

THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



Greg: Hey friends. I'm really excited about this episode of the church planting podcast. My dear friend, John Tisevich is gonna be joining us for just. Pretty epic journey. As we talk today about what it means to lead as a church planter, as a church leader, as a business leader, in the context of being kind of a mountain climber, if you will, a climbing companion with others in a climbing companion with Jesus, John is currently. Just now transitioning into the lead role as the visionary senior pastor of an incredibly impactful church down in the Cincinnati, Ohio tri-state area whitewater crossing. And John has also been out to plant a church in San Francisco. He has a. Passion for church planting and seeing God's kingdom expand. And he summited numerous mountains with me. And so we're gonna welcome right now, John Tisevich. Hey everyone. I'm here with my very dear friend, John Tisevich. He's an amazing senior pastor for me, most importantly he's just a guy. I respect, he's a climbing companion and I just love him dearly. Let's Welcome John Tisevich. It's great to have you on the church planning podcast. Thanks

Jon: Greg. It's good to be here, man. Hey everybody.

Greg: Hey and John, so give us an update. You just had a big transition, the formal transition, I think just last weekend. Where are you and what what's

Jon: going on now in your life? Yeah, so I'm in just on the west side of Cincinnati and this past Sunday, after about two and a half years, we finished a success. And I stepped in and officially have taken the helm as senior pastor at whitewater crossing. So yeah. Good weekend. Lots of, lots of stuff. quite the, quite the time to do a succession in the middle of 20 and 21, so, yep.

Greg: Yep. And so John, you're, there's a, there's a lot of story to this though, but you, you are passionate about church planting and have been involved with stadia for a lot of years. Where'd that passion come?

Jon: Well, candidly, a lot of it came from the leadership of a senior pastor named Greg Nettle back in back in, I don't know, 2000 8, 9, 10 before stadia journey I kept hearing about the local church was God's plan. and there's a whole lot of places around our communities, our country, and around the world where there are no churches. And so for me, it just made sense not growing up in the church not really being church, but coming through church by way of people and community. When you started casting a vision for, we need to plan as many churches as possible locally and globally. Kelly and I were in from the GetGo and we got to see it, taste it, feel it both locally and around the world. And then we went off on our own adventures to start a new church out in San Francisco. And we still believe this is God's plan a. And so for us at whitewater now, it's sorry, how do we begin this journey to be a church that plants, churches, that plants churches.

Greg: Yeah. Talk a little bit about that at whitewater, because I love your vision. You, you have kind of a broad vision and I'd love for this is a great chance to, for your whitewater people to hear it. But for everyone who's listening to be encouraged by this vision as well.

Jon: Yeah. So just real quick Whitewater for it's a hundred year old ministry that has gone through so much change and evolution along the, along the way in a hundred years, but where it currently sits, it's a church

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that got really good at a traditional attractional model. And, and, and God blessed it. And man, it's I am, I am inheriting a, the burden of a, of a larger ministry that has been successful. And with that comes a different type of burden. The heartbeat for Kelly and I is that we will be ascending church and not just for the local area, as Cincinnati sits in a tri-state area with Kentucky and Indiana. And we want to build out a network that is starting new sites, whether it's church plants or multisite, or micro churches in the tri-state, but also in the region. And then through throughout the globe. And so we are just now building the framework for that and starting to find partner churches to do that.

Greg: Yeah, so, you know, I, I'd love to hear that a hundred year old church. And in, in order for a hundred year old church, you know, historically they've lost their effectiveness. I mean, that's, that's the norm for a hundred year old churches, but with you now, you, I, I think you believe that whitewater crossing is just now entering its most productive phase.

Jon: Correct. We Greg David Vaughn, who I know you went to school with David Vaughn, he set a foundation really for Kelly and I to step in and go with all of the resources and leverage of this incredible congregation. We can fulfill some really big God dreams. And it is not the typical story of a hundred year old church, for sure to now recreate itself. But that's what we're doing.

Greg: Yeah. This hasn't been a church a hundred year old church. That's declining. I mean, Dave, Vaughn's amazing. No good friend and no, I mean, he's kept that fire burning, but I love what you're saying in the kind of the passing of the Baton, or I think the passing of the helmet, the gladiator helmet, which is what you all did. It was yeah. That it, it was more Dave's vision is for you to take it even farther, dive more into church planting and to renew. Now, now, John, you've always had this adventurous spirit. And you were, you had an adventure you had an adventure with me recently. Tell us. So when it's the first time we talked about this in the planning podcast, tell us a little bit about what just happened.

Jon: So we just happened to get back from the Paul for those that don't know, and we were able to Trek to Everest base camp. And I, I, I had fun a couple weeks ago telling everybody you know, we tracked, you know, over a hundred miles, we. Trapped up to, you know, 18,000 feet. We had all this 25,000 of elevation gain and loss. 18 days of hiking through rain and snow and sunshine and Yung I caught a parasite. I lost 25 pounds and 20 days. And we raised over and we raised over \$625,000 to start new churches around the world. So praise God for all of it, except for the parasite.

Greg: right, right. So yeah. So nine of us went to Nepal. And Trek to Everest space camp. And I said, it's it's if it's, if it wasn't the hardest one I've ever done, it was certainly right up there, but it's really close. And, and you and I, I was trying to remember how many mountains we've gone together now.

Jon: You and I together are getting close to 12. Well, we've been doing it for 12 years. I think the first one started back in 2010. So it's been a, it's been a journey, a lot of mountains.

Greg: And, and I love it because outta the sermon on the mound, when you read it in the message, it says that Jesus invited those apprentice to him up to a higher place on the mountain, on the hill. And then he sat

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down and he taught his climbing companions and I've always viewed us together. And those that, that climb with us and track with us as climbing companions, who, who are just happened to be invited up higher with Jesus, if you will, to sit down with him and he teaches us on the mountain. Talk about that a little bit as, as you've, as we've climbed together over, like you said, over the past decade, plus, you know, what are some things you've learned on that journey? . Yeah.

Jon: So I have not always lived this way and I think you would say probably not you as well, but candidly, you and I can kind of like open up and show a different side now that we couldn't as younger leaders pace is one of the things that I've learned that paces everything. I know. I used to think, man, run out as fast as you can, as hard as you can. And that was a bit of a young buck, young blood mentality that I only learned in time, man, that's not always healthy and especially in climbing, but also in leadership that paces everything slowly is the fastest way to get to your desired destination. Most recently one of our Sher. On this Everest track, he would, he would say slow is smooth and smooth is fast. So pace learning to slow down. Yeah, that's a big lesson for me. Yeah.

Greg: So, you know, that's just a, a fascinating thing because we do try to run at breakneck speed. And I, I know just speaking to so many of our church planters that are, that are listening or watching and church leaders in general business people. I mean, we, the pace we try to keep. Generally unhealthy. And the reality is one of the things I love about trekking and mountain climbing is that you, you literally are forced to slow down. If you go at that fast pace, it will kill you. And and the same is true in ministry and in life. So, so that's a great lesson, John, what, what else have you learned?

Jon: So I'm gonna make, I'm gonna make fun of you, Greg. But you, you already learned this and I already shared this with you on our, I think it was on our first climb we were doing Pike's peak together and I have this picture of you. And I took it from the back cuz I was. Going slow, not because of the principal, but because I was outta shape and I took this picture of the four of us, me, you, Julie, and Kelly. And there was the three of us, you know me, Kelly and Julie kind of clumped together. And then you were like a hundred yards out in front and you were set in the pace, man. And you were, and you were trailblazing. And I was like, man, that's that's awesome. And then. You fell into a sinkhole yeah,

Greg: exactly. Downstairs. I post hold in snow up to my chest. yeah.

Jon: True story. And so what I, what we have learned as leaders and as, as, as climbers is that the strongest climber is typically in the back and we saw that on Everest. We had. One of the highest esteemed Sherpa in the Himalayas as one of our Sherpa and every trip, every Trek, every day that we're on, he took the position of the last person in our entire team. And I remember one day just being back there and just asking him, why are you back here? You're the strongest climber. You're the one who knows the mountain the most. And he says, Sherpa leads from the. and I, and I thought I misunderstood him. He goes, I said, what do you mean? He goes, Sherpa leads from the back. And we started to unpack this. This just how they were taught is that the strongest climber is back there to be able to assess from the back. And there's other Sherpa there that they can communicate with and talk to if they need to make adjustments. But the Sherpa leads from the back to make sure we're at the right pace. We're going down the right path. I can see how everybody's doing is doing, and I can make adjustments if needed. and we talked about, you know, how, Hey, that

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sounds a lot like Jesus is teaching of his posture and position of where he would lead from as you know, king of Kings. You know, if you, if you want to be the best, then, you know, you will serve, you didn't come to be served. So that has been especially very candidly, as I step into being like, you know, the, the quote, senior guy, there's a temptation to be. To take the position of, I am the senior guy or I'm going to be leading out so far out in front that people don't know even where we're going. You taught me on this, climb that as a leader, you can't point so out in front that people like they will either see it as impossible, or they will see, they will be overwhelmed in. If you point or lead from too far out in front. So just that, that, that leadership lesson of position is everything.

Greg: Man, John that's just so rich. And you know, going back to our first climb together with, with our wives man alive, you know, I came home and in my reflections and so forth you know, that was one of the things that God taught me on that, that climb was. You know my job isn't to make sure Greg Nettle gets to the top as a leader or to get there first. Certainly my job is to make sure the team stays healthy. Right. And they all get to the top. Right. And, and you can't do that if you're so far out in front of everyone that you don't know what's going on with the team. And so that was such an important lesson. I think for, for me, especially, but for both of us to, to learn as well. So, you know, when you get up to 18,000 feet and beyond, and, and we've been up higher than that, you and I, you know, you're in thin air. Yeah. Talk about that concept and what it means leadership wise when you're running in thin air.

Jon: Well aside from just pace and position I think one of the things I learned on this trip personally, is that not everyone. is built and made for all altitudes. Everyone is called to climb mountains. Everybody is, is got a mountain to climb and there's a, and there's a guide for every climber. But Jesus, there is a, there's like a, I'm only calling a few to go to this place. You see that where he takes, you know, Matthew, John, James, or Matthew you know, Peter, John, James. And he is like, You're gonna go to a different level with me, then there's a 12 that you're gonna go to a different level with me. Not everybody went to the same level. With Jesus. And as we look to be leaders who are going, Hey, what is the next mountain to go after? I've really gotta assess the team that I am calling and building. Are they built? And can I get them if not like where they are now, can I assess that they have the ability to climb at the same altitude as this current existing team? And that is hard. And maybe that may sound harsh, that not, you know, not everybody's made for high altitude climbing, but just like in real climbing, there are health risks that come with high altitude climbing and not everyone is cut up for that. There is a discipline and a training that is required to be at that altitude. What I love, like thinking back to, to co pacie. It took a lot for us to get up to just base camp of Cotopaxi. But then at base camp, there was another round of training and conditioning just at base camp. So it wasn't that you were trained and ready to go to, to the summit just because you started. There was a whole other round of training and discipline and equipping just at base camp. And so it, it, there's just a, a constant, I've gotta be a learner. I've gotta be teachable. I've got to keep training even in the midst of the climb and not everyone either gets that or is up

Greg: to that. Okay. So let's, let's unpack that a little bit because that's a really important principle. I mean, in one, on one hand, we're saying our job as leaders. To get everyone to the top. And, you know, and as church planters and church leaders, we, we do want that to happen. But the reality is as, as the church shifts direction and climbs another mountain, or as the church grows larger and it becomes thinner air sometimes or if the church even shrinks and, and people don't wanna be part of the team anymore, whatever the, the reality is sometimes the team changes and as a leader, We have to be okay with that. We

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have to make the hard calls. I mean, there are times on climbs, John, where, where the Sherpa guide will say, I'm sorry, you, you can't go up any higher. You're you're done. Yeah. And it's a, that's a as a climber that that's probably the, you know, the, the worst thing possible to hear, but the, we know the Sherpa guide has our best interests and the interest of the team in. And, and so we listen to it. Hey, I, so, you know, I think as planters and leaders, we have to always be aware that the team's gonna shift. And here's the thing that I want to keep in mind. I think for myself as a leader, there, there, there may come a time. John, there will come a time. There will, for all of us, when we are gonna be the ones that are gonna have to say, okay, someone as Moses said, right, someone else is gonna have to lead into this next climb on this next part of the journey. Right. And that's what Dave bond just did with you. And, and we're all gonna do it someday. And that's an important thing to recognize, okay, I'm gonna shift gears just a little bit here because this, I wanna, we're gonna stay on the climb theme. But this one was a little unique. Our very first climb was with two women, our wives, Julian Kelly, and but most of our climbs, John have been all men and yeah, on this track, we had two women on the track with us. And it's the first time that I've done an extended Trek big mountain Everest with mixed company. And I have to tell you, I absolutely loved it. You know, what, what were your thoughts? What, what, what shifted yeah. For you?

Jon: When we first started talking to each other on zoom calls and everything, and everybody was sharing messages on here's what I'm doing for training and here's what I'm doing to get ready. The ladies Nancy and Andrea man, they were killing it, going to the gym, working out, joining CrossFit, climbing mountains, just to get. and a lot of the guys, including like me and you were just like, oh my gosh, these ladies are outpacing us. They're gonna kick our butts completely like dispelling the myth of like, well, the guys are the better athletes. Like they were setting the pace from the get go. And then on the actual climb, the two of them. Nancy, who was, I think, you know, in her sixties, she is out in front, always in the first pack, like really encouraging people to keep going. She never missed a beat, even when she was facing the the suspension bridges that like she was afraid of, she was persevering and leading the way, you know, we asked her multiple times, are you sure you wanna do this? And she was like, be quiet. I'm doing this. Andrea, she was. Beast, even though she had multiple back issues and she was, she had some sort of what was it? I forget now, something in her back was completely out of place. She kept persevering. She wouldn't give up. We were thinking, oh my gosh, we may have to like call on a helicopter and get her outta here. And there was no way that she was gonna stop or quit and not persevere through it. So that was one of the, the grit that they showed. But two man having, having ladies on the. it just made us better. There's a tendency. When, when, when guys get around guys and guys are left to guys in mountaintops, away from civilization, we can get stupid and how we talk and we can get like caveman que and what the ladies did is they kept us at a place of like, we're gonna be real. We're gonna be authentic. We're gonna be vulnerable. , but we're gonna make you better. And I think, you know why I know you and I share the same opinion of just man women in leadership and women coming alongside any, any area just makes any of us in any organization, any endeavor better that we are better truly working together. And so I I think it was a brilliant move. I think it was a gutsy move because it's not anything that you see a lot happen, especially in our experience. So you nailed it with this one, bud.

Greg: Yeah, it was, it was so fun and, you know, I agree so physically, they more than kept up. I mean, oh my gosh. You know, they outpaced us. And but I just loved, like you said, the insights in the conversation you, you were were, we're getting to track with two world class leaders who happen to be women and all of those insights. And I just think we miss out so much on a gifting that God's given. When we limit when we

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don't have kingdom diversity around you know, in everything we do. And I think that, you know, in the church world, we're seeing more and more women planters and teams planting and so forth. The, the only thing is on this trip, I said, man, the next one, I want it to be racially diverse as well. Yeah. Because we haven't gotten there yet. Other than people thought I was Indian, you were Indian. I was an Indian mistaken several times. Not because I was doing the work of a shepa, but just cuz of my dark skin color. And but we, we really wanna diversify in that way as well, but, but diversity just makes it just better as a team, as leadership in convers. Now John, one more. One more thing I wanna talk about is just the idea of, you know, Jesus is inviting us to climb with him. That's scriptural straight out of the sermon on the Mount climb up higher, come up higher with me, be my companion. Talk about experiencing God when we climb physically. Yeah. So,

Jon: We learned this pretty early on, on the climbs that God is waiting for us on the. It's never a question of, will we meet God on the mountain or I'm, I'm praying that I'll meet God on the mountain. He is waiting for us. There's an invitation of join me on the mountain. And so for us, it is, it's the principle of our, our I'm gonna empty out myself to make room for what I know I'm going to receive. On this trip specifically, I had this mantra going in that is now a mantra for just being back. The normal world is slow down, breathe, be present, empty out, be filled up. And it was, it was rooted in that idea of, I know I'm going up the mountain to meet him there and to receive something. I am coming with an expectant heart to receive because I know he's gonna be there. And I know he's a good dad meeting him on the mountain. Isn't at one it's not optional or it's not a question it is going to happen. And it's more for us of, are you gonna be aware of his presence? Are you gonna slow down long enough to here? Are you going to be so full of what you think you're supposed to be learning right now? And, and here's exactly what I'm, I'm bringing to the mountain and here's what I need from, from my father which we can do which I have done. Or are we gonna come pretty emptied out knowing that we can be filled up to the max if we come with that posture. So that has been a learning. I haven't always gotten that. But that knowing, Hey, he's waiting for me. He's calling me there. That's a huge takeaway from me and for me climbing is hard. Maybe it's not hard for everybody. But for me, Once you get above 15,000, 16,000 feet climbing just starts to be strenuous and hard, and the breathing gets labored and your body wants to give out. And there's multiple times where I'm just like, man, I want to give up and we know this, but we, we take it for granted. Like we're made stronger. And our weakness, he draws close to those who who need him, who are brokenhearted. He draws close to those who are in the valley. Like those are all scriptural truths and in the mountain. We're always in a valley, on the mountain and we're, we're weak in the mountain. I'm a bit broken hearted because this track's never gonna end. It's like, there's this beautiful, like I'm gonna meet you on the mountain because you physically are gonna need me. So it it's, it's really cool, man. I wish more people could experience it. It is cool. What you and I know. that when you get to a summit or you get to a mountaintop moment, you're seeing things that so few people see and experience. And I think we're experiencing a, a picture of heaven. We're experiencing God and our hearts kind of break because we wish that everybody could see that we wish that everybody could experience that. And the heart breaks a little bit, knowing that a lot of people aren't and a lot of people won. And so it, it, it hurts and it keeps us driving to keep climbing mountains, to keep sharing what we know to be true, even though we know, unfortunately not everybody's gonna receive it or see it.

Greg: Yeah. I mean, that's, you know, the, the, the reality is, is church. Planting's hard. Leadership is hard. It's all it's, you know, we talk metaphorically about climbing the mountain and anybody in leadership is, is a mountain climber. I would say. Yeah. And the reality is, you know, the, the, when we talk about why,

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why do you do what you do? I, you know, I love meeting God on the mountain. There's no question, but what drives us to is, you know, we get sponsors by the foot or the mile or the altitude to plant new churches, \$625,000 because these single most important thing. . What about the people? Not that we'll not see that physical mountain, but, but don't know that Jesus is even inviting them up on the mountain with him, right. Because they've never heard the name of Jesus and you know, that's why we help start new churches for the next generation. That's why I love our church planters and church leaders throughout the United States and around the world. And so we'll keep climbing and I'm encouraging all of our planters, our church leaders, our, our business leaders who are following Jesus to keep climbing. You know, spend that time with Jesus unplugged, be out in nature, whatever it is to refill your tank, where you can be close to God, John, you're starting your next mountain climb there at whitewater crossing. I'm excited to be part of that journey with you. Congratulations and thanks again for being on the church planting podcast.

Jon: Thanks brother, man. Love you.