

THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



Greg Nettle:

Well, everyone, I'm here with my friend, Valarie Grimes. I'm so delighted to have her on the church planning podcast. Welcome Valarie, to this episode.

Valarie Grimes:

Hi Greg. It's so great to be here with you today.

Greg Nettle:

Yeah, Valarie. Now you're down in Savannah, Georgia. Tell us a little bit about what's going on down there. You're planting, planting a church.

Valarie Grimes:

Absolutely. We are planting Radiant Church here in Savannah, Georgia. We launched last year virtually and we were actually independent at the time and we are now going through a transition where we are coming on board with the Evangelical Covenant Church. So we're resetting and kind of relaunching, I guess you could say. So I am so glad to be coming on board with them. They are an extraordinary organization, denomination and they are justice oriented and are fully, fully in support of women in ministry. And it is an amazing, amazing time to come on board with them.

Greg Nettle:

Yeah, I was so excited when I heard that, that you were moving in that direction. Valarie, when we first started getting to know each other, you hadn't moved in that direction yet. So I think it's a great move for you and to be connected with that tribe and to have that kind of support behind you. Now, Valarie, you launched, you were one of the brave planters that launched in the pandemic. And it's, it's been a hard launch because of that.

Valarie Grimes:

Yes, it definitely has been. We actually had our first launch team meeting or interest meeting in January of 2020. I had a second meeting in February and then March doors closed. So if it wasn't already hard enough, my Lord, COVID has made it even more difficult. But it's something that God has put in my heart. I know that it's, it's where he's leading me. And so we've had to be resilient. We've had to bounce back and face some great, great adversity, however, we're still moving forward and our congregation is growing and we're doing his work in spite of it.

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Greg Nettle:

Okay, so you're in the heart of Savannah, Georgia. Talk about why Savannah.

Valarie Grimes:

Wow. Savannah, Georgia. Really was God picking us for Savannah. My husband and I are retired military. He's retired military. I consider myself retired military too, because we serve together. And to say that we have never agreed on a place to live or move is an understatement. And once, we were in Savannah on a spring break with our kids and we kind of looked at each other and said, wow, we wanna retire here. And that was, I know it was God because we never agree. But long story short, his job, he was asked to move here as captain of police for the technical college system. Well, before our retirement, cuz we are still not retirement age. I know, I know. And so we just knew that that was a sign from God that it was time to move to Savannah. And as I got here, the drawing and the calling to plant got stronger and stronger. And so God strategically put us here. Well, before we even stepped out on the faith of walking in as a planter. So we know for sure this is where God's called us every morning that I cross that bridge. I get a chance to look back at my city and say, this is my city. This is where God has called me.

Greg Nettle:

Love that. You're just one of the city of the people there. You moved into the neighborhood, just like Jesus did.

Valarie Grimes:

Absolutely.

Greg Nettle:

So Valarie, for those who are, are not watching, but they're, they're listening in, you know, what format they're listening. They picked up that you're female, but you're also African American. One of the things I'm so proud to have you as my friend, that's been so important to me. You're gonna be coming on to the Stadia Advisory Team. And I'm just delighted to have your influence in Stadia world in that way as well. But you and I, we we've had conversations in the past, just off the record, just you and me about some of the unique challenges, and I've shared with you as Stadia moves down this path of kingdom diversity and becoming who God wants us to be everyone being profoundly represented and included at the table. Not just in God's kingdom, but certainly we wanna reflect that in the world and with church planting as well. And so it's been so good to learn

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from you. Can you talk about what are some of the unique challenges – I, I don't even know where to start here – that you face as a woman's church planter, maybe as an African American church planter? What are some of the challenges that you face?

Valarie Grimes:

Absolutely. I think if you looked in the dictionary and there was a picture for the word intersectionality, that would be a picture of me. You know, being female, I mean, gender is definitely a factor when you think about church planting. Being African American, that's a huge factor. And then also my age, I'm not 15 anymore. And so that age, so I sit there where I have multiple areas of possible disadvantage and that's kind of what that intersectionality is, is remembering that some people come to the table with several areas of disadvantage. And so I sit there and I have to kind navigate that world often because one room may say no to funding or to helping because I'm a woman. Another room maybe closed that door because I'm African American and they're predominantly a black denomination, or it may closed because we're looking for 20 somethings or 30 somethings. And so it, you know, just having multiple areas that I have to navigate has been, wow, it has been so difficult, but that is one of those times you go back and you say, God, did you really, really call me to this? And if so, then you are gonna open the right doors and finding an organization like a Stadia. You all saw beyond the female part. You know, because there are a lot of organizations that had already shut their door and would not even take me through the assessment process because I was female. And so that right there, you know, you have to find people willing to help you push against those barriers and open a door because when the door opens, then you can get in and you can be everything God's called you to be. And they recognize that. But you've gotta find those open doors because it is difficult.

Greg Nettle:

Okay. Let's talk about open doors because, um, that's one of the things that I'm learning personally. Oh gosh, there's just so many things I want to unpack with you. First of all, I just wanna say thank you for planting because I realize you use the word disadvantage and yet there are so many things about you that I look, oh my gosh, you have so many advantages that I don't have in being able to reach the people that God's called you to reach, right. And boy, don't ever forget that because, it's just, I so appreciate you and what God's doing in and through you. But these open doors. Okay. So a lot of our listeners are gonna be people of color, but there's gonna be a lot of white male leaders out there as well. Talk about how we can help you open doors. Now we're not white saviors or anything, but right. But I think opening doors for each other is a very important thing.

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Valarie Grimes:

Absolutely. You know, during these last two years, like you said, COVID has put us in a whole new arena, but what it's done also is, it's began to bring up those, those places of injustice. You know, we've seen, we've walked through the George Floyd, we've walked through the Ahmaud Arbery and all of the other cases that have come up in this time. And one of the things that someone that looks like me and has the spirit that I have, because I have a spirit for justice, I think equality is something that God ordained. And so I stand fully in that. And so there is always a give and take. And I think we have to remember that when doors open there's a give and take. And so there's a blessing to being in the skin that I'm in. And that blessing is that I come to the table and I say, Hey, if you open the door, Greg, I'm not someone who comes in and sits down and is quiet. I'm gonna come in and make some noise. And so the blessing of the open door is that the person who, who opens it, if it's a white male, let's say, that they've gotta be ready when a person comes in to accept and be willing to let them be themselves, be who, all who God has called them to be. And then there becomes that give and take. Because I have so much to offer as well. And I think that's the thing that white savior piece that you talked about. We're not looking for someone to be a white savior, but we're looking for someone to say, Hey, I value what you offer and now I want your voice to be heard. And that is it. So it can't be - you know, I've heard, "Diversity, diversity, diversity." Diversity just means that you are allowing people of color, whatever that nationality may be to have a face in the place. But inclusion means you're listening to my voice. And so I think that's the thing I want people to understand when they talk about an open door is that that door means that you want all of me all of what I have to offer, and it is a give and take. I have something to offer just as well as you do. We just have to recognize that there's a difference in that, you know, in what we're offering. I hope that kind of gave you an answer to your question.

Greg Nettle:

Yeah, no, it's fantastic. And, you know, always in my own heart, as I've been down, you know, working down this journey and have so far to go, but there's a deep part of lamenting what I've missed over the years, but also a deep joy as friendships with you and so many others develop what I'm learning, right? And that means listening to you. And that is why we as white leaders, especially if we'll just stop with a posture of humility, a posture of learning as we sit at the table together and say, what does God's kingdom really look like? So, so Valarie, talk to me about, you know, your experience as a woman planter, um, because it's its own unique set of challenges. Gimme an example. What maybe challenges did you face simply because you're a woman?

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Valarie Grimes:

Yes. Well, one of those challenges, as I said, is that most denominations, as we know them today, quite a few of them still only ordain men, you know? And so finding a place of like faith and be accepted there and to be able to go through the ordination process and be a part of that. And that's the thing I'm thankful for, with the Evangelical Covenant Church, because they believe in women ministers to the point that they take you through the ordination process. And so that has been a challenge. Like I said, some places that felt, I mean, we were brought up in the Baptist church, the missionary Baptist church, but they were not open to ordaining women. So that's one of the things, and I think, Greg, I have to say in any of the areas that I've talked about, of course being female, being an African American female and being an older African American female is to remember that we are not a monolith in any of those areas. That I don't speak for every black woman or every older black woman. And if anyone is listening today and they're wanting to walk with someone in this journey is to remember that that whoever they decide to open the door to, they're not a monolith, they don't give it, they don't give you the broad perspective of every black person or every woman, or, you know, every older woman. You have to remember that they are individual and they are unique. Do have, we have some things in common, I would have more in common with another black female, but we are so different. So we have to remember that too. And one of the things too, Greg, I think that happens is that there's a difference in some of the language and understanding around things like money, you know, fundraising and the ministry itself, that are so different from culture to culture. And if someone is wanting to open the door to someone of color, they have to start by finding out a common language. To me, I was brought up in a culture where there was not this, you could go to one person and they had \$50,000 or a hundred thousand dollars to offer. That's not the case in a lot of the dominant - the dominant culture there's access to that. And so when you start talking about fundraising or money, and I said, well, you know, it's different for me. I can't just go up and start talking about large amounts of money from one donor source. So things like that, learning the language and being willing to learn a shared language. So that's one of the things.

Greg Nettle:

So let's, let's talk about, let's just be real candid about the fundraising, because the reality is if Stadia is helping start a church, let's say in Cleveland, Ohio, and it's a launch large church and the price tag over three years is gonna be 1.5 million. We could have a white male young, you know, entrepreneurial church planter, and we need these, but he's gonna be able to go out and raise 1.5 million in a year. Whereas if I have a Latina female church planter planting in Cleveland,

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she's gonna have a much harder time probably raising that money simply because she doesn't have the network and the open doors that that white male has. And so Valarie, what's the best way that we as church leaders can be of service to you specifically in that fundraising endeavor?

Valarie Grimes:

One of the things is you've heard of is allies. I know being an ally in that area, being willing to open a door to that network and taking a risk. One of the things that I have said to quite a few people is that, you know, I've had some white males that have really been encouraging. I've, you know, talked about the vision of Radiant Church to them. And they're like, Wow, that's an amazing vision. I'm so grateful. But then when you invite them in to partake financially in that vision, it's not something they're willing to take a risk on because they they're looking at that ROI. You know, that return on investment. It's a little bit different when you're talking about an African American female or a Latino female - it's different, it's gonna be different. And, and the launch large is - we have to kinda, like I said, get a common language, you know. An African American woman planting in Cleveland, Ohio is not gonna have 250 people on the first day of launch. It's, it's just going to look different. So getting that common language, having someone willing to take that risk, and then remember that the ROI is not a financial ROI. You're gonna get an ROI of souls that are being fed and brought into the kingdom and nurtured, and, you know, walked on the journey. You gotta shift your way of thinking about what it looks like. It's not going to be a bottom line, but it is going to be souls that are being nurtured, so that's gonna be different.

Greg Nettle:

Yeah. So let's talk about this a little bit with the financial fundraising, because I hope this is gonna open some doors for you. If there are listeners out there, and they're saying, you know what, our church could get behind this, or I as a leader could get behind this, what's the best way to get in contact with you?

Valarie Grimes:

Well, the best way to get in contact with me is my email address: pastorv@radiantrising.com. We have radiantrising.com is our website and you can contact me through there directly as well. And as far as vision is concerned, we have on that website, you can see our vision and see where God has taken us. And so that's probably the best way to get in touch with me.

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Greg Nettle:

Okay. So radiantrising.com. And you know, if God's prompting you right now, go ahead and shut this podcast off. It's not nearly as important as getting in touch with Valarie. So, you know, go there right now and you can shoot her a message and she'll respond. She asked me and you can help out with this church plant. And we'd love to see that happen. Valarie, this podcast is being released in Black History Month, going on right now. Talk about your vision, a little bit of God's kingdom in the midst of Black History Month.

Valarie Grimes:

Wow. Well, here in Savannah, the people that God's called us to, first of all, I guess I should say we are a multicultural, a multiethnic and intergenerational church. That's a whole lot of things. It's a whole lot of things. But when I tell you that our launch team looks just like that. We have a group of people in their twenties on our team. We have a group of black people, white people. We have a young lady who is actually Asian. And so God is bringing all of that together and allowing it to happen. And here in Black History Month, what matters so much to me is to see a church that is for justice because the Lord himself says he wants justice to rain down. He wants people to know that they are included in the kingdom. We believe in a Revelation 7:9 church, where John says he looked and he saw people of every tongue, every tribe, every nation, and they were all worshiping God together. That is what we see here. We have a large population of homeless people here in Savannah. And our church has a vision for a transitional housing so that we can begin to help bring them into a place where they learn how to live on their own teaching things like life skills and job skills. And so that's one of the things that we see working with our young people through initiatives, such as afterschool programs. So like I said, that language has to change. We are a church without walls, bringing the hope of Jesus to every one, everywhere in every aspect of our community and Black History Month is that moment to kind of spotlight it and look at the people we serve and to see them and to know that God, he sent his son to die for them as well. So for anyone listening, I think that's the thing is that justice, equality, inclusion, those are not dreams. Those are God's reality. And so they have to become the church's reality as well.

Greg Nettle:

And I think Valerie that when, when, when we, when we approach this, so for me as a, a white male, it means that I come to the table between this, with the attitude of how can I use whatever God's given me to empower Valarie Grimes, to be fully who God created you to be as a black

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woman church planter, right? It's how can we approach the table as servants? Again, not as the ones to Lord it over in any way whatsoever, but to reflect the character of Jesus who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but took on the very nature of a servant. And that's the way we approach and celebrate Black History Month. And it means that we're aware that we say, Yay, go Valarie. But we also come alongside and say, how can we empower you and all of our brothers and sisters of color to become fully who God created you to be?

Valarie Grimes:

Absolutely. You know I spoke of a multicultural church. I hear that byline in a lot of church planning organizations now, but in order to have a truly multicultural church, I think that people of the dominant culture are going to have to sit under African American leadership under. That's just how it has to happen. Because as long as the power structure is set up where there is a white male in charge, then there's never really gonna be that multicultural feel. I believe that in order for that to truly happen, you know, we talk about the melting pot of the United States - that's not equality. It's more of a gumbo. We need a gumbo where, you know, people can come with their own flavor, they can come with their own personality and they can still worship together. You know, in a melting pot, everything looks alike, everything looks the same. And it's gonna tend to take on the look or the assimilation of that dominant party, the one who's in the leadership there. So in order for someone, a white male, a white female even, that dominant culture, in order for them to truly be able help in that area, they have to be willing to sit under black leadership or under Asian leadership or under Latino leadership so that they can truly begin to understand what it means to submit - submit their ideas, submit their culture and all of that in that place. And so, like I said in this instance, if you're talking about giving to a church of color, you've gotta be willing to take the restrictions off of how that money is used. You know, you can't come and say, well, I'm going to give \$30,000, but I want it to be used this way. That's still not really stepping out and allowing God to, use you because you still are taking on that dominant role. So I say, if anyone is willing to give, they've gotta take those stipulations off. And they've gotta recognize that the person who God gave the vision for that house is going to make the best decisions. And I think that's probably where that little confusion, not even confusion, but that inability to move forward to donate or give generously to churches of color is because they lose control of that money.

Greg Nettle:

Valarie, I'm learning from you right here as we go. And I'm so grateful for your leadership in the

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kingdom and that you allow me to learn from you. Thank you. And on behalf of all of our listeners, we're in support of you. We're gonna be praying for you. We love what you're doing. You beautiful, female, African American by your own description older - I don't know where you're getting that - church plant or Valerie. Thanks for being with us.

Valarie Grimes:

It's great to have been here. And, uh, Greg, I thank you for what you're doing at stadia, how you are really leaning into the process. And whenever we lean in there's pain, growing pains, and you are willing to have those growing pains. And so I thank you for that.

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