

THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



Greg: Hey everyone. Welcome to the church planting podcast. I'm Greg Nettle and I serve as president of stadia church planting. Our desire is to help you start new thriving, growing, multiplying churches for the next generation. On this episode of the church planting podcast, we have an amazing female leader, Mary Kamau. Mary Kamau is the founder and leader, along with her husband, Wallace, of missions of hope international in Africa. We have so much to learn from this mission about church planting and church leadership. Please welcome Mary Kamau. Well I'm here on the church planting podcast with my good friend, Mary Kamau. Mary such a delight to have you with us.

Mary: I'm so glad to be here. And thank you for this opportunity to talk about church planting.

Greg: Mary, I know that you and your husband Wallace are in this together and that it's, it's a partnership and so forth. So why don't you tell us just a little bit. What's going on with Missions of Hope International.

Mary: Missions of hope international is Christian organization that is working among the most vulnerable communities in specifically in Kenya, but also in beyond Kenya in the future. And we are working with the most vulnerable. Children and the children give us an entry point to their families. And then these families are the ones that make up these communities. And so we plant touches among these communities. And also we start schools for the children in these communities.

Greg: Yeah. So I just, you know, your heart beat resonates with me. This, you know, our vision is for every child on the planet to have a church. So I love that you all value the next generation. Mary. Your story is just so fascinating to me and how you're sold out to Jesus. How did missions of hope international get started?

Mary: So I was a college student and I learned about the slums of Nairobi specifically in Madari Valley slum. And when I went the other first time, I was shocked to see the kind of poverty. The people in Madari Valley lived. And I wondered why nobody was doing anything about it. Why weren't Christians doing something about it? And then later I got connected to a group of students from a different university and Wallace was one of them, my husband, Wallace. And so as we continued, we felt according to actually respond to the needs of this community by starting preschool and. Hopefully having these children give us a, an entry point to their families so that we can evangelize to them, decipher them. And so in the year, 2000, September 4th, we started our preschool with 50 boys and girls age four to six. And then this children introduced us to their family. And then we started the first church plant December of the same year. And it's amazing because what happens in what would happen in our school is that as we taught these children, the word of God, and as we taught them how to pray, how to memorize verses and we shared Bible with them as they went. They would share this with their parents. And that is actually what made the parents to open up to us. And so over the last, over 21 years, we have now expanded this ministry. And from that one school we had, we now have schools invited different locations and we have 26 church plants in these location. That is schools and we have 22,560

Greg: Mary. I, I just that's every time I hear that story, I just, I thank God for you in Wallace and for your the vision God placed in you. There's so much to unpack here. I'm just thinking about here you are a university student, a college student, and you see a need, right? You see a need in the community in this

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case in deep, deep poverty. and then you decide we can meet that need. We, we can actually help make a difference in this community. And out of that begin a starting a thriving multiplying, growing church from that. And I think those, those are just incredible lessons for us in the west, especially, but certainly around the world, this idea of looking for a need that's there. How do we meet that need in Jesus name? And then how do we launch churches out of that? Now, but it's one thing you went from 50 preschool children now to, to more than 22,000 children that that's in your care. Can you talk a little bit about that growth? And I mean, do you have staff now? How, how, I mean, how, how is this operating now?

Mary: Well what we do as these children give us the entry point to their families, Then we also look at what are other needs that are in these families and in these communities. And the interesting thing is that we don't give hard doubts to these people. Yeah, we will. We will. We know they have the limited resources, but we always tell them that they're not good for nothing. And so there is a way that we empower. to see the capabilities they have and the resources that they have within their communities. And so through the children and then these families, we actually started economic empowerment programs as well, as well as health programs, we use an approach. We call community health evangelism, or CHE for short and through the CHE programs, we are able to empower the community members. And so they're the one. Who actually start reaching out to others. And so we have hundreds and hundreds of volunteers in these communities, however, because of the schools and the fact that we have a social work program that works with these families, and we also have the pastors that are pastoring, the churches, we currently have 1,353 staff members. Kenyan staff. And then we also have 10 American missionaries that are working with us from the us. And and, and all these people, they all work as part of one team, of course, of course, multiple teams, but all of us, you know, whether it's Kenyan or the American missionaries, we all work with the same goal, the same focus to bring transformation to these communities. And, and one of the things that we have learned. Is that when we all have the goal of empowering these communities, they end up being feeling like they're the owners of the schools. They're the owners of the churches. So it's not like we, we can't plant a church and then it is our church, but it is actually their church as a community. And so they embraced the church. They embraced the school because these are their children. This is their community. And for us as the staff, the 1300 plus staff members, we come alongside these communities to empower them and to show them what is possible in their communities. So, and transformation

Greg: Mary, a lot of church planters and church leaders listening. You know, I was senior pastor for 25 years at river tree. We had a big preschool and, and daycare and so forth at river tree. And lots of people think about, well, should I start a school? But there's also these nightmare stories of how the school never really it's at odds with the church and real life transformation isn't taking place in the children or in the families. How have you in your schools really been able to go after the life transformation, that results really in planting churches in our schools?

Mary: One of the things that I must say is such a big blessing that we learned from the word go right from the word go, is that we have a social work department in every school. And so the social workers are strong believers, strong followers of Jesus. They are actually like evangelists and they're the ones who recruit the children into the schools. They're the ones who identify these children. They identify these families and they're the ones who start the process of empowering these families. And so they're known in the communities. In fact, the communities see them as heroes, as people who have come to really empower them and to start with them. And and so what, what we have noted. Is that as these people are evangelized

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and disciples, like, like what we will do in a community a social worker together with the church planter that is working in that community, they will start forming what we call growth groups, spiritual growth groups, and then this growth groups as the keep multiplying, they are actually the ones that form the, the church plant. And so what happens is that because it is, they themselves. The community members themselves, then it is, it is them. It is actually them like, like they're actually the ones who ask for the church plant. Like, can we start meeting also on, on, on a weekend, can we meet on, on Sundays for fellowship and and things like that. So it is them who actually ask for it and, and it is just the way it is set up. It's almost like a natural growth into a church. And so, and then of course, for our children in the schools every morning, whether a child is from a Muslim family or from a Christian family or from a non-Christian, it doesn't matter. As long as the child is in our school, the first thing they do is morning devotions. They get to know the word of God. They get to learn memory verses obviously in communities where they are Muslim. They don't like quoting the Bible because they use the Quran, but then the, you teach them the word, the word itself, you don't have to give the PBI reference And the, the, the word kind of the word of God is so powerful. It provides them the moral values that these children have to uphold. And as they go back after memorizing these verse, As they go back in, in their families with these verses. And they're saying them in English, which is a big thing in these communities, then the parents get really excited about it and they they're very open and they're very embracing to the social workers when the social workers show up or when the church planters show up. In fact, they call the church planters, their pastors. Wow. They, they say our pastor and it has been interesting even in some of the Muslim communi. Them calling these pastors, our pastor, and they refer to them and they respect them that way. And they know.

Greg: Mary, Mary, I've gotta interrupt you. I've gotta interrupt you cuz this just, I wanna make sure I understood what you said. So these children are memorizing scripture verses in English? Yes. Okay. Yes. So why in English? Why not in your indigenous language?

Mary: Because they already know, you see, like in Kenya, every child or every person. Has a tribal language, which is like the nat... The mother tongue and and because it's the mother tongue, they already know it. Then every person kind of know kiswahili because kiswahili is commonly used. However, the official language in Kenya is English and and, and it is not necessarily natural for every person. And so it is very helpful. for the children from another age to start learning things in English, how to speak and pronounce English. And that helps them even when now it comes to their performance in their start days as well. And so that is why we actually emphasize, and we have only one day when they do kiswahili, that is on Wednesday.

Greg: Okay. I just I'm, I'm, I'm laughing because it's such a brilliant idea. To take something that they actually have a desire and the need to know, and to make that part of your curriculum and transformation. But I'm also sitting here thinking about the fact that, you know, in the United States most of us, you know, one know one language English may be study another and these kids are growing up and, and they're, they're fluent probably in three languages as, as, as they're growing up, which just, again is so much to learn from, from you all. Okay. I've gotta come back to another thing you. Because, so these schools get started. But you're saying that the, so are the social workers going out into the community, into the homes where the students live? Do I understand that correctly?

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Mary: Yes. They, they actually go into the community. They make the home visits together with the identified church planters. So they go make the home visit. They identify children that can be recruited into our schools. And then they established the relationships with the parents and the community members. As a matter of fact, sometimes the community members help our social workers to identify those children that are needy and desperately in need of our services in our schools. And so that's what the social workers do. And then once the children come into the school, The social workers continue building these relationships with these families and with these community members. And so it is a continuous process.

Greg: Okay. And so are the social workers, actually the ones that end up leading these families to Jesus, or is it the local church pastor? How does that most often take place?

Mary: Both. Okay. Actually, everybody in works in missions of work. It's like a missionary, even teachers, cause sometimes even teachers interact with the parents and all of us we know that our core business is to share the love of Jesus with these people. So any interaction you get with a parent or a child, it is all geared towards sharing the love of Jesus with them. And so because the local church pastor may not be able to visit. All the homes in that community. That's why the social workers are also part of Evangel evangelizing. And then because we are use, we, we re, we re we kind of recruit among and mobilize local community volunteers. We call them CHE, community health evangelists they also evangelize. And most of the times you find that the churches, once they are planted, The we have the CHEs being part of the church. You find the, some of the social workers and teachers in that school being part of that new church plant. And of course the, the church planter that is identified and are the community members.

Greg: Okay. So this, this is absolutely fascinating because I'm thinking about the school that we had at river tree 400 children in the school. Right. So it was a pretty good sized. Not compared to most of yours, but in, in your, so we didn't train our teachers in the school to evangelize. I'm just gonna be honest and open with you about that. So talk about that. How does that process happen? That you're these, these social workers that are going out the health workers, how are they all trained to, how do they know how to do that?

Mary: We do, we do training on evangelism and discipleship for our staff. when missions of hope hires you like when, when you become a member of staff in missions of hope, the first thing as part of your orientation is you go through some training. We call it CHE training so that you can be able to understand to understand our, our holistic ministry model, whether you are a teacher, whether you are a social worker, whether you are a finance person. Whether you are doing an administrative work, whatever you do in missions of hope. That is very important, very crucial. And so in part of the lessons that you learn on evangelism and discipleship, because we believe that everybody, every follower of Jesus ought to be a disciple maker,

Greg: Oh, this is, you know, it's, it's, it's embarrassing. It's humbling, Mary. And, but I so love learning from leaders like you and from other cultures who are doing so many things right now, I'm just because I know you, I'm gonna jump into just a, another area because I've watched it be such a primary area in your life and ministry, and that's the area of prayer. Can you talk that a, a little bit about that? I know sharing the love of Jesus is your core business, which I hope everybody heard that, right. That, that that's the core business. And, but I know it's all undergirded in prayer. Just fill us in a little bit on that.

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Mary: Yes. Actually the ministry of missions of hope international is founded totally on prayers. Without prayers we can't be prayers because we totally depend on God. We depend on him to guide us to leaders, but also to provide for us and to really them make transformation happen. We know that the transformation cannot happen. Without the power of the holy spirit. And so our ministry from, from years back from when we started, we normally meet all our staff meet every day for a prayer time, every single day, every single work day. And then they pray together. And then from there every third week of the. Is a time of prayer and fasting. We encourage people to have serious focused prayer times other than just morning. And then on Saturdays, we have group of staff members meet in different locations to conclude for this prayer and fasting week. And when we pray and fast we normally, we will provide a list of specific prayer needs that are needed across missions of hope across the world, across the body of Christ because that is very key. And we have seen God, really answer prayers in many amazing ways. And if, if, for example in a school, there is a child. Or a family that is seriously struggling and need concerted prayers. We share that even, even if it's not during our prayer and fasting week, however, we also encourage staff members to organize themselves together with their families, you know, like parents and also students to do prayer, prayer times, you know, in the course of the month. So that is something we, it, it cannot be overemphasized. The importance of prayer cannot be okay. Okay.

Greg: Okay. So, so, so let's unpack this a little bit, because you said that the third week of the month they meet your staff meets on Saturday to do this time of prayer. Isn't Saturday, their day off.

Mary: Well that is when the children are not in school. And so we do that one, one Saturday, a month. and in fact, we have, we have four Saturdays in a month. So what happens is that a staff member is allowed to take a day off in the course of the week, like half a day, not whole day, but half a day. So that two, two Saturdays, we normally have mentorship programs and staff members participate in doing. And it's mentorship based on the Bible. That is totally nothing academic. It's some for the younger kids, we do like VBS type of a program. For the older kids we, we have curriculum that we have developed that we are now using. And then one Saturday, a month, sixth grade to eighth grade, they have like they have like, like they call it ignite ignite program. Where they come together. It's more like a youth conference, but it happens once a month for sixth to eighth grade. And so that means the other kids are at home, except that. And then the fourth one Sunday, which is the, usually the third, Sunday is when people meet for prayer prayer time. And it is half day up to one. So the, the meet we, we call it concluding prayer week and then once every two. They share, holy communion, we share holy communion in those gatherings. Wonderful. And that is the as staff members. So the pastors who are who are pastoring, the churches that are represented in each gathering are the ones who lead the rest for holy communion and things like that. And the prayer time and things like that. So the, the get off on, on, in the afternoon. Not unless somebody didn't take off during the week, then that is when they can be able to do that. But this prayer day, that one is compulsory

Greg: for everyone. Okay. It's compulsory. So I, I was just teasing you about taking the day off. I, I know how hard your people work. And so and, and I love that they're taking a Saturday to pray. Okay. I've got still gotta come back one more because you were talking about prayer and fast. So when you're saying fasting, like, are people fasting for, you know, through one meal or are they fasting for a day? What's the fasting look like?

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Mary: Okay. That one, what we normally do is we encourage our people to, to, to comfortably choose what they want, but definitely fasting some meals is, is something that people always. we have people who will fast for the entire week. Literally, like they don't eat anything solid. They'll probably just be on liquids and they'll do that for the week. There are people who will fast two meals and just do like vegetables for the evenings. And there are people who will fast for a, a day or two or three days in the course of that week.

Greg: And, and this is just expected. the people in the church.

Mary: Well, the people who are in and in the church.

Greg: Wow. Okay. I wanna shift gears again because there's more, we wanna learn from you. So you and your husband are in this together, and you've been in this now for a long time together. What have you learned? You know, we have lots of church planters now. Lots of church leaders. Boy, is it a good idea to work with my spouse to be, you know, that tight with them? What have you and Wallace learned working together to make this successful?

Mary: Wow. To be honest that question, a lot of people ask that and they wonder how it happens, but I can tell you what this is the, the best, the best thing for us. I'm just so glad we worked together because. I remember previously until 2005, my husband worked in a corporate company like in an insurance company as a CFO. And I can tell you, I would pray every day that God will set him free from that job so that he could work with me full time. So I us working together day in, day out is a prayer answer and the reason is that when we are together, then we are both focused. We, we both focus on the calling that God laid on our hearts because he called both of us. So we started this ministry together. So it can't be one person is somewhere else doing other things. And another person is the one really working. And so that's point number one, number two. Is that because we, we, we are focused and we are working together, then our prayer life, our devotional to God, our calling is, is very united. Even, even how we bring up our, we have brought up our own children cause we have three biological children and one foster daughter. It is with that kind of focus because we, we are not torn apart. And then one of the things that I must say is that from the beginning, we both recognized the giftings that God has given us. And we both appreciate each other's gifting and talent. And we both flaunt each other to make sure that those gifts are utilized in the kingdom of God, because the gifts are for advancing the kingdom of God. So like, like our hus like, like our CEO, that's my husband, he's the chief executive officer of missions of hope. And he's a great leader because he's able to build teams, you know, different teams in different areas of the organization. And I am gifted in building relationships and building partnerships. So that's why I'm the executive director for development and strategy. And so, and both of us support each other in doing what we do.

Greg: Mary there's just so much we can learn from you. I'm so grateful for Stadia's partnership with missions of hope international, but even more so for the growth of our personal friendship. Thank you so much for sharing with the church planting podcast today. And we'll look forward to having you on again soon so that we can learn even more from you.

Mary: Thank you. Thank you so much. We also appreciate our partnership with Stadia. And I believe that greater things are yet to be done in many more communities as we partner together. God bless you.

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