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SPEAKERS

WS: Dr Wess Stafford

MH: Melanie Hester

RC: Ross Cochran

0:00:00.0 RC: Can you speak to, just from a long view perspective, how you've seen the space of adults caring for kids that aren't necessarily just their own kids evolved over the course of your career?

0:00:14.6 WS: Well, you know, it's been quite a journey, Ross. I think I began my child advocacy back when I was a child... I grew up in a little village in Africa that had the saying it takes a whole village to raise a child, so every child in the village, including me, a little white guy, belong to every grown-up, and so I got a case to see what does it look like when children are considered important and everybody considers them their responsibility, so fast forward about, I don't know, 40 years or so, I'm now President of Compassion, which is a hard... As you know, a child-focused organization, and I go to a conference the first week of my presidency, and it's an evangelism conference where they brought in the biggest evangelist of the world right here in Colorado Springs. And it was designed, it was designed to get just the most important strategies to bring the world to Christ as quickly as possible. And they were all big time evangelists, everybody was given 15 minutes and the guy sat there with a little bell on the front row, it didn't matter if you were Billy Graham, you didn't go longer or the 15 minutes... They Didn't want stories, they wanted strategy and they wanted, how are we gonna bring this road to Christ? So being a brand new president of compassion, I was pretty excited with my legal pad, ready to take notes. How can we participate in this great thing? And I listened to the first speaker, and they really didn't say anything at all about children that I could write down and I said, Okay, that was 15 minutes, I listen to the next one again, nothing, as time went on, I began to just realize that these people aren't even thinking children when they talk about bringing the world to Christ, so being a little bit more Ross... You probably did this from church, and I started just kind of filling in the ocean, zeros biting my time, when it occurred to me, why don't I just keep track of how many times that even say "child" or "children" since it's not apparently a big topic here at this conference. So I kept track of that. Ross this went on for two and a half days, and I heard the word child or children only 12 times. And only in passing, like every man, woman and child. Okay, I had to count that as one of them, I heard a woman say, We gotta get the woman of America to stop praying for their children and start praying for the word... I like it. He said, I'll let better count that one, long story short, in two and a half days with my pen and pad to glean from these people, I heard about every people group in the world. I heard about women, I heard about Muslims, I heard in various locations, by the end of the conference, I could have led a woman Muslim Taxi Driver in Islamabad to Christ, but in all that time, only 12 times "children" and never strategically. But I looked ahead in the program and I saw that very section that said other comments, so my blood was boiling with... In me, you can imagine. And I thought, Alright, I'll wait for that moment. And I was, I'll say what I need to say, but like every conference, not this one that Awana is doing, but like every conference, it fell behind and they had to cancel that session... No, I was just boiling. What I wanted to do for us, I wanted to stand up and I wanna say people...Hear me for just a second here, the sea of humanity all across the world that we are so passionate about bringing to Christ, this harvest... Wait until Harvest, close your eyes and picture these actual people out there now, if in your mental image, every other

person in that crowd isn't a child, you don't even know what the harvest looks like, because the world is now half children, and we know from missions at 85% of us who gave our lives to Christ did it while we were children between the ages of four and 14, water to say, You're all over this 10-40 window melodically. But if you go there and you double click on 10-40 win, will to a very exciting window, the 40-14 window. So here they are, half the world at the prime time to be harvested, you're talking about bringing this road to Christ, and you didn't even say a word, child or children, I'm not a rocket sites, but we are not going to bring this world to Christ unless we wake up with a paradigm shift that understand children matter in the kingdom of God.

0:05:10.3 RC: Yeah, amen to that. So I wanna just take that sound bite and I won't have to drink coffee anymore, I'll just be able to listen to that and take me out of bed, I'll get going. I wanna actually speak right to that one of the things that I've heard you speak about, is the difference between child discipleship and just for sake of putting a label on it, we'll call it entertainment. We can have more nuanced discussions about what falls into entertainment but why is it that child discipleship is what's needed for this moment, for the harvest, rather than just entertainment, where does the entertainment fall short?

0:05:44.4 WS: It falls way, way short, truth be known in this world, we do need child discipleship, I'm not so sure we need entertainment, particularly entertainment aimed at our children, you realize that even church-going children only spend 17 hours a month in church, so with that little time... Why would we waste it trying to get them to laugh and giggle? When we have much more important things to do, we can't compete with the world of entertainment they're watching all week long on their little screens anyway, so those who think you have to entertain them in order to catch their attention... It's not going to work. Those of you, I think you have to entertain them and to get them to learn their hearts toward you, to hear what you have to say. And that doesn't work either. What children need is the actual entrance into the Kingdom of God, they need to... They need to understand the scripture, any dealer, how to live life in the world in which they have been planted. So I would say to all of those who are just falling all over themselves to make children laugh and try to get children to applaud, we have all of eternity for that, the time right now is to bring them to their heavenly Father, and it's a disciple then to reach their... God-given potentials. And bless their role.

0:07:08.2 RC: And I think what's so critical, it is, that doesn't necessarily require your own personal discipleship as a child. Obviously we want people to have been disciple as a child who are discipling kids, but what that requires is a dependence on God now, and that he will do the work in discipling kids regardless of what your experience in that 4 to 14 window look like. now you brought up your own upbringing, and that's kind of where I wanna go to next, which is... We obviously, here, at Awana believe so passionately in the mission of child discipleship. We believe in resilient disciples so much. We wrote a book about it. But your story is unique in the sense of you were disciplined, you were raising a family and that had such a heavy influence on your community, and I think when I think about child discipleship in really grandiose terms, I think about how child discipleship can literally change the world. You change a family, you change a community, you change a region of, you change the nation, and you've seen that work, that kind of impact to play out all over the world through compassion... Is that still possible? In 2021, what does it take to make that possible, particularly in America, 'cause I think sometimes, especially folks around this call with us right now might feel like maybe we've already lost. Can you speak directly to some of that sort of discouragement that is so prevalent in this community?

0:08:40.2 WS: Yeah, well, for those who don't know me, I was raised the only little white kid for 100 miles in a little African village, I had a front row seat as a son of missionaries to see what evangelism

can look like, to see what discipleship could look like. I was disciplined by a very wonderful Godly mom and dad, my father had the uncanny ability to make me think that even as a five-year-old, he couldn't do his missionary work without me at his side, I helped to build our house, I helped him dig our well, my dad and I went into villages where no white people had been since the slave trade time, I remember people screaming and running away just at the very appearance of us... I was there Ross as a little boy, watching Africans when they first heard the word Jesus, we called him, Jesu, Jesus. And so I watched this interest of the Gospel into society, and I watched my father Do this, and he allowed me to be a part of it. Now, Jesus said in Matthew 28-19, Go into all the world. Ever preach the gospel, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and teach them to observe all things I've commanded you, and teach them to observe all things I've commanded you. That is in fact, discipleship, we often think in America of discipleship as basically a spiritual component, picture a picture, a lag and real with spoke in one of those books would be the spiritual one, and that is the one that we really think of usually in the United States, but in the village where I was living, all things I've commanded, you had everything to do with social... We were under the French government as a colony. There was a great deal of injustice. And my father, opening the scripture said, it's each step, how do you live even the midst of injustice, and we were living on the Sahara desert where we could barely eke out a living, and the message was, so how do we relate to our environment... Psalm says, You know, you've put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen to be. I watched Africans look at that and say, Wow, God entrusted quite a responsibility to us. Therefore, we need to see things differently. Education is spoken of in the Scriptures. Economics are spoken of in the Scriptures, even health. What to eat, what not to eat. And if I can be so crude, if you wanna learn how to dig a latrine, you can learn it out of the Bible, so here were all of these life giving world view and mindset and skills that were necessary, and they were being taught all of that because scripture speaks to that. So if all of those wheels like a real spokes were the lake, well, they all need to be strong, so you can have one really strong... It doesn't help, you can have two really strong compassion, we call this holistic child development or holistic child discipleship. So I got to watch people hearing this, Jesus taking what they called the Jesus road, now being disciplined. What does that mean? In all these areas of your life. And then at age 15, I came to America and I realized, you know what, health is pretty taken care of, you don't need to hold the... We don't dig litres over here, that's taken care of the economics, this is the most prosperous country in the world. So that's not a big deal. Education is kind of a given, is free from the government. The environment. Yeah, we're starting to talk culture and a climate and change in all of that. Back when I was 15, that wasn't even it. There were no social injustice is really, that you can call an issue for a us, we were reduced to that one spoke on the wagon wheel, spiritual. And so when I look at discipleship, it should speak into all of the areas of life where we need to learn what Jesus would... God taught us. Teach them to observe all things. I've commanded you.

0:13:20.3 RC: Wow, that's fascinating. I've never... This is obviously something I spend most of my time thinking about, and I've never thought about it that way. Also, when I told my wife that I got a chance to talk to West Stafford, if I told her I was gonna hear him talk about latrines, I think she would have been fairly surprised... Melanie, I wanna bring you in here because one of the things that I'm mindful of our folks who are within the sound of our voice, is how a gathering like the child assumption form can sound really cool, but not necessarily feel like, This matters. Can you speak to why this matters in particular for a voice like Wess to be included?

0:13:59.4 MH: Yeah, absolutely, I love what Wess scared about that thought of the meal with the different spokes and how every place around the world, that was gonna be the same, that some things are gonna be missing and others are going to be... Need to be reinforced because maybe they're broken or maybe they're just missing all cut together. And I think that thanks to your

leadership on so many levels, where the world was at, when you sat at that conference and you realize that over the span of two and a half days, the word child or children of a reference to them was only mentioned 12 times, we've come such a long way. And it's beautiful, and it's a kingdom-driven, and it's always something that we can give all the praise and glory to God because they are his children that are coming into his presence as he asked us to do, but we're finding ourselves in this space of 2021 and we're like, Man, even some of the things that we did in the early 2000s, they're just not working today, they're not connecting, they're not happening, they're just... We feel like something has changed. And what we have found at Awana is that something has changed, and to kind of spoil alert to what we're gonna talk about at the CDF, is that we are now living in a post-Christian... For us in the US nation, but even in general, in a world that's beginning to be less specific around Christian values and more just around, honestly, humanism and what it looks like for me to determine my own truth and anything that I need to encounter the world that I'm in. And so that's one of the reasons why the CDF is critical, is that we're saying This child, the Sirohi form, is not only an opportunity to have this conversation, but it's also a place where we are inviting you, and here's the truth, like these leaders, you leader, I'm looking at you, leader, you are the hero who is on the ground in these churches saying, God has called me to disciple these children, and yet I still feel like there's something that's not working. That is your intuition, and God is going to bring you to a place that because of your access to this conversation, you're able to take this back and disciple the children differently in a world that just doesn't make sense. And so I actually love to throw the question back to you, like as we look at the spoke, as we look at that wheel, like What are we still missing? What do you see in this world that we're like, Oh man, that was a major blind spot.

0:16:49.4 WS: Melanie, that was a great question. A wonderful comment there. Yeah, one thing I know, and I've lived, I've lived in two parts of this room all of my life, I've lived among the extreme poor, and I've lived in the western world where there's a great deal of financial blessing, what I have learned is still use whatever it takes to separate us from God. And he's discovered that poverty works pretty well because it puts the message into the heart of a little child, I don't matter... Nothing's going to change. Why should I hope? Why should I dream? On the other side of this equation is comfort, and it works just as well, I really don't need God on this whole real... I guess I only need him on the spiritual spoke of this real... And that is wrong. The thing I'm so excited about what we're doing with this format, AAA, they say, the best time to plant a tree was 30 years ago. The second best time to plant a tree is today, and what we are doing today in this form is preparing for that tree that we're planting today to be in full bloom 30 years from now, in the year 2050. And when I talk about these folks of His disciples, You have real... While they may not all be relevant today, the way society is structured, in the way our government and boy, we can take care of each other. As I look forward, and you will hear before I speak in this conference, you'll hear others who will describe what will the spiritual component look like in 2052, what will be the environment in which we're working in 2052, and we will discover... I'm absolutely convinced that these parts of discipleship that don't seem needed to be spoken to today, we very much need to be spoken to at that point, yes, spiritual and we're... We're gonna hear what a wilderness it's likely to be in 2052, but social... Who knows what the world would be like, We will need children who can be resilient in the midst of injustice, the environment will be a big deal, who knows what the climate will do in the next 30 years? Education will change radically. It is changing during covid are the economics may shift dramatically, the United States may not be the financial world hub, it may be among the needy nations in 30 years in health, I think health will change dramatically, relive many advances, but we'll need to look carefully at that so when I look 30 years down the road in the seats that we're gonna plant at this conference, all of the discipleship that was relevant in my childhood village will become very relevant by then, we're gonna need to stay on our toes. All of us who work with children are gonna have to keep on learning, if we don't, there's a wave that is going to crash over our heads,

and we... And the little ones were responsible, could very well get lost in backwash.

0:20:12.2 RC: Wow, I could just listen to you talk all day, I wanna take a time machine back so I could wind up and hearing you speak more often, but one of the things that stands out to me, thank you so much for your time, for your wisdom. The folks are on this call, they are already stepping into that, they are living into the identity that you said For as child advocates, but many... Just really quickly, just to cover, so I don't get any emails from our marketing department, can you just really quickly speak to the details for the Discipleship Forum and... Dr. Stafford, if you have a moment, I think what you just spoke to is why people should go and why people who are with us now should just send that clip to convince anybody who's still waiting to register...

0:20:59.2 MH: I mean guys, The good news is, is that if you have a ticket, whether that's on later on site to the CDF, you're gonna get to hear Dr. Staff or talk to her about what it looks like for us to advocate for the children in our churches today, not just how it's been 30 years ago, but today and moving forward as he casts beautifully that vision for 30 years from now, and what it might look like for us to lead in that world. And so if you have not been able to either register or you would like to still attend, we do still have tickets available for you, and to be honest, on August 26, the price is actually going to increase, so if you want the cheapest amount to be able to help save your Kidman budget and be like, Okay, I'm actually gonna be able to do this and maybe something else as well, you should register, we will go ahead and share those links both in the chat and in comments so that you can have access to that but it's not too late. And may I just say that You are critical to this conversation, like we made your voice at this table, and honestly, we've set this table for you, and so come join us because this is where we're going to continue to together navigate the questions of what this world is throwing one and continue to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as we want, but the calling that he has in our lives...

0:22:18.3 RC: Thank you, Melanie. Dr. Stanford.

0:22:21.2 WS: Yeah, it's where the... I don't know what else is going to be going on that day, but I'm actually convinced nothing more important than this is gonna be going on to that date, there is no higher calling than the discipleship of children. And I know that those of us who work among children, we don't often hear a lot of applause were considered pretty much a second rate mandate, there's currently more important things in missions and the church and then administering to little children, but when I talk, others will have already set the stage of this rather scary environment out there in 2052, when I talk, my focus is going to be on children and why that is such a strategic, exciting, important place to put our effort. So I'm eager to speak to people who are committed to children, who have been ministering to children, I will also be speaking to pastors and mission executives who really never give children all that much of a thought, and I've had to do this much of my life, I love watching people who never gave them much of a thought suddenly realized, Wow, how could I have missed us strategic they are...How could I have missed how much God respects and loves them? I will walk us through the Scriptures where God used little children to do great, great things, because I think we never got this around a little child, He says, Wow, this is a big deal, I need something really small to deal with it. It's like a little boy to kill a giant, like a little boy to speak to an evil high priest who had lost his way all the time. Discipling these children to grow up and do great people. So we'll walk through scriptures, we'll do the strategy and the statistics of why children are so critically important, I believe it, I live my life by it, I'm convinced those of you who don't hear applause as heroes of children, that you are in for a great surprise when you walk into heaven, the first thing you're gonna hear in standing ovations for you, because in that moment, the whole church will now, with the Dark class removed in the Val-tartar, everybody's gonna know what was important

all this time down here. What was strategic? Everybody's gonna know it and they're gonna know what you did, and the applause will last probably for all of eternity. I'm pretty excited because we're gonna hear for some little kids that were in a wataru that we may have touched their lives, and they're gonna say, I'm here because of you and so on, all of these that I brought with me. And we're gonna say, Well, praise Jesus, we're good. Wait a minute, he's right over there, creates us, it's gonna take all of eternity for that joy to overflow our hearts, so do not be discouraged, those of you who are working hard for them, the rest of you come to this form... Let me at least tell you what I know about the least of these, who in fact are the most important!