

# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



**Greg:** Hey, everyone. Welcome to the church planting podcast. I'm Greg nettle, and I'm delighted today to have you and our special guests, Janie Mehaffey with us for this next episode. Janie serves as the vice president of culture and team development for stadia and her deepest desire is to help everyone start thriving growing, multiplying churches for the next generation. She's an amazing leader in her family. She's a church planters wife and is very, very active in their local church. She is so committed and sold out to God's kingdom. I can't wait to hear what she has to say to each and every one of us. Let's welcome Janie. So everyone welcome my good friend, my colleague, our teammate, Janie Mehaffey from stadia to the church planning podcast

**Janie:** Hey, Greg, thanks so much for having me here. And actually we're going to be switching things up on the church planting podcast today, and I'm going to put you our host in the guest seat. When you reached out to me and talked to me about wanting to discuss stadia culture and how we develop team culture, it just seemed like a no brainer to me that so much of what makes stadia a strong work environment and why we have high impact team players is because you champion team culture. It's just been clear through your journey of leadership, that God has you on that you know, that people and respecting people and championing them as the way that Jesus would lead. And so, because you empower people, I decided to do a bit of a hostile takeover of your podcast, and I'm going to interview you today, is that right?

**Greg:** Okay. But you, you are an amazing leader, Janie, and you set the culture. So I am not going to downplay that by anything.

**Janie:** Well, I appreciate that. I do think we have an amazing team and I could talk all day about this stadia team. That God has brought together over the past 19 years. I do think that there are some things we've accidentally come into and how to build culture, especially with our uniqueness as a virtual environment. But I do think that the journey that God has led you on as a leader and what I say is how he has turned your leadership upside down is really what has been essential to where we are today as an organization. Is all about partnering with high-impact people to start thriving and growing and multiplying churches. So I'd like to take a little bit of a journey of how God's led you to your leadership style now. And really let's start by giving the context. So when you think, when I think of. What sets stadia part and why we do you have stretch such a strong team culture it's because of your upside down leadership. So before we go to how you got here, give us a little bit of context of what is a key part of the way you lead stadia. And that's what our upside down organizational chart.

**Greg:** So, I mean, this is something that. Gosh, I don't even, we just started it a few years ago, Janie, and it's been a journey and a growth process, but you know, historically traditionally in the United States specifically, because other countries don't operate this way, but in the United States specifically, when we talk about an organizational structure and we talk about the president or an organization and the executive team and directors and assistants and all of those different positions that are so vital to organizations. What, what it looks like is a pyramid, right? And the president's at the top. And as it drops down and things flow down and so forth. And the reality is, is for me personally, I don't believe that's a biblical model of leadership. And so what, what we've gone through at stadia is really flipping that pyramid upside down. And so viewing myself as at the bottom of the period and then our vice presidents and, you know, we still

# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



have all the positions, directors and people, but they're moving up in the, in the organizational structure. And so my job at the bottom of the pyramid is to ask how can I best serve those who are above me and how can I best empower them? How can I best encourage them to be creative? To innovate to make sure they know what's going on financially in the organization to make sure they understand the vision values mission of the organization. So that way out here, up here at the top of the pyramid, which you know, used to be the bottom, but now it's the top. That's where the innovation and creativity is happening. And that's how you scale an organization. That's how you grow a church even is if we can flip it over. And so Jamie, this is a very, I think, a biblical concept and it's one that we get mixed up. But, but what does Jesus do? He says, listen, I'm going to wash your feet. He says that to the disciples. And I want you to follow my example. In other words, I'm going to be your servant. You're not going to be someone who Lords it over people. You're going to actually be the one who serves and empowers them. What did Jesus do? He was all about training and empowering the disciples and they could in turn, train and empower others. You can train and empower others. And that's how the upside down pyramid. But it's a, it's a, it's a different mind shift. So how do we look out for the financial what's best for those above us? Rather than for ourselves, how do we look out for what's best development wise asking, okay, what does Janie Mehaffey need to become fully? Who God created her to be? And how can I help her become that? Right. Because that's my job. It's not to push things down. It's to push you up. If you become better than you're able to push people, even in. And so that's how I think of my leadership style is how can we make those above us better and more empowered.

**Janie:** Yeah. And I love working in an environment like that because not only does it help me be. In the fullness of my leadership, because you're helping me model leadership like Jesus, but it also helps us multiplier impact. If we are being empowered and released to make decisions and to have the information, the tools and resources we need, then we're able to give that to the people we serve. And ultimately at the end of the day, it helps us be able to serve the planters and partners that we serve all the better. So the multiplying effect is the way we want to scale. So truly every child can't have a church.

**Greg:** Exactly. And you need this when we let's talk about because I think one of the areas that this gets really screwed up in biblically as well is when it comes to the role of men and women in leadership. So when you look at the, you know, the book of Ephesians and, and in Jesus is saying wives, you know, I want you to submit to your husbands and husbands, I want you to lead your wives, right? Okay. So, so in traditional historic context with the traditional pyramid, that means, you know, Jesus is at the top of the pyramid and then you have the husband and then you have the wife and then you have the children and everything is kind of this authority coming down. And, but the reality is, is the leadership style. Jesus sets up is that he's at the bottom of the pyramid. And therefore then the husband is. And then the wife. And so though the husband's job isn't to Lord it over the wife, the husband's job is to fully empower the wife. And I would say in, in leadership in general, the male perspective is never to get women to submit or to be power players in the organization with women, it's always to empower and say, how can I lift up the women in the organization, help them fully use their gifts? And that's actually the biblical model of leadership that, that gets lost in so many marriages and so many organizations and churches.

**Janie:** Yeah. I've watched that play out in years and Julie's relationship in both how you all model marriage in that partnership. I've watched you really champion women. Ministry and leadership and stadia is church planters. And even it's been really exciting in the past few years to watch you taking a and Julie as she's become part of a church plant and leading, and then even recently watching how Tabitha your daughter is

# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



becoming a worship leader in a church plant and how you're championing her as a woman, individually as a wife and a daughter, but also as a leader within the church environment.

**Greg:** Yeah, it's, it's really fun just to see the potential that can be unleashed in the kingdom. Right? When we're our job is to lift everyone up around us and to empower them to lift up and empower.

**Janie:** So everything that we have been experiencing in stadia over the past several years of our transitions of championing different groups of people, as God has opened our eyes to what every child looks like has really co coincided with your journey as a leader. I think. When we started really focusing on our vision of every child, having a church. And that came out of your leadership and your heart being wrecked for kids, which we'll talk about your leadership of championing women and your experience at river tree. Even our current journey of kingdom diversity in championing people across all cultures and even models of church planting going worldwide and our church planting. I can't help, but notice the correlation between your journey and how stadia has been impacted by that. I think it's a reciprocal thing God's opening our eyes is the same time that your leadership is, is growing in that upside down this. And so I wanted to. On a little bit of a journey for the benefit of those who might not know, you know, your story, but also for those who do so we can see how your leadership has been impacted over the years by God and the story that he's been writing for you. You good with going on a little bit of it. So we got to start with your first experience in church planting because a lot of people know your church planter, but they may not realize the global context and. The team environment you, you lived in. I like how you talk about that. So tell us a little bit about your first church planting experience in church leadership in Ireland.

**Greg:** Yeah. So my first church plant, I was 23 years old, single, and I believe with all my heart, it was a crystal clear call that God called me to start a new church in Dublin, Ireland. And I'm not going to go into the story of how now that that call happened. But so I, my daughter is 23 right now, Janie and I cannot imagine what my parents must have felt like when I said, Hey, mom and dad, I'm moving to Ireland. What are you doing? I'm going to start a church. Who's going with you? Well, no one you know, what, how are you? I don't have any money. You know, and I, and w how are you going to do it? Well, I don't know, but I'll figure it out.

**Janie:** And that was your level of personality was coming out there and its fullest effect.

**Greg:** Exactly. And so I moved to Ireland and literally I, so first of all, I think this journey that God called me on in Ireland was all about what he wanted to do in developing my character, independence, dependence on him, way more than it was helping people in a Hyperland. I, you know, I think you know, after a couple of years there, we had, there were 12 people involved in the church. Which by us standards zones, you know, really unsuccessful. And I thought that for years, until I started talking to European planters about how difficult the soil is over there. And it literally meant that, you know, as I kind of parachute dropped in there I had a team of college students with me for three months that I led over there. And then they flew back to the states and I was there by myself for the next several months. And then another guy came over and joined me. But for most. I mean, I remember laying in a bathtub of cold water because you had to turn on an immersion system to get hot water in Ireland. And I was ill and I was so sick. I was shivering and I didn't have anyone to call or say, could you go get me some medicine at the drug

# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



store? And and the, the water would get cold really quickly. So I'm laying in this bathtub of cold water. I'm like, what on earth am I doing? I mean, it was a dark night for me. And so I learned so much about, depending on. About my own fragility. But you know, over the, you know, over the couple of years, we, 12 people gave their lives to Christ and we baptized them in the Irish sea or in some lake in Ireland. And it was a great journey, but it was foundational for me. Because I knew that basically at that whatever God called me to, I could trust him to deliver on his promises and I just needed to be.

**Janie:** Gosh, I love that so much because a lot of the story that I came to know you about, and a lot of people who think about your church leadership before you came to stadia, it's in the context of river tree, which is a mega church now with multiple campuses and partner's with Stadia. And it's really good to think through you truly have experienced all contexts of church planting and the foundation that God puts you on to lead you before you were in a role where you were leading a mega church and now a mega organization, they impact so many churches for church planting.

**Greg:** Yeah. You know, so when, so I ran out of money in Ireland and, you know, my, the way my support was, it was like grandma was supporting me for \$15 a month. And this church was for me, \$30 a month, you know, And I honestly just didn't have the heart to reraise all the funding I needed to stay there and it wasn't much, but and so this little church in Ohio, it was called Jackson Christian Church in Northern Ohio at the time about a hundred people called me and they flew me over and I preached and they ended up hiring me. I was 26 years old and single, and it was a really dangerous thing for them to do because the elders said, just do whatever it takes to, to make this church effective. And so being 26 and single, and just coming off the mission. That is a very dangerous thing because I didn't have anything to lose. And so Ray, so Jackson, at the time we transitioned the name to river tree. Several years later, as it outgrew the community that we were called Jackson. And, but I had nothing to lose. So we made lots of dramatic shifts. We began growing very rapidly. You know, went to multiple services, moved into a school because we couldn't fit in our building anymore, constructed a big building. Right. And then, you know, agree to multiple thousands of people and multiple campuses. And it's, it all sounds so, so nice. And I can't tell you the bloodbaths and the, the journey along the way is, you know, church planting and church leadership is hard, hard. But I really do think again, if I go back to Ireland and my dependence on God through those dark times, and that was a foundation for me as we led through river tree. And again, you look at God's grace, but just an absolute passion and commitment to reach the community for Jesus and I. And how do you set the DNA in a, in a church to say we're willing to do whatever it takes. One time Janie. I was on the Howard stern show, which is a crazy story, right? But the reason the story was so important of why I was on the Howard stern show and we did this half hour interview and it was, I got to tell Howard about Jesus. And you got me to ask me a lot of very uncomfortable questions. But what it did, it set the DNA of the church because it was, it was kind of like, well, if Greg's willing to talk to Howard stern, gosh, I, we should be able to talk to anybody about Jesus. This is a church anyone can come to and become fully who God intended them to be. And so it's it's how do you set the DNA of a church? Well, it really of your own life of the church of an organism.

**Janie:** So give us a little bit of insight of how that played out in the team culture you, you built in Rivertree I would imagine as you went from leading yourself as a team to leading what I, I would assume became a larger team at river tree. Some of the things you happened upon along the way, some of the things you



# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



started learning and discerning and were proactive about. So give us a little bit of insight into your leadership and the culture you set within the team at river tree specifically.

**Greg:** Well, let me say this, that some of those things are actually very painful memories, right? I think our greatest growth comes out of our deepest pain. And so they're, they're not fun for me to talk about in, I mean, it's always fun to talk about what God did as a result of it. It's not fun to talk about my sinful. Lack of awareness, all of those areas of character. And I think one of the things that I learned on that journey, because I was at river tree for 25 years, and there were lots of, lots of times where I had opportunity to leave river tree and desire to leave river tree. But what I learned was that if you stay, God will work on your character. It's in staying and allowing people to speak into your life. That characters. And that's not easy and I don't like it, but I've always said, thank you God, that after the journey has progressed. And so I think back to one of the biggest awakenings for me, when I think about these big shifts that God has made in my life, I was was, you know, I'll just be honest, candid, you know, I wanted to be the youngest pastor ever invited to the megachurch pastors conference. Right. That's awful, but it was true. And you know, so therefore I had to grow a mega church and do it quickly and all of these things. And I remember God shattering me one night at 3:00 AM. And just saying, this is not about your kingdom, Greg nettle. This is about Mine. And I mean, I was on the floor and that talk about a change in leadership when. Start saying, whoa, this is about the bride of Christ. This is about our, our team. This is about the people it's not about Greg nettle or who knows him or what kind of platform I have. So that's painful for me to say that, man, that's when you know, river tree, I was able to become a more effective leader, start leading from the upside down pyramid in many ways, not developed at that point, but at least becoming aware of where I think God had me. And, and that's when we started getting involved with church planting at river tree because, you know, because the problem was, if you plant churches, none of the magazines ever counted those church plants in your numbers. And so you weren't really building your kingdom. And, but if you're not building your thing and you're building God's kingdom, then you can start to multi-site and church plants. And I had a great team in Ohio that planted, I think, nearly 50 churches over the next 10, 10, 12 years in Ohio. And. And that's building God's kingdom because those will far outstrip, you know, what anything I could ever do or river trades, a single church could ever do.

**Janie:** Part of your story. And I knew there had to be some point in your leadership where it's just clear that you became very focused on others and championing others. And so it's just really cool to hear the those key moments when that transition happened. And the fact that. At that time church planting wasn't being measured as an impact in the kingdom, makes me even more grateful for where we are now because your shift in that heart has resulted in hundreds of multiplying churches. And it's what all churches need to be doing now is multiplying. So it's fascinating that God's work in your heart. And I think in a lot of leaders, hearts, as they stop building their own kingdoms. And what is God calling me to do to champion myself. When that transition happens a whole lot of barriers seem to be open. There's a few that stand out to me when I think about how you lead stadia and how you champion our church planters. And I, I have heard stories of how really your key learnings in those areas started in a lot of ways during your time at river tree and the first one. That stands out and I really appreciate is your, your journey to empower women in leadership and give just a quick little snapshot about that challenging leadership time and the journey your leadership went through at river tree for that.

# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



**Greg:** Yes. So, gosh, I want to put this in context because it matters. So this was about, I I'm thinking back, this was somewhere between 20 and 25 years ago. So think back in church world about where that. Gender issue, the role of men and women in the church and how hot that was at the time. And so I just I came out you know, a very small church setting church apprised where women could prepare communion, but they couldn't serve communion where women could teach boys up to sixth grade, but not beyond that, where women could play the organ or piano, but they couldn't lead the worship. And that was my upbringing. And then I went to you know, a Christian university. And got my undergrad degree. And that was the whole, that view of women and men in leadership was completely reinforced there in my life. And that's what I brought into the church setting as a leader. And so then though, I'm, I'm starting to get these promptings from God. I don't know how else to say them then. And just went to our eldership and said, guys, I think we need to study this issue. And it was hilarious because. Out of seven men on our eldership only one of them was open to women moving into a more dominant, if you will. What I would say a more servant upside down leadership role. And so, but they agreed. And so our study took seven years, seven years, and we brought in theologians into the church to speak. From both sides egalitarian and complementarian. And they would sit in meetings with us. We'd have all day meetings. We would study scripture. We read books on both sides. I mean, we just, we went deep into this and at the end of seven years, we landed theologically. That ministry would be gift based, not gender based. And it still makes me laugh because I can still see the, the elders actually laughed. Okay. You know, they were all with me on this journey and we all landed where we didn't think we would land. And it, it was so amazing. Now let me say this. If you have studied, if any church leader has studied these issues, I don't have a problem with you if you land in the area of a complementarian position. Okay. Where a woman can't serve, maybe as the senior pastor or a church planter, or as an elder that's that's, that's gotta be between you and God. That's not what I'm saying, but what I'm saying is for me on any of these issues, Janie, it's really important for me to understand both sides, theologically, so that when we do land, we can say, this is why we landed here. And but for me, this isn't a test of fellowship. If someone moves in the other direction, unless they're an absolute jerk about it. Okay. Like if they're not empowering women, if they're not treating women well, that becomes problematic. But for me, it's really fun because I get to see these amazing women, church planters, amazing women in leadership like yourself, who my job is just to simply help you blossom if you will. And you know, in unfold in God's kingdom. And now that I've served alongside of women, elders, me personally, oh my gosh. Status advisory team. We have some of the most amazing women on. Then I go, how could you ever exist? I mean, these women are national leaders, the stadium board high-powered attorney, who's a, a female w I think the leading spiritual director in the country is, is a female. And she's one of our board members. These are high capacity women leaders, and I think how much we would be missing if we hadn't moved to gift based rather than. So if for us, it was not a culturally. It was a theological issue that, that we believed was happening. And that certainly has been reflected fully within stadia world.

**Janie:** I think it's super important for leaders to really challenge themselves of what are the theological areas and what are the cultural or even implied barriers they put up. I, you know, I grew up in one of those women be silent in the church churches, and I, I think about how much my dad was. Have grown in opening his eyes of that. My leadership wouldn't have been able to be used in the church, but it is. Now as I've wrestled with my own theology on that, I have huge respect for the churches that wrestle through the theology and land in complimentarian spaces. What we hear regularly though, as we encounter women who are either they're using their ch their leadership skills in the business workplace, because they weren't invited to use them in the. Or women who are looking for their leadership voice. We were able to hold a

# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



little session a couple of weeks ago to hear what are women experiencing in the church. And there were women in that room who would live in who work in both camps complimentary and a Galatarian. And in both of them, there were still cultural barriers or just leadership barriers. People didn't realize that through lack of representation or just not opening doors for people, women were regularly experiencing closed doors to. They're full God potential. So I love that stadia champions, you know, leaders like a Valerie Grimes, who is an amazing church leader in Savannah, but has never had doors open and for her, and she's starting to experience those as we're challenging people to look for work. The blind and overt barriers are.

**Greg:** Well, it's just, how can we lift people up? Right? How can we, and, you know, Valerie is such a dear friend and I respect her so much and I'm learning so much from her. And I think that's key is that it's not all about what we as men can do for women. It's my gosh, there is so much that I can learn from Valerie Grimes, but my job is how can I open doors for Valerie so that she can become fully. Intended of her to be an intern. Her job is to help lift me up in areas where I need to learn and grow from her. Yeah.

**Janie:** And the key. And I think going back to that upside down leadership, the, the most important thing to hone in on is whoever has the power currently had the responsibility. Sharing and empowering others with that. And let's be honest, especially in the U S church today. It is primarily white men who have the power. And that's why I think stadia has been positioned with a really big responsibility that we're able to come alongside so many for cause. And we need to steward the opportunity to open our eyes, to share that that. Powerful opportunities across the board for women and kingdom diversity and some other things we'll keep talking about. So let me shift to that being empowering children to even have a church now and in the future, when I think of so much of your leadership The thing that I love the most is your natural curiosity. And so in a minute, we're going to be talking about steady is ultimate aims. And one of those is we really want to lead with a posture of. And I think you were the poster child of that. It just is so fun to watch when you were in any situation, how fascinated you are by a person or something, and you ask great questions. And one of my favorite stories that you tell in your river tree experience, and especially as you came into leadership as a church partner with stadia is your relationship with west Stafford and how reading his book too small to ignore. Wrecked your heart for kids. So tell a little bit about that and how God used that whole situation to where you are today to be such a champion of church planting and caring for children.

**Greg:** Yeah. So this is another one that's I love where God's brought us. Right. But it's painful for me when I go back to where, where, where the journey started. So, you know, again, thinking about building Greg nettles kingdom, I knew we had to have great children's ministries at river tree, but it was so that we could reach the families and become a mega church. It had no. Yeah. I mean, it's just awful. It wasn't because I valued children. It was because I wanted to build a mega church and and compassionate international west Stafford was the president at the time. And compassionate kept trying to come into w they wanted us to do a sponsorship weekend and three years in a row, I said there was absolutely no way, you know, you're going to come in and sponsor children. We had, I don't even remember 10 million, \$12 million a building that at the time, we'd just moved into our new. And I got compassion. I'll just take money away from us. And so there's no way they're coming in. And then our executive pastor Gary Jolynn gave me a copy of west Stafford's book. And I just walked away from the screen there for a moment because on my shelf, look at this there's five copies of his book that are sitting over on my shelf. Now that's how meaningful it is to me. Cause everyone I come across, I say, look, you've got to read this. Too small to ignore. And so I read this book as a favor to our executive pastor. I finished it on Thanksgiving night. I was up in the loft of our

# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



house and I fell down on my knees and I just started crying and I said, God, how could I have missed this? How could I have missed the value about the value of children to your heart? And it's crazy. It was. So I called Gary doing that. I was praying Gary and I think I'm supposed to meet west Stafford. And he said why? And I said, I don't know, not remember. We had told compassion. No, for several years, west doesn't know me from Adam. They're a monster organization. So Gary calls out the compassion talks to Angie Lathrop west as assistant drag wants to meet with west. Why he doesn't know? He just thinks God told him to and by God's grace and Wess gracious. He agreed to meet with me. So I flew out to Colorado Springs for a lunch with Wes and we sat down in his office and I can remember sitting on his couch in his office and I just started crying and he had to think what a hot mess of, I just let it into my office. And so we spent the next two hours together and at the end we prayed together. And and at the end of the prayer, I said, look, west, I know how subjective this is. So just say no, if you want. I said, but while we were praying, I sent Scott saying that I'm supposed to ask you to mentor me. And he said, well, you're not going to believe this, but while we were praying, I sense God saying, I'm supposed to pour my life into this young man. Which, how cool is that? Right. And so for the next several years I would fly out to Colorado Springs for once a month and spend a day with west. And that turned into me traveling different places around the world with. And I can't begin to tell you how much I learned from him. Most importantly, though, most importantly is I learned the deep value of children to God's heart and the next generation. And so river tree, by the way, did become a compassion sponsorship church. I think they've sponsored well over 3000 children now with compassion and always paid their bills. They're debt-free they paid off the building right in the midst of. That's God's principle of leadership when we're generous, the things that are close to the heart of God, God entrusts us with more. That's straight out of the Bible. And that led us, Julie and I to sponsor were model vulnerable children through compassion, led us to become foster parents. And then it led us to adopt our beautiful son, Elijah. And so I mean, when we, when God wrecked my heart about children, he wrecked it all. And so when we, you know, when we started looking at church planting and the fact that 85% of those who make a decision to follow Jesus around the world do so before the age of 18, we had to ask the question, what would happen if we combine new church planting with intentionally and strategically hearing for the next generation. And what has happened is we've seen exponential kingdom growth because you have two things that are close to the heart of God reaching, lost people. And children. And when you combine those two, I just don't think you can be closer to the heart of God. And and so it's that value of children, not as a means to an end, but as an end into themselves.

**Janie:** Yes. And the multiplying effect of the, having a church for every generation in the future. So that is really what drives, steady his vision for every child to have a church and your journey. And his journey came, came together at a time when that solidified and all of these things have been apart of the churches that we've started. It expanded our global church planting initiatives. It expanded a variety of people, a variety of models. And I would say it's really led up to our most recent and probably. Most significant cultural shift as a team, yet both of us as a team and in our work with our partners. And that is that as we truly think about including every child in that vision and in our church planting work, we're embarking on a journey of kingdom divers. We want to be an organization that champions all people from every cultural background, every ethnic background but that's required some hard work and some internal looking of where have we not been a champion of that and where have we served in ways that have created barriers. And so that could be. Podcasts in and of itself, but give us a little bit of the highlights of how God wrecked your heart there and how stadia is going on this kingdom diversity journey and where we are right now.



# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



**Greg:** Well, again, this comes back, it comes back to these pain points of, because this is probably the third biggest shift in my leadership. And, and so, again, going back to the idea. Big sanctification and big leadership shifts almost always are accompanied by deep pain. Right? If you want the Heights, you're going to experience the depths as Sheldon Ben OCHIN said, and if you want the joy, you're going to have to probably experience despair. And I, for one want the Heights and the depths, I'll take it to get that great joy with Jesus. And so so think about. Revelation seven nine, where the great gathering of worshipers and heaven is taking place. And it's described as people from every tongue and tribe and nation and culture. And it's this beautiful, beautiful picture of, of what God's kingdom table is going to look like. Yes, it's the stadium. The new picture of the kingdom of God. And so I thought, you know, well, I'm doing pretty good in the whole diversity area. We, we adopted our son. He is a, a black, black boy, beautiful black boy. And so we, we, you know, we grew up with that and we help, you know, we have a weird relationship. With people of color and what, as we started diving into this with stadia, our stadium team was diving into this and then, you know, I, Julie and I have been on this journey. And so we started looking and I started having conversations with, you know, one of our board members, Albert Tate, who's this amazing voice on this issue and other friends. And what I learned was and again, this is the painful parts for me. My relationships with people of color were typically relationships where I was helping them. And so, yeah, we had relationships with children around the world because we sponsored them through compassion international. And so when I went to visit them in Ecuador or Africa, as I did, we were taking them gifts and we were helping them financially. And we were telling them about Jesus. We were helping them, Julie. Was a big sister to this beautiful young girl named rose from the time she was six years old until just recently, I believe rose turned 20 and rose went on vacations with us and she was in her home for holidays and bake cookies with us and became a part of our family. But the reality was, was rose as a person of color was someone we were helping and, and, and that's that's that's should we be helping? Yeah. But what that did for us is created a worldview that people of color, where people to be helped. And that is no good because what I've learned is my goodness. I need help from them. If, as much, if not more, To learn a God about God's kingdom table and a whole variety of other things. I'm naive as it to think that I'm the only one that has anything to offer and is the one to help. And so when you start processing that stuff and you start lamenting and then repenting quite frankly, about things in your life that you've said, or have not done. Right. So for instance, we did a survey at stadium. From many people that had gone through our church planting world process Janey. And as you know, the data we got back was very painful. Just last year, 40% of our church planters in the United States were planters of color, which is really cool, but our systems and process, because stadia was birthed out of a white church planting world launch, large church planting. Now listen, God birthed Stadia.. I believe that with all my heart. So it's all good. And we are thankful and celebrate all that God did, but we have to look back now and I go, Ooh, we've put up some barriers or people of color that we did it wasn't intentional, but it was. And I'll tell you what we, as an organization started lamenting the barriers that we even unknowingly put up, then that leads us to repentance sin. God, we're not going to do that anymore. We're going to correct our systems and processes. And for those we have heard, we are going to ask their forgiveness and we have, and so, you know, it's, I liken it this way. I look back when I, as I've been on this journey and I look back and I think to my childhood, just because of where I grew up in this little white town in farm country, in Ohio and spent my life there, where there were no people of color that I was aware of. I had no people of color in my school system until my junior year of high school when we had an exchange student from Brazil. Okay. And so I would sit on the back steps when I was a little kid and we would say this horrible rhyme, any meanie miney Mo that was. And so now, so now when I'm reflecting back on saying that as a little kid at the steps there, it breaks my heart because I knew it breaks God's heart. And so I lament that Janie. And here's the deal. If there was anyone

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there that I don't even remember who those kids were, but, but if there was a person of color in that group that I knew today, I would go back to that person right now. And I would say, I am so deeply. For, for what I said and, and hurting you. And I say that to my brothers and sisters of color right now, I repent. I will not come out of my mouth again. And I am sorry for that. I, so, so, you know, was Greg a bad kid when he was five, play nine, go seek with his friends and saying that, no, I wasn't, I wasn't a bad kid. I just didn't know. But when I do know, I have a responsibility to immense that as God breaks my heart, And then to repent of it and not do it anymore. And I believe to say, listen, I am really sorry about that to anyone. I can feel a relationship with where I did damage. And so that's been the journey that stadia has been on is saying, listen, now we're ready to go. We are, we are ready to do. We have lamented, we have repented and it's, it'll be an ongoing journey, but we are ready to learn. Now we are working on our systems and processes because the goal it's do I celebrate all the churches that God has planted? Yes, absolutely. We celebrate. And all those people involved in stadia over the years we celebrate. But man, am I looking forward to the next couple of decades as we have diversity around the table that reflects the kingdom table of God. And so, yeah, it's a big journey. Janie. It's a painful journey. Quite frankly. It's a scary journey, but man, it's a journey. I'm delighted that we're all on together.

**Janie:** I am too, because the kingdom diversity journey we're on. First of all has to happen for that. Every vision I'm so grateful for stadium wanting to develop me as a Christ follower by investing in me to be part of the conversation. We've provided tools to all of our team, like the intercultural development inventory, and lots of really powerful conversations. Yukon chew coming in as, as our catalyst for this and guiding us through both personal and professional hard work that we have to do. And what I also really appreciate about this journey in context of the conversation we're having here is how it really represents. The Stadia culture is upside down in leadership and how your leadership affects things. Because really the journey internally to stadia started from team members who are on the front lines right up on the pyramid. And you were the ones who are seeing, wow, we are kind of a hot mess. We're doing great things. But we've got some problems and hi, Greg other leaders, we've got some problems. We need to wrestle with this. And at first it was a little bit like what we're doing good here. And then the opening of eyes and just the grace-filled leaning in with a posture of learning. All of the ways that we want to show up as kingdom leaders started unfolding. And we got to see how everyone on our team was being able to be a voice in this conversation. And even now we're, we're really embracing the need to give each other permission to make mistakes there. All of us need to realize that we're trying to navigate this with opening our eyes, but our eyes aren't totally open yet. And it won't be until we're in the presence of Jesus. But until then, how can we even deal with mistakes and challenges along the way? So it is truly an example of that upside down leadership and how our whole team is empowered to say, we even need to grow in this area.

**Greg:** Yeah, it's a fun journey Janey, and it's always better in team. And I absolutely love it when team members that are empowered out here. Actually, I love when God uses them then and goes, Hey, Greg, we need to work on your character as a leader. And, and that's the coolest thing in the world.

**Janie:** It's so good. So let's give a few practical things before we wrap things up. I want to talk through some practical tools that you and our other leaders use and just things that we champion in our organization that have helped us in upholding a strong culture and protecting it and living it out. And the first and the most significant is the way that you and our other leaders constantly keep the vision in front of us. So our vision for every child to have a church. Is just frequent in everything. We talk about all of our rhetoric and then

# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



also the fact that our values, the way we live out, that vision and work toward it are not tucked in away in a drawer somewhere, but they're truly something that we talk about regularly. So just give the highlights of how you make sure vision and values stay a part of everything we do.

**Greg:** So part of it is just you, you talk about it all the time. And so we have five values and. And unlike a lot of organizations. I really believe this. If any of one listening right now are watching where to get in touch with any stadia staff member. I mean, you're way up here. One of our bookkeepers our admins, anyone, they, if you talk to them, they would be able to tell you what our values are, what they made and why they, how they influence stadia and, and how that person actually lives in the mouth. So they are, they are not just something that's hung on the. Or written down somewhere, these are values that guide us. And so, you know, the vision, every child has a church. Well, how do we accomplish that? Well, we help you start new churches that are thriving, growing, multiplying from the next generation. And then our, our values, you know relationships and urgency and impact in children and celebration, which I love. And here's, those are our guiding principles that help us make decisions. And so they have to be buried deep within you. Those are not aspirational. None of it. And they actually are how we make decisions.

**Janie:** Yes. And we repeat them, every gathering we're together. We celebrate them. We give values, awards, people to champion and motto.

**Greg:** That's your team. That's so good.

**Janie:** I get to do the fun stuff of playing out the pieces. And it's just such an honor because our team. Live out those values. So the next tool I want to . Talk about, and we can put this in the, in the notes is the process we've gone through of moving icebergs. We've gone to through just in, in identifying the key problem. We're trying to solve that. Today's church's. And that can play out both in the quiet quality of the churches, that there are churches that are dying and not thriving and multiplying as well as the quantity. We don't have enough churches for the people who need a church. And so as we've started wrestling with scaling, so we can plant more churches, we've known, we need to go through significant changes as an organization in that process, though, we needed to know. That we've gone through an iceberg process. What is it that of our iceberg that is true under the surface that needs to remain consistent no matter what changes outwardly happen. And in that process, we've honed in on some ultimate aims that things that we really want to be about as a team that we want to show up as our, with our planters, with each other. And so talk a little bit about the ultimate aims and, and how we're starting to play those out in everything that.

**Greg:** Yeah. So the, the ultimate aims are really how we're going to show up in every situation. So this is how I'm going to show up in a podcast. It's how you're going to show up in one of your team meetings. It's how our project managers are going to show up with a church planter. In any situation we're in, this is how we show up and these have become so important for us. And, you know, the first one is just simply in all things we lead with. Grace-filled authenticity. And when we, when we talk about this I would go back to our journeys. And so for me, I hope I've shown grace-filled authenticity. Today in that talking about the pain in my own life, as I learned the mistakes and the sinfulness and the character pieces God's, God's working on. And but it's also allowing me offering you great. Jamie as you share authentically your story, but the only way I think we can show up in those spaces that way is if, like when I say I actually respect

# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



and value people that are different on the egalitarian. Complimentarian part of that is I know the pain of my own journey and where I've come from. And and so I can respect others where they are in their pain of their journey, enjoy of their journey. Right. When I, when I look at people who haven't yet understood the value of children I don't become condescending. I just realized, gosh, they're just where I was. Right. 25 years ago. Right. They, they that's, I didn't value children either. So why wouldn't I be grace-filled towards them? And so it's, it's, it's saying we're going to be out there. But we're also going to show up with grace in those situations. Now, I don't know how much you want to dive into these Janie or..

**Janie:** Yeah. And then I, when I give a quick story of how I've seen this play out to our other three, ultimate aims are leading with a posture of humility. The others are commit leading with a commitment to learning and then leading with love to those who are on the margins. And so I think all of the stories we've talked about today, play that out. But one that really stands out to me is you know, we're a virtual organization. So most of our work is done through a zoom screen. We don't see the bottom half of most of our team members. We're just in these boxes. So when we started working on our team rally this year, it was going to be the first time we were going to be in person. For three years. Partly because we just decided to go virtual few years ago and then we had to because a coven, but when we put the agenda together for that, we knew we need to do things in person that we can't replicate in the zoom screen. And so a vital part of that whole week was sharing. Sharing where we came on our journey, where, how we grew up, how we came to know Jesus, our home church stories. Because I think when we lean in with authenticity and humility and want to learn and really love to the margins, the more we share stories, the more we can see where people have been on in their journeys and where they're coming from and how the way they might show up might not always be the way we would show up or we would want to be impacted. And so I say that to say, So many ways that eyes were open during that week. And I think even about my friend Marco, who works on my team and how English is his secondary language Spanish is his primary language. And just getting to see him in person being able to interact in El Paso with people who spoke Spanish primarily and realizing he has a different personality in Spanish than he does English. And then getting to sit around a coffee shop with our team. And share stories in here where he came from and how I could just see each of us opening our eyes to a whole greater appreciation of the honor of getting to work with Marco and the leadership abilities he brings to our team. And it was just a reminder that story is a key part of stadia culture, because we are about helping people experience the greatest story ever of Jesus through a local church.

**Greg:** Yeah, it's comes down to story, determines language and language defines culture. And so, you know, we are sticklers, you know, this Janie, when, when everybody's talking about art organization structure and someone inadvertently. Yeah, well, the people under me I'm I always say, oh, no, stop right there. Those are the people above you. Right. Or when somebody's talking about church planters only as male in a male context, and I'm going, Hey, hold, just throw it on a second. Let's start using non different pronouns here. If a planter is male or female let's, let's use those pronouns appropriately because language matters and it determines our actual thought processes and the hard wiring of our brain. And so when we talk about, you know, I love that we went to El Paso because one of our ways we're going to show show up is, is to just lead with love to those on the margins. And right now, if we're not putting ourselves in situations, I mean, some of the deepest poverty. It is just on the other side of the wall from El Paso right now in, in Mexico. I mean, it's right there. And if we're not aware of that and placing ourselves in that situation, then there's no way we can learn about how Jesus feels about. People on the margins. Absolutely. And when we look at the census that the growing majority of kids in the U S are, are of Latino background, we have to, even in the U



# THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



S context, think about a worldwide perspective, let alone the worldwide. For churches around the globe. Well, gee, it has been great talking with you on this podcast, and I'm so glad that you contributed so much by hijacking this.

**Janie:** Took over the hostile take over, but not so not hostile because of the way you empower me as a leader. And I'm so grateful for it.

**Greg:** Janie. Thanks. I'll look forward to having you as a guest next time when we actually do talk with you about your leadership role. Thanks everyone for joining the church planting podcast.