

*Alex Kocman:* Today on the show: Are Christian workers called to stay faithful to the old ways or innovate new methods?

*Ted Esler:* You know I think in some ways we've adopted an inappropriate and I would call it worldly view of culture. Culture is not a sanctified entity, and sometimes missionaries have been so beat up because they've been accused of cultural imperialism that they lose sight of the fact that there are things in that culture that are not redemptive, that are opposed to the gospel, and that, I'm sorry, but you know we need to challenge them. Jesus did it in his day. You know he took the leading cultural figures, were the Pharisees, and he took them on.

*Alex Kocman:* A lively discussion with Missio Nexus president Ted Esler. Stay tuned.  
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 Communication with ABWE, joined by my good friend Scott Dunford, West Coast Advancement Coordinator, Pastor of Redeemer Church in the land of Freemont, California. And it's exciting to be back here together, Scott, and we're grateful for you for joining us for another episode also, you who are listening. At the time we're recording this, there's about to be a large contingent from our offices here heading down to Dallas for a conference, networking with a lot of mission leaders at, with an organization called Missio Nexus. And they've got a lot of interesting and exciting and new and sometimes controversial ideas and things worth engaging about. And so the guest that we're gonna be interviewing today has a lot to say about those sorts of things, and so we're excited to introduce him in just a moment. But first, Scott, how are things in your world?

*Scott Dunford:* You know, things are going pretty good. It's exciting to see people come to Christ and just the normal everyday, probably not super innovational ministry that we're doing here in California. But I also have a crisis that people can be praying for me about, I hate to even bring this up, my wife would probably cringe but I don't think she listens to the show. So in –

*Alex Kocman:* That's okay, mine doesn't either.

*Scott Dunford:* in California there is a, it's almost paradise here, it really is. People always tell me they're sorry for me living in California and I just kind of chuckle to myself 'cause it's pretty great. But there's something we have called roof rats, and because of all the fruit, they eat the fruit but then they go into the roof, they try to nest in your attic. They don't really wanna come into your house, but they get there. Well, we have a construction project going on and someone let, one of the builders left a hole in the wall, and now I've got a problem in one part of my house and it is not fun. So I'm losing sleep over it, catching them and it's about the grossest thing I've ever done. But you know, many of our listeners who are listening, I just

read a sweet obituary. I can't remember the missionary lady's name who had lived and served in PNG for a long time with Wycliffe Bible Translators and told the story of, you know, cockroaches all over her walls and rats in the ceiling, and I'm like, you know what, I can suffer for Jesus in this very small way. But anyway, kinda gross, probably didn't wanna know about that, did you, Alex?

*Alex Kocman:* That was way more information than I planned on hearing. And it makes it a little weird now to ask people to also rate, review, subscribe to the show. And consider supporting us at [missionspodcast.com/support](https://missionspodcast.com/support), however, I'm not sure if we really set up the pitch as well. But hey, life happens, and I think one of the things that's fun that makes kind of a secret sauce of this show is that, you know, you and I have some relationship, we talk about life, we talk about ministry, we don't just dive right into the interview. But sorry to hear that, Scott.

*Scott Dunford:* [Laughs] Yeah.

*Alex Kocman:* I will say our guest who's waiting online has been very gracious with us. And Scott, would you please introduce him for us?

*Scott Dunford:* Well, we are excited to have Ted Esler. He's the president of Missio Nexus and he's also the author of a new book that just came out called "The Innovation Crisis" by Moody Publishers. And so welcome to our show, it's really good to have you, Ted.

*Ted Esler:* Hey, thanks for having me, and I'm excited to be on here despite the roof rats.

*Scott Dunford:* [Laughs] Thank you.

*Alex Kocman:* So, Ted –

*Ted Esler:* Is it roof rats or root rats?

*Scott Dunford:* No, they're in the roof, they go into the roof. Yeah, they like to stay in your attic.

*Alex Kocman:* Out here in Pennsylvucky, some people would say rough rats.

*Scott Dunford:* Yeah, they're that too.

*Alex Kocman:* Right, right, they're that too. So Ted, tell us about yourself and how God led you into global missions. Let's talk about missions now; maybe that would be a good thing to talk about on a missions podcast.

*Ted Esler:* Good idea. Well, I was a computer consultant in Minneapolis back in the mid to late '80s. And one morning, went to church and I would, I'd call him an old timey missionary was the speaker and I had never been exposed to the world of missions before, and it blew me away that there were even missionaries around. I was so interested, we set up a lunch with him, and it was intriguing to my wife and I. So we talked to our mission

pastor about it, and he said, “Well, if your interested in missions the first step is to take the Perspectives course at our church, so take that course.” And in 1988 if you took the Perspectives course in Minneapolis, you’ve got, you got this unknown Baptist pastor on the first night named John Piper.

*Alex Kocman:* Heard of him.

*Ted Esler:* And he talked about the story of his glory, the missions story from Genesis to Revelation. And we were just hooked, and amazed to see how there’s such unity in the scriptures, and it all revolves around God’s redemptive plan for all peoples. And so we started to track in that direction, went through some training. And we ended up working in the Balkans during the 1990s when all those wars were going on in the Balkans. And then after that I had a couple of different ministry leadership roles, and we serve with an agency called Pioneers. And so that moved us to Florida eventually, where I live now. And about six years ago I was invited to take on this role as president of Missio Nexus. So that’s been my journey.

*Scott Dunford:* That’s awesome, and you know when we were serving overseas, we had so many great partners with Pioneers and loved our relationships there. What a great organization, and thankful for your role now. So tell us a little bit about Missio Nexus, for those that maybe don’t know, it’s probably pastors and maybe even missionaries who are listening that don’t even know what that is, and what that might be about. So what is Missio Nexus and what role do you see it playing in the furthering of the great commission?

*Ted Esler:* Yeah, I think the easiest way for somebody to understand Missio Nexus is we’re an association. So if you think about wherever you live there’s probably a real estate association, or you may have heard of the tire manufacturer’s association, et cetera. These are formed typically in the commercial setting to protect the interest of that industry, and to promote that industry. And the great thing about Missio Nexus as an association is rather than being an association of competitors, we are an association of cooperators. We all work together to try to see the great commission fulfilled.

And so I get to lead this incredible network, it’s about 350 mission agencies representing just under 60,000 globally placed workers all around the world. And our mission is to catalyze relationships, ideas, and collaboration within the great commission community. We also have lots of church members. If you’re a globally focused church, you would enjoy being a member of Missio Nexus. We do all sorts of events, and we have publications, all sorts of things to try to encourage the fulfillment of the great commission.

*Alex Kocman:* So of all the topics to address in the missions world, all sorts of controversies over things like CPM and DMM, which I don’t think we’re

gonna get a ton into today, but you know it's, these titillating topics of conversation, right, right? Of all the things that you could possibly address, innovation, in your latest book, Ted, "The Innovation Crisis." Why talk about innovation?

*Ted Esler:* Well, I talk about innovation for a couple of reasons. First of all I would just say that in my role as an association leader, people will often, especially leaders of organizations, they'll ask me, "What other organizations are really making an impact? Who should we be looking to to understand what's happening in the global great commission that we might learn from?" And often they're asking who are the biggest innovators. And after being asked that question many times, I realized that my list of innovative missions agencies was very short. And I began to think about, you know, why is that? Why do we have this sense that, you know, if, a lot of people in the broader church, they would say that missions is kind of a bygone concept. There's been a lot of deconstruction of the great commission, it's been lumped in with colonialism, and just, we could get into all sorts of avenues talking about how there's, there is a feeling out there that missions is a past generations effort, not the contemporary thing that we should be thinking about in the church.

*Alex Kocman:* Right.

*Ted Esler:* So that's one whole thing I would say is there is idea out there that missions is old fashioned. And the second thing I would point to is, you know we are supposed to be followers of Jesus. And whether you like to use the word innovation for Jesus or not, he was innovative. Start unpacking the language and what you find is lots of talk about things that are new. New commandment that I give you, that you love one another. There's a new covenant. You know, don't put old wine into new wineskins, I mean, I'm sorry, new wine into old wineskins. It goes on and on. All of the newness that Jesus introduced, and if you look at the response of people around him, many of them were stunned by the framing of new ways of thinking about their spirituality.

You know he ushered in a new kingdom. If you were in the first century, and you were a Jew in Jerusalem and somebody said, "Hey, where's innovation happening in Judaism today?" I can't imagine they wouldn't say, "Man, you gotta be listening to this guy named Jesus. Every time he opens his mouth, people are almost hiding because he's gonna say something new and challenging that we've never heard before." At one point his disciples said to him, "Why you gotta say these hard things? We can't hardly take it anymore." And so the author and perfecter of our faith was highly innovative. And even if you look at the first century – until the government got its hands on the church, I would say we had tons and tons of innovation going on in terms of how we were approaching the great commission. So I think you got the contemporary situation that the missions world finds itself in, and then also you have the biblical side in

which we see Jesus modeling innovation in his ministry. And hey, we're supposed to be his followers, and we're supposed to copy what he did.

*Scott Dunford:*

So you know as Alex and I were talking about this ahead of time, you know certain thoughts were coming to our mind and just wanting to put some of those out there and let you kind of interact with those. You know it's clear that you see, both in the title but also throughout the book and the content of the book, it's clear that you see a lack of innovation as a real crisis in the church, but also in, in the missions world. You highlight, like you said, Jesus is an innovator, the reformers as an innovator, and then you're getting into a lot with William Carey, who's one of my heroes and probably half of our listeners would put him as one of their missions heroes, up there.

But a question for you is one, I wonder even as you're talking about Jesus is how many of those that you list would even have considered themselves innovators? Like when I read the reformers I get, I kind of get the sense, and even William Carey, that they didn't really see themselves as innovators as much as they saw themselves as recovering something that was lost. I think that to the reformers, they looked at the changes in the church of their age and saw those innovations, the indulgences, and some of the, the things that were being added around the cult of Mary and other things like that, as innovations. And that they saw themselves as really recovering and restoring what was lost. So a question for you and kind of coming, you know, having you defend your thesis a little bit here, is Christian ministry the place for innovation? Or is it a place for restoration, what, you know, Alex loves Latin a lot more than I do, but if we were to say *ad fontes*, you know like go back to the source. I kind of tease him about that.

*Alex Kocman:*

Yeah.

*Scott Dunford:*

You know is that, how do you balance that tension? I know you deal with it in the book, I mean 'cause there's clearly some things that you don't want to see us innovate. But how do you balance that crisis of innovation with the need to, that we should have to go back to what the apostles and Christ himself taught us?

*Ted Esler:*

Yeah, well, so I, there is I think, and maybe this is one reason why innovation doesn't happen in the church like it should, I think there is the fear that we're going to encourage innovation theologically that's inappropriate. And you know that, obviously that has happened throughout history but, and this comes out in the book, when we're doing ministry – so businesses actually can innovate better and easier than ministries because their competition is other businesses and that's a very concrete form of competition.

But for us in ministry, we don't compete against other ministries, we compete against the world and its enticements. We compete against the

culture and its, you know, its innate attractiveness to pull us away from Christ. Our competition isn't as concrete but it's very real. And I would say that when we think about whether or not, I mean you talk about the reformers for example. Many of the themes – so I talked about the new themes that Jesus introduced. But the concept of renewal, the concept of the born-again language, all of that is certainly wrapped up in renewal and in new ways of understanding and seeing what was already there.

You know when I talked earlier about how we talk about there's a unity of the scripture from Genesis to Revelation. A lot of what Jesus did was he took what was already made manifest in the Old Testament that pointed to him, and he communicated it in a much more relevant way, in an innovative way, to the culture in which he was currently speaking and standing in. And so you know, I mean you could go, there is a theologian that talks about the double movement of Jesus, and I really love this idea. What he's talking about is Jesus did two things at the same time when he communicated his message. One thing he did is he said some things that were entirely anti-Jewish and very hard for Jews to swallow, while saying it in a way that was entirely Jewish and easy for Jews to understand.

And I think that that's part of the innovation challenge for us in the church. It's not to take, it's not to take the theology that comes from the scriptures and innovate it in a way that changes it, but it's to communicate it in a cultural context in the places that we are and we stand and speak into today in a way that is one, prophetic and challenging, while still at the same time really getting to the hearts of the people.

*Alex Kocman:*

Mm.

*Ted Esler:*

And so I understand where you're coming from when you talk about we gotta be a little careful with innovation. My biggest fear with innovation is actually more not so much that we're gonna be, we need to be worried about innovation in the theological sense. I think the fear that we face is that we often will retreat into patterns and ways of talking about the gospel and relating to gospel that are at this point decades old. So there's plenty of room for innovation around how we communicate that message.

*Alex Kocman:*

I wanna dive deeper into that because that raises a lot of other questions there. There's obviously things that we could unpack there theologically or methodologies, are methodologies things that are given to us from scripture, or should we be continually innovating those as well? But before we dive too deep into that, I want people to understand the book a little bit more too, because the book is not necessarily fixated on those types of issues that we're even talking about right now. You lay some of that foundation, you make the case that Jesus was innovative in that sort of, in that certain sense of the word that you just articulated, right? He's introducing the new covenant, right, it was always promised, it was always there in types and shadows.

But you move beyond that too and you share lots of practical insights and lots of practical wisdom. And you appeal to my soft spot as well, Scott's soft spot, which is talking about William Carey. And so you have his five shoemaker rules, obviously influenced by William Carey. What are the five shoemaker rules and why are those rules?

*Ted Esler:*

Well, the, the incredible thing about William Carey is, and this is hard for us as Americans to really wrap our minds around because we live in a culture where there's lots of mobility. You know, you can be born, I mean I'm the son of a blue-collar worker from a Minneapolis suburb. You know, he never went to college, very awesome father, very good father. But here I stand with a Ph.D., and I have an education level that he was never able to acquire. In one generation that kind of change happened.

Well, in the British environment that William Carey lived in, there was no, no mobility like that. You know they were, if you were born a shoemaker which he, you know William Carey was a shoemaker, you might aspire to do some lay preaching, and he did. And he even was pretty radical in that he became a full-time preacher. But I'm telling you that was a really far bridge for him to take. And so the first thing I think we gotta realize when we talk about William Carey, he, his ministry was launched from a position of, of just really, an immobile culture where he should never have had the opportunity to move across the world and so things that he never did.

You've probably heard of the phrase that he gave, expect great things, attempt great things. You know that really gets to who he was and what he accomplished. And so again when we talk about William Carey I think he is, there's just, there's very few people like him. So he has, there's five things that I observed about him. And these are the rules, I'll just throw them out of them quick.

See a problem worth solving is number one. In his case it was this huge continent, all these people, nobody bringing the gospel to them. Number two, ride the wave of existing innovation. In William Carey's day, the British empire basically they were flinging people out all across the world, and he rode on the back of that to get to India. Now I know today that's not popular, we're worried about colonialism, yada, yada, yada. But just like most of you would not see yourselves as being driven by modernity, he did not see himself as driven by colonialism. So ride the wave of existing innovation is number two.

Three, be biased to action. And you know you have to act. It's one of the things that I love about missionaries as opposed to missiologists. Now I love missiologists, I have a degree in missiology, but missionaries gotta actually do things. They actually gotta act on theology.

*Alex Kocman:*

Right.

*Ted Esler:* And as soon as you take action, you're influencing a lot of things that you may not be intending to influence in that context. But if you're gonna be an innovator like William Carey, you've got to be biased to action. The fourth rule is to empathize, then strategize. It's to understand the problem, the people, the thing that you're trying to innovate over. And again, William Carey is just such a great example of somebody who dove into the culture, he didn't live in a cloistered setting, he – I could go on and on. But we have to really understand the people that we're trying to minister to.

And then the final one is to think big. And those, those five shoemaker rules are one way that we can frame innovation in our current ministry constructs as well.

*Scott Dunford:* Even as we were discussing offline or through email, like there is something that definitely comes up in how much Christian mission organizations don't seem to really define what they are trying to accomplish.

*Alex Kocman:* Right.

*Scott Dunford:* And if we're not trying to define clearly what we're trying to accomplish, how often that leads to innovations that really don't accomplish much or that leads to no, to no innovation. And –

*Alex Kocman:* Right, or your missions' statement is like, "We wanna make disciples." Okay.

*Scott Dunford:* Yeah, and that was one of the beautiful things about William Carey and I think we could probably nerd out about William Carey for the rest of our show, but you know he had a very clear understanding of the problem. And he obsessed about the problem and he definitely innovated in ways of not, I don't think he, I don't see William Carey innovating on the preaching of the gospel or of what, the Bible understanding of discipleship is but he certainly innovated in, even in just his creation of the category of missiology. Like, you know the discussion of people groups and lostness and about parts of the world that need the gospel in new ways, in a renewed effort. And then even in the ways he went about doing that, starting first as a cobbler in his own town, but then how he implemented all sorts of unique means that really, you know, we say they were unique 'cause they were unique to that whole time period. But they really were things that the apostle Paul was also modeling, and probably some of them were even things that Jesus Christ was modeling. So I love the way you bring out so much of those great things about William Carey.

As we look at the history of missions, we see examples like William Carey and we see you know in the end what looked like futility and even setbacks, he was roundly criticized, even his own government didn't want him to go into India. And yet at the end, we see at the end of his life,



incredible success that's still reverberating today. I mean we know people who were led to the Lord by people by people who were led to the Lord by people who were led to the Lord by William Carey, you know that are in the church today; it's incredible.

But also as we look at innovation and missions history, you know there's some massive failures. I ministered in east Asia and there's some incredible stories of innovations that turned into cults, and the cults led to revolutions, and the revolutions led to, you know, China shutting the door on ministry for generations. So sometimes there's ill-advised innovation. So what would you say about this mixed bag with innovations? Like how do we prevent innovating the wrong ideas? How do we stay true to our calling and mission and not, you know, while not being afraid to try new things? While also recognizing that sometimes innovation can get out of hand and cause more damage than it does good. You know what I'm, I don't, I hope you understand what I'm trying to ask.

*Ted Esler:*

I understand where you're coming from. I mean I would not say that especially with mission agency leadership I'm not really seeing a ton of heresy come out of the North American missionary movement that's a part of Missio Nexus that would give me pause there. I mean failure is certainly part of innovation. I know that personally right now because I'm in the middle of unwinding an innovation that I brag about in the book actually that's gone south since the book was published. You know we started this partially self-funded healthcare plan called Missio Benefits and I talk about it in the book as a great innovative example of trying something new. Well, in the last four months, in part because of COVID, we've decided to shut that program down. It's been very painful and hard for everybody involved.

So there's no doubt that risk is a huge part of innovation. And if you really, you know if you wanna, if you, I mean this year in Missio Nexus, we have a theme every year, all year long it's been innovation. Next year it's gonna all be about safety. I'm sorry, risk taking and safetyism. Because of where we're at in our culture right now, we're all risk averse, we're all worried about catching COVID and all the things we can do to keep it from happening. That kind of attitude that you know, making sure that things are done right and the best way without any potential heresy, all that. That's probably stopped a lot of powerful innovation from happening. So I would say our bigger danger isn't that we've got too much innovation going on in the world that creates heresy, I would say our bigger danger is that we don't communicate the gospel message well because we're too afraid of innovating. And you know I've just, I've seen over and over again the, you walk in some of these cities of fifteen, twenty million people and it's just a trickle of believers in them. It's gonna take great risk taking to see that situation turn around.

*Alex Kocman:*

Right.

*Ted Esler:* So I would encourage people to take that risk of innovation and not be as concerned about the potential dangers. And there's certainly dangers there, I've certainly felt them myself, even just now.

*Alex Kocman:* Right. I'm not sure I agree with all of that because I do think that we've seen a lot of downgrade within evangelicalism. Look all the way back to someone like Charles Finney and his new methods, right, were a source of a lot of things that, you know, did the visible Christian community grow as a result? Potentially, right? Something was happening during the second great awakening, so called. I'm not convinced it was a biblical revival. So I think that there is maybe an area here where there would be some friendly disagreement.

But my question would be to you then, okay how do we evaluate the faithfulness of innovation? Because we both believe that there are guardrails at some point, right? In that our goal is not only to innovate, but also to be faithful and to trust God with the results, right? So for you, Ted, what is the role of scripture and exegesis in forming the parameters around what can be innovated? You know so, you mentioned obviously we're not trying to innovate theologically, yes and amen to that. But what else does scripture in your opinion say we can innovate on? And then what are some of the areas that you would say are sort of locked down and are kind of just delivered to us in scripture?

*Ted Esler:* Well, I mean I think we have a, I mean we've got a rich theological trust to draw off historically and biblically that I think provides us with just a lot of direction about what's good and bad. Now there are times when we get off base. I mean I think, so let me give you a missiological issue where I think innovation was attempted to the detriment of the communication of the gospel, and that would be in that whole arena of contextualization where you had people saying and doing things to identify with the cultures that they were going to. Which you know from my perspective, were associating them with sinful religions and harmful religions. That would be to me an example of where we've gone too far and allowed people to go too far innovatively. But that said, be a little careful here. Hudson Taylor, he was a contextualizer.

*Alex Kocman:* Sure.

*Ted Esler:* He wore the clothes of the people. In his day, he grew his hair long and he was called a heretic for doing those two things. Now we look at that and we say well, that's not a biblical charge. Well that's not what those people at that time said. They thought that it was a biblical charge.

*Scott Dunford:* True.

*Ted Esler:* But even on contextualization, I, you know we leave a lot on the table there that is right for innovation in a way that doesn't harm by our witness by identifying us with other religions. You know one example I would

point to is when we talk about contextualization, it seems that we define that only by shaping the gospel message to fit the culture. But it, that should be turned upside down as well. We should be thinking about how to make those cultures adapt better to receiving the message of the gospel. And again in our day and age, that's probably not popular because it sounds like we're trying to change culture. From my perspective a biblical message would take precedence over that.

But I give a really good example of innovation in that space. Years ago a team went to southeast Asia and the people group they were working in, nobody knew a single Christian from that culture. And in fact when they asked about Christians of that culture, they would say, "Well, that's not possible, there aren't any." So if you're starting from the standpoint that it's impossible for me as a person in this culture to become a Christian, you're a long ways off from the gospel. So the missionary team there said let's change that perception and culture and they began to highlight publicly the stories, conversion stories and the lifestyles of Christians that were good citizens living in that culture. And as a result, three and four years later, if you walked up to one of the people in that culture and you said, "Do you know of any Christians from your culture?" They would not say that's impossible, they would say, "Well, yeah, actually I do know about that. And you can find them here if you're interested in learning more." And so there's great space to innovate when it comes to this issue of contextualization. Unfortunately we tend to look at it just kind of through one lens.

*Alex Kocman:* Mm. That raises an interesting question by the way, and again there's a lot where we could dive in, but I'm really interested, you did say something in the book that struck me. You didn't call it this in so many words, but you basically made a comment about reverse contextualization.

*Ted Esler:* Yeah.

*Alex Kocman:* On page 195, for those that might be following along. Unpack that for us 'cause I think that is helpful.

*Ted Esler:* Yeah, again, reverse contextualization is the idea that you know if we're working in a place where there is no concept of somebody becoming a follower of Christ, converting, then part of our task should be to address that cultural assumption.

*Alex Kocman:* Right.

*Ted Esler:* And call it into question. In fact, you know a lot of what we do in our own cultural context is reverse contextualization.

*Alex Kocman:* Right, in other words, you're changing the culture to fit the gospel a little better, rather –

*Ted Esler:* Yes.

*Alex Kocman:* rather than modifying the way in which the gospel is delivered to fit the culture.

*Ted Esler:* You know I think in some ways we've adopted an inappropriate and I would call it worldly view of culture. Culture is not a sanctified entity. And you know I –

*Alex Kocman:* It's not worldview neutral, yeah –

*Ted Esler:* It is not.

*Alex Kocman:* it's not value neutral.

*Ted Esler:* It is not.

*Alex Kocman:* Right, amen.

*Ted Esler:* And sometimes missionaries have been so beat up because they've been accused of cultural imperialism that they lose sight of the fact that there are things in that culture that are not redemptive, that are opposed to the gospel, and that, I'm sorry, but you know we need to challenge them. Jesus did it in his day. You know he took, the leading cultural figures were the Pharisees, and he took them on. Now you know, was he changing their culture? Was he being inappropriate in, you know, challenging that worldview? Yeah, I think, inappropriate, no, but he was challenging that worldview for sure.

So and again, William Carey went into that culture. They were burning widows. And he said, "Hey, this has got to stop. This is wrong." And that becomes part of the gospel message, part of the redemptive message that people in most cultures can receive. So again, contextualization is fine, but we, we have historically limited it to trying to redefine the gospel into a culture and that's only part of the equation.

*Scott Dunford:* So Ted, as we're wrapping up, I just wanna, you know, recommend a few things about the book as well. I don't want anyone to get the impression that this was a, that we're negative about it. So clearly as we go through the book there's things that obviously anyone in missions will have an opinion on one thing or another. Everyone's got an opinion on church planting movements, everyone has an opinion on translation philosophies and those kinds of things. And you do bring out of course your opinion on lots of those things. But what I really do appreciate that I think is helpful for people, especially missionaries as they're thinking through the problems is identifying, going through those roles, identifying some of the big things that we need to tackle.

And then you do give some really helpful grids for evaluating the problems and then how to go about tackling those. And I love that every chapter ends with discussion questions and application questions. And so even if someone comes to a different position than you on one particular

missiological issue or not, there's still a lot of value here because no matter where we're at in ministry, no matter what our philosophy or theological background, there are going to be problems that we need to face that need some careful and analytical discussion. And I think you do a great job of one, highlighting resources that are sometimes out of the minister's purview, some of the business books and articles. But then also giving us some helpful frameworks in which we can go about tackling those –

*Ted Esler:* You know, let me –

*Scott Dunford:* problems.

*Ted Esler:* if I could interrupt you for just a second.

*Scott Dunford:* Yes.

*Ted Esler:* I would say this book is not a theology of innovation. I approach innovation as if it's theologically acceptable. I'm thinking about writing another one on the theology of innovation at this point because –

*Scott Dunford:* I think you should, yeah.

*Ted Esler:* I think we miss, we miss out on how, I mean one of the reasons why the first century church grew like it did is because it was unlike anything that people in that Roman world had ever seen or come into contact with before. And in so many ways, my lament for the church in the US, and I love the church and I'm not trying to be rock thrower here in any way, but we have struggled so hard to be relevant. And it might be that the church is gonna be more relevant when we begin to call into question some of the things that are happening in our culture and not just feel like we have to adopt and adapt to the latest pop culture trends that come along that –

*Alex Kocman:* Right.

*Ted Esler:* that keep us kind of cool.

*Alex Kocman:* Right, which we'll always be ten to fifteen years behind on anyway, yeah.

*Ted Esler:* Yeah, which we do a poor job of.

*Alex Kocman:* Very.

*Ted Esler:* Anyway, yeah, you're right. So anyway, I do think that there is a lot more to be said on the theology of innovation but the book, when you talk about the, it's a pragmatic book more than it is a theology book; you're right about that.

*Scott Dunford:* And I, and I appreciate all those things that you put out there for us to be able to learn from. So how can people find out more about you, Ted, how can they find your book? How can they interact with you and Missio Nexus?

- Ted Esler:* Well, of course we gotta website, [missionexus.org](http://missionexus.org). Love to job on there. If you wanna write to me directly there's a contact form, and I get them in about thirty seconds after you hit enter on that form, I'll get it.
- Alex Kocman:* Send your love letters to Ted.
- Ted Esler:* The book obviously's on Amazon and other places where you can find that. We do a lot of events. I'll give you guys some information that'll come out next week.
- Alex Kocman:* Oh.
- Ted Esler:* So I don't know when this podcast will actually hit the airwaves, but next week we're gonna be announcing the national church mission leaders conference. And so this is gonna be as far as we know, the only national mission pastor conference. We'll be launching in 2022, it's gonna launch alongside the conference that we're currently doing for mission leaders. And we're hopefully gonna cross-pollinate mission pastors with mission agency leaders by co-leading a dual conference.
- Scott Dunford:* Excellent.
- Alex Kocman:* I'm all for leaning into the local church.
- Scott Dunford:* It's a great idea.
- Alex Kocman:* Yeah, and I would say, too, I derived a lot of benefit from the book just thinking of it from the standpoint of how large parachurch organizations in particular, you do just get stuck in your ways. You can have entrenched patterns and interests and habits that lead to drift, right, and all of these sorts of things that take us off mission. And something to sort of shake awake the parachurch world a little bit, and to realize you don't have a right to exist, you only exist to the degree that you're actually moving the ball in the mission forward because the local church is God's plan A. And so to say to parachurch organizations, "Keep up, and keep doing radical new work," and so it was particularly helpful from that standpoint. And so we do recommend it. And [innovationcrisis.com](http://innovationcrisis.com), [theinnovationcrisis.com](http://theinnovationcrisis.com)?
- Ted Esler:* Yep, [theinnovationcrisis.com](http://theinnovationcrisis.com). And there's a fun little survey that's there you can take, it'll tell you how innovative you are, what areas you're most innovative, and not innovative. So yep, that's out there too.
- Alex Kocman:* [Theinnovationcrisis.com](http://Theinnovationcrisis.com), Ted Esler, President of Missio Nexus, thanks for joining us today, Ted. Appreciate the friendly back and forth. To get more content go to [missionspodcast.com](http://missionspodcast.com), subscribe on your app of choice. And while you're doing that, remember to leave a positive rating and a five-star rating and review for us, that'll help us get this content in front of other people who can be blessed by it. Questions and suggestions to [Alex@missionspodcast.com](mailto:Alex@missionspodcast.com). Support, [missionspodcast.com/support](http://missionspodcast.com/support). Until next week, thank you for listening.

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