that phrase, you know, the idea of disciple making movements, DMM, or church planning movements, CPM. Sometimes you hear four fields or T4T thrown in there. I had kind of ingested a lot of that stuff before I came to the field. Again, some of that I find really, really, I'm really thankful for. I think was was helpful, and and to this day, I kind of appreciate some of that influence. But but then, you know, again, I don't ever remember anyone explicitly saying if you do these tools, you will 100% see a movement in the next three years. But I do feel like that was at least sometimes implicit in what I was getting. I think also unintentionally, sometimes with the best intentions, you have these movement trainers or these books that you know share story after story of you know, so-and-so was doing ministry a traditional way, they were seeing no fruit. And then they started using this method I'm about to teach you, and within two and a half years, they had a thousand churches, they had a hundred churches, they had two hundred baptisms, you name it. And you you hear those stories so many times that it it again it kind of just gets into your subconscious as this expectation that this is kind of simple. You just you just use these tools. If you have enough faith, if you work hard enough, the the fruit's gonna come. I regret a lot of how that influenced me

because again, it created some cockiness and it created this kind of sense of urgency, but not a good urgency, kind of an impatient urgency, this rushed expectation, so such that when you start meet someone who's interested in Jesus, you're already putting, oh, this guy's a movement leader onto him. Before he's even come to faith, you're always visualizing this huge outcome that you've been, you know, kind of led to expect. And you impose that on people who can't carry it and aren't gonna actually bring it about. And you can do a lot of damage to people. And I'm I'm sad to say I I do think we we did some damage to people because of those just you know unrealistic expectations of of fast fruit we had.

SPEAKER_00 7:05

So you have these expectations and you come out to the field and walk me through kind of what happened next. Where how did you get from you know these expectations of movements and thousands of people coming to faith? And like what what what was the progress of kind of the change that you went through?

Anomalies That Challenge The Model

SPEAKER_01 7:24

Yeah, this is something that I really kind of chronicle, if you will, in uh in my book A Brighter Vision. And and what what I go into there, I you know, I came with this kind of really strong movement paradigm, movement expectations, and I began to face what I call in there anomalies. And an anomaly is like some fact, some reality that doesn't quite fit with the picture of the world or of ministry or of missions that you've adopted. And it it kind of starts to you know niggle at you, starts to kind of bother you. You say, hmm, this doesn't quite fit into my boxes that I that I have adopted. And there's a number of those that I you know I go through in the

book, um, and each one kind of built up on the last one. But you know, some that come to mind are, you know, for example, I had kind of come to this place, even though, as you know, uh, you know, I love teaching, I appreciate good teachers, but I kind of had received this expectation that teaching is kind of an embarrassing thing. It's kind of that's kind of a bad bad word, a dirty word in in movement work. Uh teaching slows down movements. Uh it's either totally to be avoided or marginal in the progress of the gospel in a new location. Why would we teach people when we can let them discover on their own truths of scripture and the Holy Spirit will be their teacher? Like, what why does why does God need us? I had that view, but then I would come to the book of Acts and see, man, they didn't seem to view teaching the way I view it. They seem to be very happy to do it, to do it with new believers, to do it anytime and all the time. I mean, uh, you know, the the the word teaching or some cognate of that shows up over 20 times in the book of Acts. It's I don't think it's unfair to call it like a teaching movement. And of course we can go into okay, what did that teaching look like? Did it look the way that churches in the West do it today? Maybe not uh exactly, maybe not all the time it was like that. You know, that there's all those good, nuanced conversations we can have. But the the fact of the matter is there is there's no discovery Bible study in the Bible, no discovery Bible studies in the book of Acts, and a whole lot of people proclaiming the good news about Jesus and instructing people in how to follow Jesus once they've believed that good news. So it was little things like that that started to kind of itch at me, scratch at me, and make me say, I believe that movement methodology is the reincarnation of apostolic ministry. But then I actually look at apostolic ministry and it seems to conflict with a lot of what I've been taught, a lot of what I'm telling other people, a lot of what I'm trying to do. So it was kind of those things. You know, another one that would really get at me is I would hear about a movement or a bunch of people coming to

faith. You know, then a year or two later I would come back and ask the person who had told me about that, or the person who was involved in it, and they would say something to me like, yeah, that that movement kind of fell apart. It turns out that the guy who was leading it was lying. It seems like it was if anything happened at all, it was way smaller than we thought. Or, you know, yeah, that there were a bunch of believers, but then there's a bunch of persecution, and now the missionary who was kind of overseeing that work can't really find any of these believers. He doesn't really know what happened to them. I would hear things like that. And that really started to also, you know, to bother me, to get at me, and raise questions about, okay, these movements I'm hearing about, I hear the big numbers, I hear the the you know encouraging stories at conferences, uh, you know, around lunch tables with other workers, you name it. I but then I don't usually hear the collapse part of the story unless I go and seek it out myself. So what's what's going on here? And and that's not to say that every report of a movement is followed by a collapse. You know, I would I wouldn't be saying that, but just that reality of movement collapse, of faked movements, the the degree to which uh Western missionaries were being duped by deceitful locals, but that that work was at least for a period of time being reported as a lot of fruit. Things like that started to uh make me feel unsettled about my view of things. And then there were kind of two experiences, which I can I can go into if you'd like, that were kind of, you know, I call them triggers in the book. There were

South Asia Reality Check

SPEAKER_01 11:48

others besides these two, but the two biggest ones were first, I went to South Asia, I won't say the country name, but you know, went to a place where I heard about a bunch of movements

happening, a bunch of multiplication happening, and we were told, hey, we're seeing you know, churches planted left and right, and we we can't handle it all. We need more help. Even though you don't know the language here, you can come over and immediately be effective through translators. So me and some teammates kind of jumped in on that, and we we wanted to see these you know multiplication that we were hearing about. That was sort of a cognitive dissonance moment for me. It it really sort of unsettled me. I did see things in South Asia that were encouraging. I do feel like there was like an openness to Jesus there, more than the Arab world where I was serving, and that was refreshing to see hunger for Jesus. It did seem like there were some signs of legitimate growth in the church in the area that we were working in. But I also saw like a lot of things that really bothered me. That, you know, kind of these anomalies I was feeling, they start really getting cranked up. This sense of uneasiness I was feeling about reports of of movements that turn out to not be true or turn out to be exaggerated, or you know, you hear this whole family has come to faith and now we're discipling them. Do you want to go on this visit? And you go and you sit down in this this home and you're like, goodness, I I don't speak the language, I want to be slow to judge, but I don't see any signs of genuine faith in these people. To me, they seem to be polite Hindus that are willing to go along with the Discovery Bible study, but I I I don't feel nearly as sure that these people have any comprehension of who Jesus is compared to what's being reported to me. So it was it was sort of things like that. And and I could also mention just the concerning widespread greed among local believers. And this doesn't apply to everyone by any means. You know, I met saints and servants of Christ there that were really beautiful, really compelling people that seemed to be very genuine. But there was also just so much, it felt like so many people had figured out what Western ears are itching to hear, and figured out what they needed to say, the numbers they needed to

report, or the stories they needed to tell to get a salary, to get uh support, to get income. I came away saying, man, if this is the great work of God I'm hearing about, I feel way less certain about this stuff than I did before I came. You know, it kind of had an opposite effect to what I was hoping, in a sense. I was hoping to come away encouraged and you know, come away with a lot of movement experience. So that was that was kind of the first trigger. The second one was, so this would have been 20, this was about 2019. So that sorry, that that trip to South Asia was in 2017. The second trigger was about 2019.

Apostolic Fathers And Paradigm Crisis

SPEAKER_01 14:32

I uh started reading the letters or the epistles of who are called that, the apostolic fathers. So this is three men in particular who credibly knew the apostles. They're Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Clement of Rome. Um there's there's like really solid early church tradition that these men personally knew some of the apostles. Uh, and we have letters that survive from their ministry, which is just kind of this extraordinary historical fact. And so I started reading their letters, and what it kind of served as was like um a test case. Like, here is what a disciple of the apostles talks like, here is what he focuses on, here is his kind of perspective on ministry. And so I read these letters, and I'm one, I'm I'm blown away. Like the heartfelt zeal for the Lord that they had, their commitment to Jesus, their commitment to the saints, their passion for holiness and for the gospel, it just really, you know. I mean, if you read these letters, I think most people are kind of moved by how Jesus drenched these people sound and feel. On the other hand, I came away thinking, man, these these men do not talk about the work of ministry the way that I do and my colleagues do. These men have been trained up by apostles,

and they just do not focus on you know statistics, reported number of baptisms, reported number of new churches, reported number of generational streams, tools, gospel tools, uh discovery tools, obedience tools, mapping, generational mapping, all the all these things that you know I was called, I was introducing to people as the recapturing of apostolic ministry were just totally absent from what they were doing. And even just even beyond the specific practical things they were doing, just the whole demeanor, the whole ethos of their approach to God and to ministry, it the way I put it in the book is it it's it had an aroma, a smell, if you will, that was markedly different from the aroma and the smell of the ministry kind of circles, ministry culture I was running in. And it was sort of this wake-up call to me to say, okay, whether or not movement principles and practices are a good thing, you've got to stop calling them the reincarnation of apostolic practice. Because these guys knew apostolic practice, and they they they are the fruit of apostolic ministry, and they are not movement gurus. They are they are not approaching ministry in this sort of um standardized, systematized, strategic, technique-focused work like I am. It was those two things primarily that put me into what I call in the book a paradigm crisis, which then led to a paradigm revolution, which is where I came to the point of saying, okay, I've got to really rethink what ministry is supposed to look and feel like. And there's a lot that I might retain from my past five years on the field, but I think I've got to try by God's help and the help of wise saints, past and present, to chart out a new way of doing ministry that I think is gonna be significantly different than kind of what I've been doing for the past five years.

SPEAKER_00 17:48

Wow, very interesting. Such a fascinating journey that you went on. And just to plug there for a moment, obviously your book, A Brighter Vision, rethinking the way we see missions, movements, and making disciples. I'll put a link to that in the show notes. But

also on the Apostolic Fathers, there's a book called The Apostolic Fathers in English by Michael W. Holmes, which I find to be very accessible. He's got uh his translation is very readable, but also he has some fantastic introductions that help you to kind of understand what you're about to read when you read Ignatius and Clement and these guys. Can I ask a few questions about these two uh things that you just talked about? The one when you were in South Asia, and then the other when you were reading the Church Fathers.

SPEAKER_01 18:34

Yes, yes, please.

SPEAKER_00 18:36

My first question would be why do you think and I've I experienced this as well. I remember being in a training, and we had this guru who was talking about all the different movements that were going on, and then I think he accidentally mentioned the country I was in as experiencing a movement, and then he looked at us and he said, But of course, you would know if that was true or not. And then everybody kind of nervously laughed because we knew it wasn't true. And I just remember thinking, like, this guy knew what he was saying wasn't 100% true, but he just had to get those numbers out there, and I felt like we knew it as well, you know, when everybody kind of nervously laughed. So, my question is so you go out to South Asia and you kind of like you're kind of sniffing around, you're not going out as a cynic, you're going out thinking, like, man, this is really gonna help me, this is going to propel me forward, but then you start to see like, man, this isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Why do you think you were able to see that? But then the other cross-cultural workers who are part of these so-called movements were kind of blind to it. What do you think was going on? What do you think is going on there? That's a good question.

SPEAKER_01 19:36

And I want to speak as highly as I can of those other cross-cultural workers. I mean, I, you know, I just I found them to be very genuine, very earnest for the Lord, very friendly, very happy to let me get involved in what they were doing. So I would say I to some extent, I think they were experiencing these anomalies. It's just what, you know, once you when you have a paradigm, when you have a worldview, it is not easily changed. And and it's it's worth saying that even after I came out of my time in South Asia, I still would have said, I'm I'm pro-movement, you know, I would have put myself in the movement camp. Uh that experience alone wasn't enough to put me into a paradigm crisis or lead to a paradigm revolution. I think in a way they reacted kind of similar to I did of, oh, there are problems here, this is messy. But you're, you know, if if you spend much time around movement practitioners, movement coaches, they'll tell you ministry's messy, movements are messy. So you you sort of have these boxes that you can slot things into. You can say, yeah, this is kind of troubling, but movements are messy. There's there's a messy middle. It starts out exciting, gets messy, and then eventually it starts to mature. You can you can put this into categories that kind of make sense of it for you. And and that's to a large extent um what I myself did until you know more anomalies built up, and I had say that second trigger of reading the the Apostolic Fathers. Yeah, I think that's one reason. Uh uh maybe a second reason is I I don't know, I've I've always been a thinker, an analyzer. I'm always trying to really get to the bottom of a thought, if that makes sense, to really search it out and and make it all coherent and fit. And I think just that sort of mental you know tendency I have caused me to hone in on the anomalies and to really be really wrestle with them, maybe more than your average worker might. I mean, of course, there's you know exceptions to that, and there's all kinds of things that that I miss. I'm not saying I'm this perfect

analyzer, but I'm just saying I think that's part of what was going on. I had a demeanor that was more prone to really try to wrestle with these things and to really be willing to be confronted by them and made uncomfortable by them. I think, again, that's nothing good about me. That's just kind of how I'm wired.

SPEAKER_00 21:51

It's very interesting. Just a comment about the early church fathers as well. I remember reading them, thinking kind of like what you did. Man, these guys sound uh very familiar to me. That was my first thought. I was like, I know these guys, these I know the God they worship, I know the Jesus who saved them. There's a language that I understand. And then at the exact same time, it was like, but these guys also don't speak like me at all. You know, it's like this is this aspect of familiarity on one side, I know I know these guys. And then this other side where it's like, man, their emphasis is very different than what I'm what I'm emphasizing.

SPEAKER_01 22:33

That's really well said. That's exactly kind of how I felt.

SPEAKER_00 22:36

So, you know, in in movements, it's this almost this kind of like race for numbers. And like you said, maybe people don't say it like this, but it's understood that if you follow our best practices, if you follow our steps correctly, if you follow them correctly, then you're going to see the fruits that we saw. You'll see the results that we are seeing in you know, in this place over here, you'll see them in your location if you follow what we say precisely.

When Methods Fuel Missionary Burnout

SPEAKER_00 23:03

Maybe speak into a little bit about how that worldview is causing burnout in so many cross-cultural workers. What have you experienced or noticed there?

SPEAKER_01 23:15

Yeah, it's a great question. That is something I I try to hone in a lot in the book because I, you know, I think there's a lot of good conversations going on around is movement biblical? Is it wise? Is it the best practice? I find that on the ground, in my view, one of the biggest issues with movement is not just is it right or not? Of course, that's vitally important, but it's also what impact is it having on missionaries? And um, you know, my personal experience was that on the front end, these kind of high expectations are really exciting. It feels very energizing, you know, to be given this very simple kind of system, set of tools that you can church plant churches by. Yeah, it feels very empowering on the front end. But then you go out with as much faith as you can muster, as much diligence and doggedness as you can muster, and you try to run the play that you've been given. And two years later, three years later, four years later, five years later, ten years later, fifteen years later, you know, depending on the individual, you haven't seen that fruit. What was at first empowering, I find often becomes exhausting. What was at first experienced as a blessing comes to be felt more like a burden. You begin to ask yourself, like, okay, if I've got the tools and I've got the knowledge and I'm trying to do ministry, what's missing? Is it something in me? Do I lack the faith? Do I just lack the skill, the necessary ability to put this into practice? Do I lack the apostolic gifting? Like, what is it that's keeping me back from seeing a movement? This can really become a weight on your soul. In the introduction of the book, I describe it as it almost felt as if there was like a ticking clock inside of me. And it's just, you know, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. And that clock is like

measuring every second that goes by without me having started a movement. It's it's this um immense sense of pressure. This is supposed to be happening fast, it hasn't happened fast. Uh, when is it gonna happen? If it doesn't happen, what am I doing wrong or what's wrong in me? Uh that's that's the way that I eventually began to sort of experience this. And so when I when I had this change of ministry view, change of worldview, however you want to put it, I just it was like a like a yoke being taken off my shoulders. I mean, I was, you know, almost giddy with relief. Wow. This ability to like exhale, finally let out a sigh and say, Man, if I don't start a movement, that's okay. I don't know if God has called me to start a movement. Like if he wants to use me in that way, you know, wonderful. If I'm involved in churches that plant churches that plant churches, that would be of course something to praise God for and a delight. But that that is not the only track on the ministry field. We we don't serve a one-track God who puts us in a one-track mission. That all kinds of different people are needed to do all kinds of different things. It may be that the work God has called me to in the Arab world has impacts and bears fruit that I cannot see, that is not visible, that I cannot tabulate on a spreadsheet, uh, that I cannot share an impressive case study about at a conference. And that that sense of freedom, it just washed over me like a wave of relief. And I I will be honest and say, the more and more people I talk to, and this was the case before I wrote the book, but especially now that I've written it and people, some people have read it and have given me feedback, the more and more I'm finding other missionaries who have felt the exact same way, who are telling me the exact same thing, who have said, like, reading your book felt healing for me. I felt this sense of guilt that had been on me finally released. Um, you know, other people who, you know, would say you you put language to tensions I was feeling but couldn't articulate. And so it is my sense. You know, burnout is like a complicated reality. We we can get into that if we want. I think it has a lot of factors, but I I

don't think it's unfair to say that one of the key factors leading to burnout for many missionaries today is the expectations and the pressure that movement methodology has put upon them. So I think it's the two burnout and movement methodology for many people are very deeply connected.

SPEAKER_00 27:46

Doing ministry from a sense of guilt. Oh man, I gotta do more, I gotta make this happen, sounds like such a heavy burden. Do you want

Redefining Success Beyond Visible Fruit

SPEAKER_00 27:56

to say something about movements and how the success is measured or and what the problem with measuring success in the movement world is? I don't know if that question is very clear.

SPEAKER_01 28:11

No, yeah, I I'm following you. Um yeah. The first thing I would say, and one thing I always want to do in these conversations is try to be as fair as I can, to give credit where credit is due. You know, the movement world, the movement camp, however you'd like to put it, uh it's a very diverse set of people. You know, there's no standard gold standard, this is what movement is, this is what it isn't, this is exactly how the paradigm works, these other things don't count. It's it's a diverse range of views and practices, and you get a real spectrum on how say hardcore or more nuanced people are when it comes to this. So I want to say that, you know, um like I say in the book, you know, I some things I'll say about movement methodology. I'm saying these things happen often or sometimes, not that they happen all the time. There, you know, there are there are some movement

practitioners that I think, you know, I could hear their vision of what success is, their definition of how to measure success, and say, yeah, I basically agree with that. I think we're basically on the same page or or really close. However, I I do think there are mindsets that become common and become popular. And sometimes it can be the more extreme voices that kind of dictate that conversation. And I don't know if it's just who we are as people and as sinners, or you know, it's the the eagerness of young missionaries, but there's something where you know almost the the more sharply something is said, the more easily it gets grabbed onto. And so I do think many, many people get the idea that visible fruit is what this whole shebang is about. We are here to have tangible outcomes that we can count, we can see, we can mark down, and we can measure. What I'm doing in the book, I try to frame a ministry paradigm, a mission paradigm in terms of dials that you turn up and you turn down. So you know you've got this dial and it raises a volume on something, say, and it can be up all the way to 100, or it can be down to zero. And you can shift that to raise it up and raise it down. And and what I what I try to say is I'm not saying that visible, tangible uh outcomes don't mean anything. Yeah, I do think sometimes people, maybe in a bit of an overreaction, can say that. They can say, like, look, we're not we're not supposed to care about what comes out of what we do, we're just supposed to be faithful. I think I think that can be going too far. It's not wrong to look at what you are visibly producing. It's not wrong to consider that. It may even be okay at times to try to count that, to get a real tangible numerical feel on what is happening. I'm not saying that's entirely bad. However, I do think where our dial is as a worker culture on this is way too high. And we are way too oriented towards the visible number, the visible fruit. And we overlook uh a few things with that. One thing we overlook is the fact that, you know, like I said earlier, the thing God has called you to do may not be very visible. It may not be numbers of professions of faith. Maybe it is. Maybe God has

brought you to a place to catalyze that, to incite that in a context. But it could be he has something else for you. Or it could be that you might lead one person to faith who uh is never very fruitful while you're on the mission field, but who 30 years from now has a big impact, or who 30 years from now leads someone else to faith, and that person has a big impact that you never hear about. So there's there's both the fact that God has so many things he wants to do through you that are not visible, that you can't count, you can't put on a spreadsheet, you can't, you know, take a screenshot of it and say, here is my fruit. And there are other things that maybe he does want to do to you that one day will be visible, but they're not going to be visible to you. They're gonna be visible years or even decades or even generations after you have stepped back from this work. And so that that's to me where this view of success can get can get skewed. It's it's too focused on the short term, and it's too focused on what we can see and and touch.

SPEAKER_00 32:22

Yeah, it's very interesting. You know, I think 90% of what a cross-cultural worker does, in a sense, is is not statisticable. You know, 90% of what a cross-cultural worker does is not something you can put in a newsletter and write home about or count calculate it on a spreadsheet, but that doesn't mean that God isn't working or that God isn't pleased. You know, I think of this, uh Jesus says that God is pleased, even if you simply give a glass of cold water in his name. And I think sometimes we're like, man, we have to have the largest movement for God to be pleased with what we're doing, or for our our time and missions to have been worth it, or for us to be worth our supporters giving us money to do this. When God's economy is very different, you know. Even I think of the this parable of the farmer who sows seeds, and then the enemy comes and sows weeds into his good seeds, into his field. And when everything starts to grow, the workers say, Should we

pull up the weeds? And uh Jesus uh the and the farmer says, No, leave them both together because we don't want to uproot the good with the bad. Leave them until the day of harvest comes. And so, even within the work that the visible work that we do have, there's going to be these two going on at the same time. There's going to be people growing and maturing in their faith, and then there's going to be people coming to faith for all the wrong reasons, causing problems, walking away. And then what are we going to put in our newsletters? You talked about dials. You talked about some dials need to be tuned tuned up, turned up, as it were, and some needs to be and some needs to be turned down. And the dials maybe of strategy, method, techniques, reliance on numbers, rapid, visible ministry fruit, those needs to be turned down. But what what is in their place? What do we do instead? What needs to be turned up?

Turning Up Abiding In Christ

SPEAKER_01 34:20

Yeah, that's an excellent question. It allows me to speak to maybe a side of the book and of of kind of this idea that I haven't gotten to get into yet. There's this quote from a great book. The book is called Power Through Prayer, written by this old Methodist preacher from 100 years ago named I. And that is the man or woman themselves, their relationship with Christ, their abiding walk with him, their holiness, their inner character. We we can be so tempted to focus on you know skills and training people in skills and giving them the tools they need that we then underemphasize what this prospective church planter needs, most of all, is Jesus Himself. Amen. He needs Jesus poured into his soul, alive in his spirit. In fact, the the thing that is most going to draw the nations to Christ are holy communities. That's my conviction. I believe we see this in scripture that the real engine of

church growth is not so much having the right tools, the right methods. Though I do acknowledge, again, when it comes to dials, I acknowledge there is some place for that. I'm not saying the method dial goes to zero. But I'm saying if you compare importance, communities of Muslim background or Hindu background or Buddhist background or whatever it is, communities of newly believing saints, loving each other, being formed in holy love, mutual care, care for the church and care for the lost, often in very practical and tangible ways, that is what is going to draw people into the faith. That is what over time creates this cumulative effect that you know snowballs and snowballs and causes the church to grow bigger and bigger and bigger at whatever speed God wills, and that it's maybe not in a quick timeline, but that you know I would say that's what we see in the New Testament and then in the early church history, that more than the apostles having figured out a very good way to teach people how to share their testimony, they were teaching these little collections of believers to love God and to love each other and to shine like little lights. And that shining light, you know, step by step drew people in. It was the transformed character, the strange and beautiful character of these early Christians that won so many pagans from their paganism, from their worship of idols to the church of God. And so that is what I think is underemphasized, and those are the dials we need to turn up. Specifically in the book, I talk about you know abiding in Jesus and overflowing with his spirit. That's that's the first one that needs to be turned up in my view. The second is an emphasis on holiness, and the third is an emphasis on teaching and on knowledge of the word. And so, you know, we can go into any of those that you like, but that's sort of what I'm talking about.

SPEAKER_00 37:52

No, I think it's super important and very helpful. I would I would like to focus just a little bit on abiding in Christ and overflowing with his spirit for the cross-cultural

New Legalism And Practical Abiding

SPEAKER_00 38:03

worker. And I think you used the term new legalism in your book. Uh I don't know if you remember uh using that, but I think it would be interesting maybe just to hear hear what you had to say about that. But then also, how does a cross-cultural worker turn his dial from focusing on numbers to focusing back on Jesus and overflowing with his spirit again?

SPEAKER_01 38:25

When I talk about a new legalism there, what I mean is you know, sort of the old legalism is this fixation on outward righteousness. You know, that's the classic Pharisee. They clean the outside of the cup, but the inside is filthy. A new legalism that I think we are in danger of imparting to people if we are too focused on tools and on quick statistical results is not a focus on outward righteousness, but a focus on outward fruitfulness. We can, again, unintentionally, you know, no one ever goes in meaning to do this, intending to do this, hoping to do this. It is far and away an unintentional, inadvertent thing. But we can go in and when we're engaging with new believers or local partners, potential movement catalysts, uh, we can be so focused on the results, the fruit, the churches, the baptisms, the results of ministry, that on a heart level, what they're picking up from us is knowing Jesus is mainly about spreading Him and being successful in that, visibly successful. And they can then set their spiritual identity upon uh their own fruitfulness or their own success. Or that or you know, they came from a religious background, say they're a Muslim,

that's very focused on works and you know the outcome of your works. And so they come in and become a Christian, and of course, we've shared the gospel with them. We want them to have a gospel identity, but again, uh against our very own wishes, we can be creating in them a new legalistic identity of I'm justified by the fruit I bear. So that's that problem of a new legalism that I talked about. And and uh again, I I can go back to my own ministry and see times where I think I was doing that or in very great danger of having that effect on people. Certainly I it kind of had an effect on myself, you know, when I talked about that sense of burden, that sense of expectation. It in a way, that's a that's a type of legalism I think I had ingested and internalized. Uh I'm sure I'm thinking you had a second part.

SPEAKER_00 40:32

Yeah, my second part was for the cross-cultural worker who says, Man, I'm too focused on methods, strategies, and techniques, numbers, visible fruit. I want to abide in Christ. I I want to overflow with the spirit. What do I do? Like, how do I make that shift?

SPEAKER_01 40:50

I wish there was a very easy answer. Obviously, people are complicated, our hearts are complicated things, so that I don't think there is an easy answer, but I I would maybe start by saying there's first of all the internal piece, and then there's the okay, how are you practicing that piece, the external piece, right? So internally, I think in large part it is it is a matter of examining your heart, and you know, if like me you have this moment of saying, Oh my goodness, I have been unbalancing the priorities on a heart level, even though I verbally would have denied this, on a heart level, I have been cherishing my fruitfulness above my relationship with Christ. I've been trusting in tools instead of the power of the Holy Spirit. I've been looking for better methods when God's been trying to make me a better man. I think you can

call it repentance, if that word is not too heavy a word. It's this moment of saying, Lord, I am I am sorry. I have been from generally good intentions, but nonetheless, I have been walking in a less than helpful way. I've been holding the wrong priorities. And that that act of confession, I think, again can be so liberating. When we confess sin or mistakes or you know, failures to God, he rushes in with grace. There's this immediate opportunity to turn over a new page, to turn over a new leaf, to start in a new direction. And you can you can ask God, like, Lord, uh, show me what it means to abide in you. I always go back to um, I think it's Mark 1.18, where it says, Come and follow me, and I will teach you to become fishers of men. Jesus, you promised, in a sense, that if I come and follow you, you will teach me how to fish in the right way and from the right heart posture. So uh to some extent, let me, I want to learn anew what it looks like to follow you, to walk with you, to walk behind you in this intimate relationship. And uh so that's that's that's kind of the center and the the place where it starts, uh a heart shift. Then the question comes, okay, great. You know, I know I need to be abiding more. You know, every one of us knows we should be praying more than we are, right? And I apply this to myself even today, even you know, six years, seven years into this quote-unquote paradigm revolution, I still regularly find myself falling back into habits of busyness, habits of trusting more in the visible things that I can do than the intangible things that prayer can do, or better put, that God can do through prayer. And so I think it's on the on the day-to-day level, it's it's a matter of seeking as best you can to uh zealously guard your time with the Lord. Something I like telling people is abiding is more than your quiet time, because we we can get into this place, right, where we say, How's your abiding going? And we immediately be giving kind of a laundry list. We we give somebody a laundry list of how our quiet times went for the last few days. Abiding is more than that. Abiding is a heart posture, it is a relational, intimate orientation to Jesus, where in your heart

you're depending upon him and you're drawing life and strength from him. That is the core of abiding. So it's more than a quiet. Time, but our quiet times, our devotional practices are key in experiencing and living out and practicing that kind of relationship. And so on the practical level, you just have to, with God's grace, requesting his grace, seek to renew the extent to which you protect your times with Jesus. You know, we all know those days where you wake up and you've got so much to do, so much on your plate, you've got all these WhatsApp messages, you've got all these tasks on your pseudo list that you that are still unticked, unfulfilled, you've got this big so-and-so coming up at the end of the week, and you just you get stressed, you get busy, you you roll out of bed, and you get into your work, and you haven't, you've failed in that moment to sort of guard this sanctuary space with the Lord. Reminding yourself and really trying to apply in your life, the most important thing I can do today is pray. Not only is that the best thing for my soul, that's also the best thing for my ministry. Like to carve out unhurried time and space with Jesus. That will be that will bear more fruit in the right definition of fruit than any activity I can do. And so guarding those regular rhythms with Christ, I think is just really vital. I would the last thing I would say is I for myself, you know, we're all wired different. You might find something works a little bit differently for you and how you conceive of things, but in my categories, I like to think in terms of you know ordinary rhythms with the Lord and then extraordinary times with the Lord. By that I mean when your relationship with Jesus and your your times of prayer kind of fall into rhythms, and you've got such and such time in the morning, and you've got your team prayer meeting, and you've got this city prayer meeting that you go to every so often, and that's the only times when you're connecting with Jesus. Um, that is not bad, that that's foundational, but I find that I am more alive in Jesus, more attuned to him, more hungry for him, when in addition to that, I'm finding or I'm allowing God to put in front of me other

extra times where I really seek the Lord to try to make that practical. You know, there's this park not too far from where I live, where I do a lot of my ministry. It's not a not a forest, but it's it's getting there for where we live. I will go out there, and there's very few people, especially on a weekday. There are times where it's like, you know, I don't have a lot to do today. I my schedule is kind of open. I'm just gonna drive out to this park and set the next five hours aside to be with Jesus. I don't really have an agenda. Maybe there's a a passage of scripture that's been in my mind. I'm gonna start there. Maybe there's something that's stressing me. I'm I'm gonna get to it at some point. There's a decision I need to make, I'm gonna talk to God about that. But I'm I'm really just going out to uh connect with Jesus. And so you have these extraordinary times. They can be individual or they can be with your your teammates or whoever you do ministry with. You can just, you know, sometimes you'll just get this kind of impulse like, what if we just got together and we worshiped the Lord for this evening? So-and-so canceled, I've suddenly got this span of time that I can I can do whatever I want with. What if I just put on worship music and and get down on my hands and knees and try to connect with God? Those are those unplanned, spontaneous or semi-spontaneous uh pursuits of the Lord, pursuits of time with the Lord, that I find can do wonders for your relationship with Him. So that that those would be some thoughts to get people started with.

SPEAKER_00 47:32

Oh, I find that very, very helpful. I find this whole conversation that we've had today very, very helpful. I appreciate the uh humility that you bring to the conversation. Was there anything, just as we close, was there anything that you wanted to talk about that we didn't mention?

SPEAKER_01 47:50

What comes to mind is this it is possible to shift your dials, as it were, to focus less on strategies and statistics and speed and more on Jesus and holiness without actually kind of shifting your heart motives. You know, we we are we're we're sinners and we have a good way of trying to finagle what we want. And so um, I know I am sinful enough to hear someone say it's it's less about the tool, it's more about trusting in Jesus and walking with Jesus. On a heart level, my conniving heart says, okay, what he's saying is if I want to start a movement or if I want to see a bunch of fruit and become a conference speaker and be praised by my friends and and colleagues, then I need to spend a lot of time with Jesus. And so you you start reorging your schedule, but at a heart level, you're still just trying to get fruit and fame. There's still this prideful impulse to be seen by people as great, to do great things, to have a big visible impact that can sabotage your attempts to recalibrate how you do ministry. And again, that that's in all of us, right? We all have that conniving inner Pharisee who is only out for himself, right? That that I know, I know I've got him. I think just that maybe the final thing I would say is there is so much joy in beholding the face of Jesus. There is nothing like it in this world, and it is an end in itself. It is true that this is a means to being the person that God wants you to be, to use you in the ministry he wants you to do. It is true that beholding the face of Jesus is a means to that reality, to that end. But we approach Jesus in the right way when we come to him as the end itself, as the only thing we want. When we're so enamored with who he is and a desire to connect with him, to uh you know have communion, heart to heart, soul-to-soul communion, that everything else, including the fruit, is is kind of falls to the wayside. You know, it becomes dim in the brightness of his face, as that as that old hymn says. And that would be my encouragement. You know, you can you can come away from this podcast perhaps feeling, okay, I I feel a little bit better about not having to do so much strategic work, but now I just feel guilty about my spiritual life. And and that that that is not where I would

want somebody to leave off. Um rather, see this as an invitation to feast on the bread of life. I just marvel at this reality that hardworking, faithful Christians go to their jobs as accountants and engineers and lawyers and everything else, and they take some of the money they get from that job and they send it over to me so that I can orient my schedule and my life around being with Jesus. It almost feels unfair, right? Like that other people give me money so that I don't have to work in that way, and I can prioritize and centralize the face of the living God in my own life. It is just an inexpressible privilege. And I think when God, by His grace, allows us to come back to the abiding relationship from that perspective with that part motivation, that is when real transformation can happen, and that is when I find so much joy is the result, and so much release from this rat race that we get ourselves into, this expectation of produce, produce, produce that we fall into. It, you know, not perfectly, because we're sinners, I I I fall back into this, but but more than I deserve, and more than I definitely experienced in my early years on the field, you get to this place of saying, I am with God, and if nothing else happens, that is enough for me. Uh it's the sweetest thing in the world, and it really is that good. You you know it's good. We all know it's that good. Um, it's just some hearing someone say that can kind of help you get to the right frame of heart, frame of mind. So that is maybe where what I would what I would try to leave people with.

SPEAKER_00 51:55

Wow. Amen to that. Hey, thank you so much. I think uh it's a perfect word to end our conversation with today. Thank you so much for being on the pod with me. And uh Lord willing, we'll do it again sometime.

SPEAKER_01 52:06

Yeah, brother, thank you so much. It's it's been a joy.

SPEAKER_00 52:09

Amen to that. Well, what a powerful conversation. So interesting to hear his thoughts. This idea of empowering on the front end and devastating on the back end, and how we measure success and needing these dials to be turned up and turned down. Man, I learned so much, and I hope you did too. And remember, you can find his book in the show notes below. But before I let you go, I just want to remind you that it's okay to be normal.