

Alex Kocman: Coming up this week on the show.

Ted Esler: I would want to experiment using different methodologies within my doctrinal understanding and I would try to evaluate the fruit from those. And when I use the word fruit, by the way, the Bible never uses the word, and this is another thing that gets me crazy about the numbers, the Bible never uses the fruit to talk about numeric anything.

Alex Kocman: We dialogue with Ted Esler about movements. Welcome to The Missions Podcast, the show that explores your hard questions on missions, theology, and practice to help goers think and thinkers go. I'm Alex Kocman, Director of Advancement and Communications with ABWE, joined again by Scott Dunford and our friend Ted Esler. We started the conversation with Ted Esler of Missio Nexus last week and we'll include the link in the show notes for you to listen to part one of that conversation.

But today we're bringing you part two and our goal in this conversation was to reset the ongoing dialogue over these practical missions methodologies like disciple making movements, church planting movements, and all of the bag of related issues that come with that. But not only did we want to bring that up, we also wanted to move the conversation forward. We wanted to figure out once and for all where our common ground is, but then where our differences are as well. We're glad you're along for the ride. Before you dive into this half of the episode, please remember, share this show with a friend and leave us a positive review and a five-star rating in your app of choice. That helps us get this content in front of others who can be blessed by it. Now let's explore the second part of our conversation with Ted Esler.

Scott Dunford: I'm gonna bring us back to what I view as the core of our discussion, and I think that's super, that's very interesting discussion, I think, you know, my two cents are there's both. And you know if we're honest, that's the way, most of us prefer that, right? We preach and have discussion and talk about things and certainly I think preaching is important, so is discipleship. And I don't, I'm sure there are people out there saying none of this stuff, only one of this, this or that, but neither of us, none of us are that way.

So I want to get down to what I, I still wanna, I feel like we're trying to lay chess board out as people are discussing movements and this kind of thing. Like getting their mind around what is the debate about, and what is it really not about, and what are misconceptions. So this is how, when I get passionate about this discussion, here's why I get passionate about it, I think Alex would say the same thing. And probably, Ted, just the little bit I've gotten to know you, I feel like you would say the same. I really wish we had hours and hours just to sit around and talk because I really enjoy hearing your thoughts on things. But my question is this, so critics of movements, and I would put myself in that camp, even though I've got a

lot of good friends, I'm not a hater, but I'm critical, right? I'm concerned about the ecclesiology and the soteriology behind some of the movement discussion. And these are some things I've even seen with my own eyes where what's being talked about or pushed, I'll give you like an anecdote to kind of set it up, but I think a lot of our listeners could understand it. I'm working with an unreached people group –

Alex Kocman: What's an anecdote, Scott?

Scott Dunford: What's that?

Alex Kocman: Give us an anecdote.

Scott Dunford: Yes, that's what I do. And I'm sitting in an, in a group of missionaries, we're meeting outside the country we're working in because it's, you know we're working in a really restricted access place with a really unreached people group and no one's really seeing much fruit. I'd worked with some people who'd been doing this for fifteen years with this particular people group and had never seen someone come to Christ. And that was the majority experience of the, with this group of about one hundred missionaries from probably about a dozen or fifteen different organizations. And then one guy stands up and is like, "I've lead twenty-five people to Jesus, and I've got, I'm the only missionary I know that has got four generations of believers, where this guy led, this guy led, this guy led, this guy." And then as we like start talking, as he describes what he's doing, like it's barely Christian. I mean and I'm just like, "Okay," so then my soteriology of fire kind of like, you're not leading people to Jesus at all, you're leading them to a more Jesus-focused type of Islam including continuing to proclaim Mohammed as your profit and continuing to read the Qur'an and all of these kind of things. So not just seeing it as like a methodological difference but like for me sometimes I see it as an ecclesiological and soteriological, so I see it as a doctrinal issue, which puts a whole lot more passion behind it.

So my question is do you see this debate as like primarily as a theological, like doctrinal, soteriological, ecclesiological? You know, for those that aren't familiar with those terms, like doctrine of salvation, and doctrine of the church. Or do you see it as a, not to hijack your book, but as an, as innovative, it is simply methodology problem? Or is it, do you see it as a real doctrinal debate? 'Cause I think how we come to agreement or not agreement, I think that part of it's important.

Ted Esler: Well, let me just respond by saying have you been, have you even been in a church in the US where there was bad doctrine, bad theology happening? Using the model that you support.

Scott Dunford: Oh yeah, mm-hmm.

Ted Esler: Okay, so that doesn't throw –

- Alex Kocman:* No, I'm just –
- Ted Esler:* the whole model out, right? I mean –
- Alex Kocman:* Yes.
- Ted Esler:* that's basically the argument you're making is because some have had heresy, and by the way I would just nobody has propagated more heresy as a culture, I don't know, than the United States has around –
- Alex Kocman:* Amen, we've got plenty of heresy.
- Ted Esler:* the world.
- Alex Kocman:* I will say though that in the churches that I've been in, the reason we've had false teaching, I won't name the church that I was a part of, but it's because of a lack of proclamation, a lack of exposition. So I'll throw that out there.
- Ted Esler:* That's fair.
- Alex Kocman:* I don't think it's too much proclamation that's causing that.
- Ted Esler:* That's fair. I would say that if you want to get into anecdotes, I mean I have been with – so you got to remember, I've been a missionary, I was a missionary back, a long time ago. So I remember when one Muslim coming to Christ, and I was part of a major missions organization. One Muslim coming to Christ would reverberate around the whole world and people would rejoice.
- Scott Dunford:* Mm-hmm.
- Ted Esler:* Just one conversion. Today we're in a very much different environment where we have seen there, by anybody's, anybody's numbers, more Muslims have come to Christ in the last thirty, forty years than at any time in history.
- Alex Kocman:* Yeah.
- Ted Esler:* And at least a good part of that has been through ministries practicing movement work. And I have visited those places and I have seen both, I have seen places where they say, "This is happening," and I've come away and I realize that is not happening there. But I've also visited places where they say it's happening, and I've come away and it's happening there. So anecdotes to me are a tough sell because –
- Scott Dunford:* Well, let me clarify. I was using an anecdote to help make my point, but clearly I didn't do that. What, if I can be more specific –
- Ted Esler:* Try, yeah.
- Scott Dunford:* right, I'll try again, I'll get another run at this. 'Cause I wasn't just using that as like a, I was using it as an example of something that I hear more

commonly. But it gets down to like if we're, if the question of like for instance with disciple making movements. What is a disciple? Is a disciple someone who's just studying the Bible? Is a disciple someone who's been saved and has publicly identified with Christ in baptism and is at least outwardly and publicly identifying himself with Jesus? Or how are we defining that? Or when it comes down to church, is a church a gathered group of self-identified and publicly identifying believers who are gathering for teaching but also for the administration of the ordinances or sacraments? Are there those elements of what we see in New Testament churches, you know the common, the definition of church that kind of comes out of the reformation and even preceding that that we see? Or is church a lot looser than that? Because it does seem that's some of the disagreements of like when you see, you know, the latest, I think it was from the IMB, you know like, I forget what the number was, Alex, you know 17,000 churches planted in South Asia. But then the rest of the world has got like a tiny little number of churches planted and you're like, "Is there, are they working from the same definition of church that everyone else is working on?" And so then it becomes like a, it seems like then it's an ecclesiological issue, not just simply a "Wow, they finally found a model that's really working and everyone else is stuck in their old ways of hymnals and ties."

Alex Kocman: Yeah, the exact number is 17,000 people in South Asia alone. There was new churches reported in 2020, whereas the same agency reported double digits to triple digits in every other part of the world of churches planted.

Scott Dunford: And I know we're gonna talk about numbers later, so I don't wanna totally get off track, but I think that highlights a little bit of the tension. Do you, I guess my question more specifically is do you see this as a doctrinal conflict or just simply a methodological conflict?

Ted Esler: I think it's hard for me to answer that because I think in most cases it's methodology, but I think in other cases I would say it is doctrinal or theological. Like I'm aware of a group, I won't name who they are, but they work on a lot of campuses, and they report basically what I would call a Bible study happening in a dorm room as a church.

Scott Dunford: Mm.

Ted Esler: Now for me, that doesn't cut it. That's where it would hit a doctrinal issue for me. On the other hand, some of the definitions I see floated around on what constitutes a church, I mean it's probably going back to your liturgical podcast but it's above and beyond what the scriptures talk about in terms of being a church.

Alex Kocman: Yeah.

Ted Esler: I mean you look at discipleship and what it is, I mean we have pathetic discipleship here in the US. I'm sorry, but we do. And even, I don't

wanna, can't get into that, but I feel like even in my household I wonder about the discipleship sometimes, you know? And it –

Alex Kocman: Well, we know who to blame for that though.

Ted Esler: Yeah, exactly, you do. But the –

Alex Kocman: I'm right there with you, brother.

Ted Esler: the point just being that I do think that there are times and again, you can anecdotally pull out lots of instances of place, I mean I personally have seen them. I've been taken on dog and pony shows basically to show, to see, kind of show of ministry, and come away thinking that's really incredible, what's happening there, only to gain additional information later on that makes me think, "Oh wow, we were misled." And I think it all goes to the problem inherent in evaluating and analyzing these kind of things. Not just movements, by the way, but also what I would call very traditional missionary work. It can be misleading to outsiders, what's happening locally. So it's hard for me to answer that question in a, with a yes or a no, a thumbs up or a thumbs down. And I'm not trying to equivocate, I'm just trying to say –

Scott Dunford: No, I know, I feel like the problem is the question and not the response. So let me ask it another way. Would it be helpful for an organization like Missio Nexus or, okay, Missio Nexus isn't a missionary sending organization, but, or let's just say any organization to define what they mean by a church and define more specifically what makes a, at what point – I feel like in Christian history it's been pretty obvious what, when you qualify someone as a disciple. It's someone who is baptized and publicly desiring to follow Jesus but then maybe that's just my own take. But do we need to have more definition around what do we mean when we use these terms as disciple? Is a disciple anyone doing a Bible study? Is a church any group of people studying the Bible? Is that the, is that part of the problem, that we don't have definition to what we, our organization believes the Bible teaches on those topics?

Ted Esler: I would say it would be easier for me to answer that question when you talk about church than it would disciple. And I would hope that if an organization is committed to church planting, I would hope that they would have some kind of idea of what the target is. And if they don't, I would really wanna ask questions about what that might look like. But a great, and a great exercise and it's one I've been undertaking as I've been going through the book of Acts myself, a great exercise to employ is to ask yourself at what point was this group that Paul started a church? For example, he says go and appoint elders in all the churches. Well, how can you appoint elders, how can it be a church if there's no elders there yet? But he says appoint elders in all the churches. But wait a second, he doesn't say appoint elders in all the discipleship groups that we hope to become churches.

- Scott Dunford:* Mm-hmm.
- Ted Esler:* But this is the kind of parsing that we place on these things. So, but I would say that if –
- Alex Kocman:* But also notice that Paul, but also notice that Paul as the missionary is going in and is appointing people to office, right? It's not a completely organic process, so I think that's a helpful text –
- Ted Esler:* Okay, let's drill down on that one. So let's take the church in Colossae. A great, one of my favorite books on first century church was written by a guy named Wayne Meeks, it's called "The First Urban Christians." And in that book, he talks about what the church in Colossae looked like. Now we don't do this, but the apostles tended to call churches by their city name, not by their First Baptist designation, right? And he would say that the most likely scenario was that in that city there were numerous houses meeting, that none of those houses were considered a church, but together they had shared leadership and the elders were actually appointed over that grouping or network of house churches. Well, that's a different model than, you know, average pastor has in the US. We are very much a congregation, elders appointed over that congregation whereas if Wayne Meeks is right, and it's just Wayne Meeks, right, so who knows, but he's got lots of good evidence in the book. But if he's right about that, then what we would call a house church is really probably not the house church that we think of as an unto itself church, but it's connected to something a little bit bigger. So you know there, and again I would hope that there's some flexibility on that thing, on that kind of thing, but I would agree, Scott, with the idea that if your organization is about church planting, you had better have an idea of what the target is and you should define that and make sure your missionaries understand it and know it and are seeking to fulfill that objective.
- Alex Kocman:* I don't know that we can, I appreciate the thoughtful response, Ted. I don't know if we can define church but then have, but not define disciple. I agree it's probably easier to define church than define disciple.
- Ted Esler:* Yeah.
- Alex Kocman:* Right, 'cause when you define disciple then you get into like, "Well, is this person truly regenerate or not?"
- Ted Esler:* Right.
- Alex Kocman:* And there's some subjectivity there. Church you can look at objective factors, right? This is where I actually find, you know so full disclosure, I'm a Baptist. Not a babdis –
- Scott Dunford:* What?

Alex Kocman: but I am a Baptist. And in chapter twenty-six of the London Confession there's this statement, "All persons throughout the world professing faith," excuse me, "professing the faith of the gospel and obedience unto God by Christ according unto it, not destroying their own profession by any errors or adverting the foundation or on holiness of conversion," so basically, everyone who claims to hold to this gospel faith and obedience to Christ and is not destroying their profession of faith through their lifestyle, "are and may be called visible saints," so these are people who appear to be visibly Christians and of such ought to all particular congregations to be constituted." In other words, a church is a collection of disciples, people who appear to be disciples. So we really have to define disciple before defining church. And I think what's critical is that we realize that yeah, a disciple is an obedient believer and follower and then churches should be composed of people like that. I do think that, that a lot of clarity could be gained if organizations were willing to put their flag in the ground and define a disciple, define the nature of conversion, define the nature of what is the local church. Ted, why do you, why do you think it's so hard for us to decide that? Is that because we're just coming from so many different denominational and theological camps? But we're unified in some of our missions conferences and conversations on methodology, but we have fundamentally different doctrines of conversion. I'm curious why you think we haven't been able to nail down –

Ted Esler: Doctrine of conversion is different –

Alex Kocman: the definition of disciple –

Ted Esler: doctrine of conversion is different –

Alex Kocman: and the church.

Ted Esler: than disciple.

Alex Kocman: Sure, but they're related.

Ted Esler: Yeah, they're definitely related.

Alex Kocman: One brings up the other, yes, one brings up the other.

Ted Esler: So my conversion experience happened through the Navigators, the very defined idea of what a disciple is, and I would say the bar is pretty high.

Scott Dunford: Yeah.

Ted Esler: In that tradition. What you said basically just now is if they're followers of Jesus, they've hit the bar. Somebody else might say, "Are they taking up their cross and following Christ daily?" That's gotta happen if they're gonna be, you know, get the name of a disciple. Well, how much obedience qualifies one? You know, what if they're obedient on ninety percent of the things, but ten percent of things they don't do. Are they a disciple then? I think, you know, I think theologically we can probably

define it, but this kind of gets down into us trying to determine if someone's saved or not, and it, it can get us in trouble.

Let me just say, one thing you just did is you just made a point that the DMM people make all the time, which is that a church is a collection of disciples. And they would say that the church happens in the context of discipleship, which is the opposite thing that the traditional or the proclamational model has tended to make, which is that the church is necessary for disciples to occur. So the two, when I talk on this difference, okay, I say the proclamational model tends to say grow in the Lord, come to church. And that's true, and that's, I'm not arguing with that point. But the discipleship folks tend to say the church happens after you have a collection of disciples, not beforehand. And so we gotta do discipleship preceding even, in some cases they would say before the salvation point because people gotta understand that obedience is a part of this process. So.

Scott Dunford:

Mm.

Ted Esler:

I, we're probably talking semantics here, but.

Scott Dunford:

But the semantics is where the problem is, right? Especially, like all of this is a semantics discussion, in some ways.

Ted Esler:

Fair enough.

Scott Dunford:

Because while yes, a church is a collection of disciples, disciple making happens within the context of church. And I don't mean, when I say church, I'm not meaning just Sunday morning proclamation only, I mean like within the body of believers. I think that's probably a huge part of the issue with American churches, at least in my area, is that people see the discipleship process and their walk with Jesus as completely divorced from the community of faith. They don't see themselves as, that is a necessary –

Ted Esler:

I agree.

Scott Dunford:

component of that. Where it does seem that like is something Jesus and the apostles clearly taught, that the community of faith is where we grow to become mature disciples. And I guess maybe that's, I wouldn't consider it, I –

Ted Esler:

That's not a luxury a missionary has.

Scott Dunford:

see a disciple as someone who's –

Ted Esler:

That's, a missionary doesn't have that luxury. So –

Scott Dunford:

Explain.

Ted Esler:

if you're going into –

- Scott Dunford:* I don't understand, I'm not sure I follow.
- Ted Esler:* a pioneering place, there's no church to disciple them into. So, that's why I say that question of when was it a church and when was it, you know, was it when the elders were appointed? Well, Paul's already calling it a church at that point, that would argue toward the collection of disciples argument.
- Alex Kocman:* So, so Ted, my intention in reading that line from the Confession was not to say that a church is only a collection of disciples.
- Ted Esler:* Okay, good.
- Alex Kocman:* Because I believe there are such things as parachurch organizations. I work at one, right? ABWE is not a church. I would hold the historic Protestant marks of a church, so the right administration of word and sacrament, or ordinance, whatever word you prefer there. Baptism and the Lord's Supper there being two. And church membership. Some people roll discipline into that as well, but it's part and parcel that there's identifiable membership there. I don't think that's western.
- Ted Esler:* Well, what you just described though can be executed in many different ways.
- Alex Kocman:* Exactly, that's why it's not exclusively western, yeah.
- Ted Esler:* Right. I would probably –
- Alex Kocman:* It works everywhere, it works globally.
- Ted Esler:* have a little catch on the idea of membership as we know it. But I'd say for the most part I agree. But listen, if you and I were planting churches shoulder to shoulder, this gets back to Scott's question, these things should be clear and ironed out.
- Alex Kocman:* Yes, yes, yes.
- Ted Esler:* So you know, I'm fully on board that, one of the reasons why you have these debates going on is because there are differences in how we're understanding and defining. The other difference that's important to point out and I wrote this note down like ten minutes ago as we were talking, I wanna come back to it. And that is the way people talk about movements is not really what happens on the field. So you get this idea that they got a model in mind, and they're pursuing that model, but then when you show up, my experience is it rarely is actually happening like that on the ground. And if you talk to field missionaries, they're actually plucking components of the proclamation model, and they're plucking a few components from the CPM model, whatever the CPM model is they're using. They're actually not following any of these methodologies purely in their context.

Alex Kocman: Yeah, that's true.

Ted Esler: And so again this is why I think the temperature on the debate might need to come down a little bit 'cause we're debating in some cases over something I don't think is really happening out there.

Scott Dunford: I do agree that on the field it looks differently. But I think there's some really bad consequences on this side of the pond, and that is, at least one of them is that an expectation is set that puts pressure, and this maybe leads us to the, I would love, I think we need to go down this hole again and I just, obviously we don't have enough time to talk about all of these issues, there's several things I'd like to follow back on but I just don't think we can do it today. But there, I do hear pressure being put on missionaries and feel that there's pressure put on missionaries to perform – when they're hearing like, "Hey, other places in the world are doing this and that and the other and amazing things are happening." And here am I in my corner of the world, I'm faithful, and I'm proclaiming or I'm doing these studies and I'm, you know, I'm praying for a person of peace, and it just isn't taking off like it sounds like it's taking off everywhere else in the world. And you know you hear this on conferences on this side of like, "Well, here's what's going on over here, and here's what's going on over here." And, "You guys are doing it all wrong because over here everything's going amazingly, and if we just got out of the way, watch what could happen." And I feel like the train that's going behind it and the emphasis going in behind it, and then the dollars that end up going, being redirected from one place to another become a real problem.

Alex Kocman: And there's more to it than just that because it's also, you and I both know people who have just asked some of these questions and have been accused of being insubordinate, have been sent out of agencies.

Scott Dunford: Yeah.

Alex Kocman: And conversations open about like well, if we're discipling people outside of local church, then do we want to let nationals come to our church, and we're not gonna plant a church 'cause we don't want nationals coming in, they're already disciples. And so it creates real division, and those divisions are harmful. So there's a real pressure, I agree with you, Scott.

Scott Dunford: And I don't know that we can go, I mean I would rather not go completely, getting into who, people getting let go, I mean that goes into stuff we don't really totally know a lot about. But if I can just take it a different direction and, Alex, and you can feel free to disagree and take it back to where you wanted to go with that. But like I wanna talk in the time we've got because we're already a good way into this conversation timewise, but numbers, right?

Ted Esler: Yeah.

Scott Dunford: So and counting, I mean you read “Wind of the House of Islam,” and it’s like, “Whoa, what am I doing over here? Let’s go to where all the action is and where scores and scores and scores of people are getting saved.” And yet, and I do hear, you know you hear stories out of Iran, and you hear stories out of south Asia, and you hear, you hear some amazing things and I want all of it to be true. I really hope on the day of the Lord that we stand, and we see all the numbers were great. But then we also, but we also hear from people on the field that are like, “I’m looking for these churches, and I’m trying to find it, and I can’t find any evidence of that, and it doesn’t really seem like what we’re hearing on the ground is actual.” And so the question I have for you is is it about the statistics? And we’ve talked to Justin Long on here about stats, it’s really an interesting, mission stats is a fascinating discussion by itself. But as a missiologist, and the head of Missio Nexus, what are your thoughts on counting and the counting numbers behind number reporting? Should we be skeptical of that or, or is it accurate and just hidden? What are your thoughts?

Ted Esler: Well, I, so my view is that the number counting game is very harmful in a lot of way. I think it is an example of a performance orientation that hurts our missiology. I don’t think a lot of the numbers are real or valid. That’s not to say there aren’t great things happening in a scale and scope that is historic in many parts of the world. And what really gets me worked up more than anything else is when I see cost analysis, how much it cost to plant a church, and you’re seeing things like – and I just got an email like this a day or two ago and I wrote back to the organization right away and I said, “You gotta stop this, this is just misleading.” But it was x number of dollars to plant a church through our organization last year, and the number was in the a couple hundred-dollar range.

Scott Dunford: Yeah.

Ted Esler: And that just, that kind of thing is, it’s harmful to the entire missionary enterprise, not just the movement people. I don’t know why it’s helpful to have those kinds of numbers and that kind of reporting. And I would also say, now I’m a pretty seasoned missionary traveler; I’ve been to a 120 countries plus, I’ve sat in the room with many people doing movements. And I’ve been duped into thinking things are not what they are on numerous occasions. Those are the ones I know about. There’s probably other ones I never realized I was being duped in, okay. So if that can happen to me and I know some of the right questions to ask and to drill down on, trust me, it’s happening on a broader scale to people that are less traveled than I am. And I’m not trying to put myself out here as the expert that knows better than everybody else, but I do think that it’s very easy for people to come away with the wrong idea about what’s happening. And I don’t even, and I would not even ascribe this to outright charlatanism and lying, I think a lot of times it’s enthusiasm and it’s naivety, and it’s the

idea that we're gonna always think the best. And I'm positive, I wanna think the best.

Alex Kocman: Yeah, sure.

Ted Esler: But, you know, I do think the numbers thing is a real problem. I love Justin, you know, I love what he's doing. I would not make those kind of reports, statistically. I'll give you an example. When you introduced me at the beginning of this podcast, you said, "Missio Nexus has 30,000 workers." Well, we just did a survey of all of our membership, and we just concluded that if you counted up all the staff it's actually, now we don't have any workers frankly. These are the staff of our organization –

Scott Dunford: Representatives.

Ted Esler: so not, don't wanna say these are our workers, okay?

Scott Dunford: Yeah.

Ted Esler: They're your workers that we're reporting on. Now when somebody sits out there and hears that we have all these workers, they think, "Oh wow, Missio Nexus is a big deal." You know we're five people working in remote offices to serve you guys that actually have the missionaries. But the uninformed person sitting out there, they don't get that, and they don't know that.

Alex Kocman: Mm-hmm.

Ted Esler: So we recently asked our staff to remove from our website four or five phrases that have to do with the scale and scope of our work because we think that it could easily give someone a wrong idea. And I wish missionaries tended more toward underreporting than what I think is happening, which is overreporting.

Alex Kocman: Yeah. There's always a temptation to speak that way and when you see success, to reverse engineer it and to want to police each other on, "Hey, just do this and then we'll get to these numbers." And you know there are interests, right, and there're donors and those are real sin problems where we're tempted toward exaggeration and it can, yeah, it can whatever camp you're in. You can be tempted to exaggerate and be dishonest in some way and I think we have to constantly be living before the face of God and letting him scrutinize us and looking ourselves in the mirror the way that you guys were when you described that. That's helpful, Ted.

So my question for you is do you see a way forward? What would you suggest to those like us who are critical of DMM? But would you also suggest to those who are passionate about these methodologies and kind there's the temptation to exaggerate and yeah, I think you're doing a good job representing your side and policing your own ranks. What is the way forward? Maybe what're some ways that you would challenge both sides?

- Ted Esler:* Yeah. Well, I'd say the first thing I would do, so I wrote an article in 2013 about –
- Alex Kocman:* Mm, ancient.
- Ted Esler:* the two different models that are out there. And that article has been read a lot. And what I've tried to do is I tried to say, "This is the movement model, and this is the proclamational model," and compare and contrast them. And my goal in that article wasn't to say one's better or worse, it's just these are the, these are the two different models that are out there. So since I wrote that in 2013, what I've seen on the kind of the anti-movement side, or the critical side is they have not produced a positive message about what they're for as much as a negative message about what they're against. And I would love to see the proclamational side do a better job of articulating of why their model is a good model. So that would my advice to that side. Instead what I see them doing is saying, "These are all the problems." In fact, on my computer screen here in front of me before we started talking, I pulled up, this is an article, when I wrote that article, I wrote thirteen, this is not in the article, but as the research goes, thirteen reasons why movement ministry sucks, that's the name on the top of the document. And I, and every one of these things –
- Alex Kocman:* Are you allowed to say sucks on a Christian podcast? Hang on, let me –
- Ted Esler:* I'm sorry, I'm sorry.
- Scott Dunford:* You both said it. I'm the only one still sanctified.
- Alex Kocman:* Oh. We'll have Nathaniel bleep it out.
- Alex Kocman:* No, don't do that.
- Scott Dunford:* Don't do that.
- Alex Kocman:* That would be worse.
- Ted Esler:* That would be worse.
- Scott Dunford:* A lot worse.
- [Laughter]*
- Ted Esler:* But these thirteen things are still valid today as critiques. None of these critiques have gone away. So in other words there's been no real critique given that wasn't given eight years ago.
- Scott Dunford:* Mm.
- Ted Esler:* And so I wish that the anti side instead would be seen as this is really what we're for.
- Alex Kocman:* Yeah.

Ted Esler: On the movement side, I really wish that they would take a chill pill about the numbers. I also think that there's a, kind of a sense of add these magic, add these ingredients and on the other end this magical thing is gonna appear as a movement. And I wish there was more humility about the fact that this stuff does not work everywhere. I mean where I work, where I was a missionary, there's been a team there working the DMM model for a long time. And they don't have hundreds of thousands of conversions, and you know, a thousand plus churches and all that. So the magic formula kind of a thing – and here's something both sides can do, and here's what I would do if I was going back out as a missionary today. I would run experiments using different methodologies within my doctrinal understanding, and I would try to evaluate the fruit from those.

And I, and when I use the word fruit, by the way, the Bible never uses the word fruit, and this is another thing that gets me crazy about the numbers, the Bible never uses the word fruit to talk about numeric anything. The Bible talks, fruit is estimated in terms of character in the scriptures.

Alex Kocman: Sure, yeah.

Ted Esler: And how Jesus transforms, that's what fruit is in the New Testament.

Alex Kocman: Yeah.

Ted Esler: If we could think about fruit more like that instead of you know how many conversions or how many baptisms in churches and all that kind of thing.

Alex Kocman: Yeah.

Ted Esler: That'd be way better than the way we do things. So.

Alex Kocman: Yeah.

Scott Dunford: I'd like to just, I mean something though, Ted, you just said about evaluating, it does seem like just, I do love missions history and while I'm, would never, you know use anytime –

Alex Kocman: Just say it, you're a historian.

Scott Dunford: I'm not a historian, I wish I was, but I'd love to be 'cause I really love studying the work of a guy like William Carey or Adoniram Judson. And I also love the mission failures stories as well of like what went horrifically wrong. But even more modern stories, you know, especially if we're talking about a positive model. And I do hear of positive models probably just not being published in some of the resources that are out there, maybe that, I appreciate that it's a good challenge. And maybe that's something Alex and I can work on and get some other people involved with as well. But you know you hear, I would call it the New Tribes model, which is very much not a, it doesn't always work in cities, and I've seen that be tricky in cities. But it's a long model that takes a long time, but it does

show positive fruit. Or the, even, but sometimes the fruit is, okay, fruit's a, you already set us up to not use that word. But –

Alex Kocman: Results.

Scott Dunford: Seeing the results sometimes takes a lifetime, right? And like look at China.

Alex Kocman: Or more.

Scott Dunford: You have all these methods, all these things going on, we think it's dead when the communist revolution takes places and then all of a sudden like all of the acorns that have been planted and growing and were just slowly growing now become these oak trees. And I realize, you know we can get into analyzing that in a whole nother, like there's a lot of discussion about that too. But whatever happened there wasn't the result of quick, a quick fix. It was years and years and years and years and years and years of planting that took, that produced something incredible. So it, I mean how do we evaluate in a short run something like that?

Alex Kocman: And we can't, we have to see the fruit generations later, right? We have to be prepared to step in and correct if false teaching takes root or if there's syncretism, all those sorts of things. Regardless of what methods the missionary's adopting – real quick, Ted, maybe it's just something real quick that we should be speak to as well. 'Cause we talk about this proclamational side and movement side and that's not even perfectly helpful terminology 'cause I don't know that the proclamational side, and maybe this is why you don't hear as much positive articulation of the viewpoint, 'cause I don't know that the proclamational side considers it to be a model. You know I think the proclamational side, being one of those guys, I would say hey, we're just trying to find what this outer border is that scripture gives, and what are the non-negotiables. Well, at the end of the day we know a church can't be anything less than the proclamation of the word, and disciples' gathering for prayer and worship, and having a self-conscious recognition of themselves as followers of Christ. They're doing word and the ordinances, right? For instance, I think what we're trying to do is sketch out what is the borders that we shouldn't be coloring outside of, and yes, Scott mentions like the New Tribes model. I think the IMB foundations document is a helpful tool for just sketching out some basic definitions, but just realizing there's a lot of wiggle room within some of what we do there. And I think having conversations like this is critical going forward as we, brothers in the Lord, flesh out what we do 'cause there are implications for it.

Ted Esler: You know there's a concept in sociology that you can see, it actually happens in the Bible too, it's called horizontal hostility. And –

Alex Kocman: Is that what's happening on this show right now?

Ted Esler: No, no. but horizontal hostility's –

Alex Kocman: Oh okay, good.

Ted Esler: when –

Alex Kocman: I didn't think so either.

Ted Esler: horizontal hostility's when within a, well they would use the word movement but let's talk about the missions movement in the US and Canada, for example. In the missions movement, horizontal hostility happens when we want the same thing, which is healthy, reproducing churches, as an example, but we see different ways of getting there. Often times what happens is the people that have those different ways of getting there become bigger enemies of each other than they, than there are against those that don't even care outside their movement.

And the big example that people always give from history is in the women's voting rights movement in the US, everybody knows about Susan B. Anthony, but there was another woman that was a bigger leader and actually got Susan B. Anthony involved in the movement. And the two of them worked together until they disagreed about methodology and then they split, and never again did Susan B. Anthony say a nice thing about that other woman. Even though they wanted the same thing. And I do think that that's a, it's kind of like when Paul says, you know they're saying terrible things about me, but I don't care as long as the gospel's getting out. I think that –

Alex Kocman: Mm, I follow Apollos, I follow, yeah, yeah, all of that.

Ted Esler: Yeah, and I think we have a little bit of that going on in this issue, on this issue. And we've got to lower the temperature on it some. I'm all for proclamational work and I happen to think in some cultural context, it is actually the model to use. I don't think it's every model; I don't think it should be used by every and in every case. I think there's gonna be other models where you can't use it as effectively. And I do think they're models, I don't think it's fair to say we're just looking for all those lines are because I do think the other side would say, "Yeah, well your circle's here, ours is a little bit bigger or a little bit smaller here." 'Cause I think they would kinda feel they're doing that same thing. So there are models, we are following models and –

Alex Kocman: Well, Ted, I've got a publication coming out and I think it has a positive articulation and we'll talk about that offline, I'll, we'll send you a copy and –

Ted Esler: I want a copy.

Alex Kocman: talk about it again once you read it, yeah, yeah, there you go.

Ted Esler: Hey, let's post a copy of it on the Missio Nexus website for the missions community to read.

Alex Kocman: Oh yeah, have them –

Ted Esler: I think –

Alex Kocman: have them –

Ted Esler: I think that the movement people –

Alex Kocman: dialogue.

Ted Esler: have done a way better job of presenting their position that the proclamational people have.

Alex Kocman: I will say that we conservative Christian folk can be pretty onery and cranky sometimes. Especially Scott, he's such a curmudgeon.

Ted Esler: I know, I thought, was thinking that about Scott.

Alex Kocman: You know he's always coming on here with his Latin and his 1689 Confession and –

Scott Dunford: It's true, it's the California air that does it to me. All right, Ted, I know you're a busy guy and it's such a pleasure to have you on, you're, it's a, you bring a lot of light to the discussion and give us a lot of things to think about. And I hope that regardless of where, what someone is thinking about this issue that at least this conversation will give them a little bit more clarity about what are the discussions about, and what are, you know, what is the crux of it. And give us some frameworks on how, and some pitfalls to avoid as we go forward. So thank you so much for your time. I would love to have you on whenever you feel like you wanna come on. If you've got a, I don't, I don't flatter myself into thinking you listen regularly to our show, but if you ever hear us talking about something or see something come up that you wanna talk about, let us know, we'll get you on 'cause it's a great discussion.

Alex Kocman: Yes.

Ted Esler: Thanks for having me, guys. You're very gracious and I appreciate the time, thanks.

Alex Kocman: So glad to have you. And thank you all for joining us today as well. And if you believe in the work of the show, and you want us to help get the message out, go to missionspodcast.com/support. It's the end of the year, 'tis the season, and that helps us continue doing what we're doing. But the best way that you can help is by sharing this show with a friend, and leaving a positive rating, and a five-star review in your podcast app of choice. Again, that helps the algorithms get this to other people that can be blessed by it. And The Missions Podcast is a ministry of ABWE. You can go to ABWE.org to learn more or go to missionpodcast.com to get more content. So Ted, thank you again, and for everyone else, we will see you in our next episode. Thanks.

Ted-Esler-Pt.-2
Alex Kocman, Scott Dunford, Ted Esler

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