

THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



Greg: Hey friends. I'm really excited about our guest today on the church planting podcast, Daniel Yang, Daniel's the director of the Church Multiplication Institute. He leads and oversees all of its initiatives. He's a church planter. He is previously with the Send nNetwork and the release initiative. He's kind of the guru of all things church planting. He's on the Stadia advisory team, and so he speaks into the direction of Stadia. He's a good friend, his most recent book inalienable how marginalized kingdom voices can help save the American church is a must read, really excited to have Daniel Yang with us today. So Daniel, so good to have you on the church planning podcast, my friend.

Daniel: Greg. Good to see you and be with you again. Thanks for having me. Hey, Daniel.

Greg: I mean, you've been going through a, a bit of a transition lately. Tell let's tell everyone that's with us watching,

Daniel: listening. What, what are you up to these days? I lead something called the church multiplication Institute at the Wheaton college Billy Graham center. And it used to be called the send Institute. But. A couple of things that we're focusing in on that really is number one, allowing us to work broadly. But number two to also, you know, kinda on the other side, focus, our work and one is to and there's, there's three areas. Greg one is we really want to help church planting organizations engage the conversation of how to help Gen Z-ers think about church planting for the future. So that's the first initiative. Secondly, is minority led networks, things that you and I have talked a lot about in the past. We're really focusing on how do we help develop and proliferate the ideas of minority led networks. And then thirdly is emerging leaders. So who are the emerging thought leaders that are gonna lead the missional conversation for the future? So those are the three things that we're focusing in on at the church multiplication. all right. Well, man, we could

Greg: spend a podcast on each of those. So yeah, but let me, let me just ask this, cuz you opened with allows you to work more broadly what, what do you mean by. ..

Daniel: Yeah, so the church multiplication Institute, I office out of the Wheaton college, Billy Graham center. And so and initially we were a initiative out of send network and and they continue to be a partner of the work that we're doing. Oh, but fantastic network. We love partnering with them. Absolutely. Absolutely. And so but by being here at the Wheaton college, Billy Graham center, it allows us to work more broadly with all groups. And so and then also to not just provide. Thing tank, you know, activities, but to really provide initiatives, like I was saying, helping organizations think through engaging gen Zers in church planting. And so again, that's really taken advantage of the fact that we're here at Wheaton college, you know, working amongst a, you know, a young demographic. And so these are some of the things that you know, our shift has enabled us to do over the last. Okay.

Greg: So gen Zers, I mean like the, the, the, the generation that terrifies everyone and so forth, and you're

Daniel: saying, getting them involved in church planting and you know, how committed Stadia is to the next generation.

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Greg: Mm-hmm so talk to us. I mean, we're, you know talk to us as church leaders. What are some of the things you're seeing. About how to engage, how can we engage with gen Zers and specifically in church multiplication?

Daniel: Yeah. So a big part of it, Greg is creating environments for them to actually develop. The language of mission for themselves and for the next generation. So here's a couple of things that continues to come up in research and also in our think tanks surrounding gen Zers is they understand institutional structure. Then you think about when you're in your twenties, all of us, when we're in our twenties, we were a little bit anti institution. But the research spring tide research is showing this spring tide research does an annual report called the state of young people. And. And they've noticed among gen Zers that you know, larger than normal you know kind of adverse feelings towards institutional things and again, not abnormal for 20 year olds, but among gen Zers, that number is greater. Doesn't mean that they don't like large groups. It doesn't mean that they don't appreciate structure, but the idea of like, I'm going to join an institutional movement, that's less appealing to them. So, and then also, secondly, is the idea of just power dynamics. And so think about this. If you're working with a church planter right now, almost no church planter identifies himself as a senior pastor like that language of senior. Leadership senior pastoring. Like that was something that came out of a very institutional model. And so you began to see even amongst Xers and millennials, they shed that language of senior leadership again, because that kind of harken to more of a bureaucratic model of organization. So we shifted to language. Lead lead pastor. And even amongst that, like there was a lead pastor, a vision lead pastor of you know, preaching lead pastor of ministries. So you notice that like with each generation, like there tends to be somewhat of a flatter leadership model when you get the gen Zers. You know, this is probably, you know, when we talk about team leadership and round table leadership it's not to say that they don't value point leadership, but that is to say that in our language, in the way that we talk about power dynamics, like you're gonna see amongst gen zer as a desire for new leadership models that are developed their own team. And so I, I, I think, you know, these are some of the things that we need. Wrestle with, and then lastly, I'll say this, there, there is embedded into our church planting vernacular in north America right now, language. That is, that is one generation removed from gen Zers. And so like the idea of being missional, for instance, like you and I have a pretty strong understanding of what bean missional means. And millennials might sort as well. But by the time you get to gen Zs, like if you think about like, there's so much like unpacking to do. And so there is a sense in which like, we, you have to create environments where Zers, you know, and the oldest of them right now are about 25, depending what you accept to be the birthdate of 26, maybe it, it isn't to say that you couldn't like teach them the vernacular of north American church planning language, but that's an, that's an ad. It's almost like a Saul's armor that they have to learn and then they have to choose for themselves, whether they're gonna carry that forward. So, you know, these are some of the things that we need to wrestle with as we're leading our organizations.

Greg: Okay. So let's say we're an existing church an existing church planning organization, like Stadia, and then there is this and I get the 20 something we've all gone through. But a stronger adversity towards institutions. So Daniel, do you, do you have any suggestions for us? How do we at a practical level engage gen Zs, even though we are maybe the institutions that they look adversely towards?

Daniel: Yeah. Yep. So there is a little bit of attention there because there is a sense in which like. Zers are a little bit less, I would say they're, they're more anxious about entering into institutional commitments. Likes, say for instance, like if you have a church leadership pipeline, you're gonna get a zer, who's gonna be apprehensions about entering into your pipeline. Even that language pipeline you know, can feel a little bit yeah, heavy for them. But as an institution or an organization, you know, and you don't have to be a. Longstanding organization. I mean, Stadia has 20 plus years or something like

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that. Yeah, plus yeah, one of the reoccurring themes. And again, this comes from spring tide researches the state of religion and young, young people or state of young people from religion. Is this idea of like mentorship now we all value mentorship. Like mentorship is something that I think you know, with each generation, there is a, there's a, a, a, a value of mentoring, but the, the way that mentoring happens at the level that I think is meaningful to Zs, is there, isn't just a, you know, I've heard somebody distinguish that coaching is. Drawing out of drawing something out of somebody that they already kind of have for themselves. Mentoring is kind of like pouring knowledge and skill into people. And so mentoring, coaching in some ways creates this dynamic where you're both drawing out of people and you're pouring into them. And what, what that does is it actually creates. So if you develop like leadership team models around mentoring, coaching, you know what it does is it, it can't afford. As a as a leader of an organization to not be transparent. And that I think is one of the biggest issues that I think Zers are most timid about when it comes to institutions is I just don't know the leader. I dunno if there's longevity in their character, if there's longevity in their commitment, because if you think about. You know, there is kind of like boomers who are the IBM generation and they were committed corporately to a, a job 30, 40 years, by the time you get to Xers and then millennials, there's a bit of, you know, like everything is you know a stepping, you know, ladder to the, to the, to the next job. And so there's a sense in which like Z. Trust stability based on how they know the leader relationally. So mentoring coaching is a huge is a huge, like posture that we should have towards the next generation because they do want wisdom. and they do want knowledge and they do want leadership. They want some level of authority. But that comes with a high level of number one, transparency and number two high levels of accountability. And again, that's not different across, you know, it's not like different generational Accords want that or don't want that, but Zers want that with greater intensity.

Greg: Let's talk a little bit about, I, I love this idea of, of team based mentoring and coaching and Daniel, what I'm finding with with myself personally and specifically, you know, with a lot of our younger church plants is that there's this idea of mutual mentoring. Is incredibly valuable. And so certainly because of my longevity in the church, planting world in pastoral leadership, I have some things to offer that, you know, that, that we have just simply that come through years and hard knocks and all of those things we go through, but what I'm learning is my gosh. I have an immense amount to learn from gen Zers. Mm-hmm . Talk about the importance of that posture as we enter mentoring and coaching, where it's mutual mentoring and coaching going on rather than just this one

Daniel: sided. Yeah. You know, I mean, one of the terminologies that's been used for a a while now is reverse mentoring. It's the concept that you're talking about. And, and actually, this was actually one of the things that was most helpful in corporate environments when they began realizing that the executive leadership was primarily driven by men. and and so the men needed to be reversed mentored by women. And so now generationally, we're seeing that as well. And there's a couple of reasons why I think it's pertinent for us, right? Like in this particular era you know, as we're looking into 2050, and I, I, I often talk about why 2050 is important for the church. It's also important in terms of like socioeconomic and political reasons as well, but why it's important for the church. And so in that mutual mentoring, There's a sense in which Zers you know, they. They don't think of themselves as like experts of anything in particular you know, cuz again, most of them are entering, you know, the oldest of them are entering into age 25, 26. But what, what you begin doing when you do things like reverse mentoring is like, you're actually, you're living out of value that they already implicitly feel.

And that is like, I wanna matter in the lives of the leaders that are actually leading. And so the listening posture, the hearing posture, you know, so I'm, I'm just gonna apply this in the relationship of if you are a, a church planning coach in the planter that you're coaching let's say is a 24, 25 year old, which is kind of rare these days. It. They, they don't only want to be you know poured into, but they

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want to know that like what they're experiencing matters to the organization, that it has the ability to change the culture of the organization. You know, it has the ability to permeate the the, the way that things happen. And so what it does is it actually forces like more senior leaders to adopt agile leader. and when your senior leaders adapt agile leadership, that means the culture of your organization becomes more agile as well. And you know, cultural agility. Especially in organizations, you know, has been the trend for most organizations right now. Most of our church planning organizations, you know, were started networks wise were either denominational, which would've been started, you know, 50, 60, 70 years ago. Or they would've been networks like Stadia, which would've been started 20, 30 years ago. So it was either boomers or Xers at started these organizations. If you look at. The tech industry that was started by Xers. And it was really in the mid nineties and early two thousands where they started talking about like cultural, agile organizations and a big part of this was that you realize that when you decentralize power, you know, power dynamics and decision making that the culture of the organization needs to be more agile. And so your know, a gen not, not a generate. 10 years, 20 years into cultural agile environments. And so gen Zers just expect us to be a part of the, the organization that they're, they're a part of. And that reverse mentoring, that mutual mentoring is what helps to foster some of that agility. Yeah. You know,

Greg: I we have a church planner up in Cleveland here where I live in Lumar Vargas, and she's this amazing young, Hispanic lady who is launching a church here and in a, you know, Latino community. And so I've been doing just a bit of coaching with her, but in all honesty, The stuff I'm learning for her has been absolutely incredible. You know, learning about the culture and bivocational planting and, you know, so it's just been such a rich experience for me. Whereas I think, I think if she were on this, this podcast with us, she would say, I'm so grateful to Greg for, you know, spending time. Well, the reality is, is I'm so grateful for the time that I, I get to spend with her, which is such a, you know, a great segue here in you're talking about minority. Networks and your new book, which I am gonna plug here because you were gracious enough to give me a copy of it. And I, I loved it. So it's called inalienable how marginalized kingdom voices can help save the American truth. So I, I, first of all, we're gonna talk about minority led networks, but I, we I've gotta ask the question to start with the, the title begs is why does the American church need saving? Mm-hmm what, what are you seeing?

Daniel: Yeah. And I, I appreciate you, Greg. You know asking about the book when Eric Costanzo, Matt Sorens and I came together to think about this project, a big part of it was just personal, how it had been waning on us, the the trajectory that we've, we've seen in the church you know, and I would say every generation experiences their version of this. If you go back to the sixties and seventies, you can see some of the same tones that we're experiencing when it comes to the politicization of faith. You know we start out with. The, the introductory chapter quoting Beth Moore because in some ways we saw the treatment of women in ministry as another indicator of kind of the state of American Christianity and then the polarization within not just the churches, but even within groups that have the same theological persuasion, how they were polarized based on politics in ideology and not even about the content of scripture and you know, The rise and fall of different, you know, Christian leaders, all of that. And you know, this is our generation's version of a cultural upheaval within the church. And the thing that really. Drove us to write this book above all else is our failure to realize at an institutional level that this impacts how young people want to move forward in mission, you know?

And so, because they don't want to propagate something that's not healthy in their, in their eyes. And so When we there's a plan in the words of, you know, saving the American church, cuz obviously only Jesus can do that. But we also think that like, you know, American Christianity, the church in America you know, there is no guarantees that like, like it's gonna persist on forever, but the only guarantee is the kingdom of God will. And so what's required for us to really awaken ourselves to see that God is at work in various means is to look at the places that don't center, American Christianity. And that is,

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you know, the history of the church that is those who are marginalized in the you know, in America. And then also in the global population, the majority world, we're not saying that these parts are better at being followers of Jesus, but we are saying is that they pull us. To the margins of where we we're no longer centering American Christianity and they give us a greater perspective. And I think we really need that right now because when we center our Americanness and we intersect that with our identity as Christians we get some of the polarization that we're seeing right now.

Greg: So, so Daniel, you're talking about, Marginalized kingdom voices in broad strokes I mean, who, who should we be listening to? You know, who should we be looking at? Who should we be learning from?

Daniel: Yeah, that's a great question. So it's important to, to know that when we're talking about like those marginalized voices, we're not just talking about those who are poor or those who, you know, are disadvantaged. What we're saying is that when you look at the center, American evangelicalism in north America it's still predominantly dominated by, you know white in me in, in male voice. Absolutely. Now you, I don't say that. I don't say that as a value statement. I say, I just say that as a matter of fact. Right. And we don't need, like, you know, I should say this and maybe I'm making too much of a caveat. White male voices are still very important, necessary to the conversation. Yep. But when you're talking about like how the church is growing outside of north America when you're talking about how the demographics are shifting within north America, you're realizing that, you know, the, the growth of the church in evangelical circles, we think about sums of God. We think about even the Southern Baptist, which are the two largest Protestant denominations in north America. They're growing largely because of immigrant communities. And so as a matter of fact, I, I was, you know, I used to work for the north American mission board and we report. in year 2020, that over 60% of the churches that we helped to plant were led by, you know, non-Anglo church planters the assemblies of God have, they've only largely grown over the last 20 years by specifically their Latin American or Hispanic constituency. So, so much so that almost a quarter of their membership right now is composed of Hispanics. And so so these are actually voices that, you know you know, when we say marginalized, Saying that in a condescending way, we're just saying that in the conversation, they typically don't host a conversation. They typically don't facilitate the conversation. And so it's important to now begin to recognize that these are the voices that need to heavily influence and, you know, so case in point Greg you've, you've worked with the reformed church of north America, of America, RCA and. they recognize this, that amongst the growth of their denomination that they needed a voice that really helped them to understand number one, the world. And number two you know, the shifting demographics here, north America. So their general superintendent. That was voted in a few years ago. Eddie Allman is you know, from I believe central America. And and this that's a historic, you know, historic appointment. And it was because they needed somebody who understood, you know, a little bit more than just the north American context to lead them towards the future. So these are some examples. It doesn't mean less of something per se, but it means more of everybody else. And so it means that we're including voices at the table of our leadership to learn and to gather and to lead, but it also means that we are inviting others from other cultures, racist tribe, none, everyone to actually help build the table that we're sitting around, which for many of us myself certainly included.

It's a transition it's it's taking that posture of learning and it's really kind of sitting back in my leadership, in our leadership to. Hey, I need to learn. I need to hear your voices. I, this, it made it's a, it's a whole new world.

Greg: Hey, I need to learn. I need to hear your voices. I, this, it made it's a, it's a whole new world.

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Daniel: Mm. So, yeah. You know, and I, in that posture, I mean, again, I mean, we talked about this earlier with the mutual mentoring. Like that's, that's a necessary posture, you know, it's a necessary posture and not just for the season, but that is the, that is the. That's probably the posture of leadership for the foreseeable future, you know within the generation. And it's, it's more of a, it's a, it's a mutuality. And I think this applies to, you know, all categories of gender race, again. I mean, without trying to get into like the ideas of intersectionality, cuz I know that's not helpful to everybody, but it's just, I it's this understanding that like when you look at the church, The new Testament church, when it stayed central in Jerusalem, it had the hardest time being a global mission agency. And so it wasn't until it went to Antioch. Right. And Antioch is very interesting because Antioch was this, this military town. roughly about 200,000 people. And it was diverse and it brought people from all, you know, corners of the known world at the time. And these people came to faith in Jesus and they formed something that was so new that they were, they could no longer be considered, you know, Aranian or African. So they had to invent a new term for this new group of disparate, you know, Formerly segregated group of people. So it says in the book VAs that they were called Christians for the first time. Think about that. Isn't that amazing that this group of like diverse people that were coming from social economic, ethnic backgrounds, they came together and they were called Christians for the first time. Cuz they formed this new, like social, you know, group. And that's the pattern for us. It's this is a biblical pattern for us and it's a mutual learning. It's a mutual sharing of.

Greg: Man that that is just rich. I love it. And we have work to do in many of our organizations and churches we lead to accomplish that. Hey Daniel one of the questions I wanna ask you is, and this is just kind of out of the blue, but what's God teaching you right now? What what's he teaching you in your life right now?

Daniel: Yeah. You know Greg I've, I've had a lot of personal challenges over the last year health wise and I I'm, I'm 42. So your listeners can be the judge of whether that's still young or older. You know, in this season of life, like so part of the reason why we refresh some of our initiatives at the church multiplication Institute is I'm, I'm, I'm so convinced that personally in my life, but also in the season of the church multiplication Institute, that there is a transition of not just like Models and strategies. Although I think there is there's also a transition of like who is hosting this conversation around mission for the future. And I, I had a heart attack in surgery last year. and that is a a very distinct milestone for me that I am primarily not a doer anymore, but I'm a permission giver and I am a convener Vener to empower others, to be doers, you know? And I think, you know, I mean, part of that is midlife, right? I think a lot of folks feel that when they get to midlife. But I think that there's a metaphor. Like my life is a bit of a metaphor. I, I actually told, I told people that to my best assessment. The reason why I ended up having a heart attack and a quadruple bypass, because I don't have any heart disease in my family. When you look at the history of my family, I don't have heart disease. I wasn't a big guy you know, fairly healthy. And but in my thirties I planted churches and I . And and more than that, Greg, you know, this is me kind of just you know, personal confession repentance for about 12 years of my life. Like, I, I I've, I personally, you know chased after church growth. and and I didn't do it the right way. Others have done it in better ways, in more healthier ways. I, I just didn't, I didn't do it the right way. And I did damage to my body. And you know, doctors said, how did this happen to you? Cuz I didn't have high blood, blood, high blood sugar, high blood pressure and diabetes, none of that. And I looked back and I said, you know, Completely stress myself in my thirties. And and so I'm now I'm entering into this new season of life. And again, I feel like my life is a metaphor for what's happening. Church growth is not bad. Church growth is a good thing. It's a positive, like, you know, Jesus grows is church. So wanting the church to grow is not a bad thing we should want. , but the way that we've idolized it and we created methodology around it, and then we put it onto others as like, this is your ministry assignment. I think that is changing. And I think what we're also now learning is that let's create tables where we don't have to control the conversation.

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We're helping the next generation biblically come into their own hearing from the father and creating new models, new language for the future. And I'm, I'm very glad to give the second half of my life to that. And In some ways, what I'm learning the most is that like when you live a life of here in obey, it's never modeled specific. It's like you're chasing the wind. That's what the holy spirit is. You're chasing the holy spirit. There's no model for that. You just wake up and say, what's the father doing? And how do I move forward in obedience with that?

Greg: Daniel, thank you for your transparency. Thank you for joining the church planting podcast and just your partnership with Stadia. Love you, brother. And praying that this next season, as I know, it will be, will be even more fruitful than the last one.

Daniel: Thanks for having me, Greg.