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SPEAKERS

RC: Ross Cochran

KR: Keith Robinson

0:00:04.2 RC: I imagine there's a large contingent of folks who listen, who have heard of slingshot, maybe there is... Maybe there's people who listen who got connected to their ministry that they're right now, thanks to slingshot. But for folks who don't... Can you explain what Slingshot Group is? What is your ministry? What does that look like?

0:00:20.9 KR: Yeah, we staff the church and faith-based non-profits. Our mission is to help organizations that are doing good to build remarkable teams, and so for the last 15 years, we've had the privilege of serving thousands of churches and nonprofits and their leaders by making those crucial introduction entering seasons of transition. And so we have an amazing team of associates, 50-some associates on our team that work remotely coast-to-coast, serving the church and the broader body of Christ, both in this country, but even globally because of our work, helping organizations that are doing international missions. So it's just an incredible team, and I'm so honored to be a part of... Such a great group of Paul stars.

0:01:05.8 RC: Yeah. Well, it's great to connect with you. You have been somebody that's been on my radar ever since I heard you on with Gabe Lyons, for those who view... Who don't know, Gabe and his wife, Rebecca, founded a ministry called Q-ideas, and they have a podcast too, 'cause at some point, everyone in the world will have a podcast of their own, but since you're not doing yours right now, you're a listener. Thank you for listening to ours, but Keith I wanted to start things with you because it's something that I heard you and gave discuss extensible in your conversation, which is a qualifies for saying neither of us are epidemiologists, but since we have navigated a world that seems to be outside the peak of how covid 19 was gonna change our lives, we were operating in a different reality than we were back in 2019. I'm curious how you break down the responses of how churches respond to covid in the lens of particularly technology, but sort of in general, from your seat.

0:02:06.9 KR: Yeah, great question, Ross. And boy, is that a loaded one, because in that you can find a lot of different scenarios that sort of represent every experience and anecdotally, I feel like it's slingshot, we saw all of those are associates in with as many churches as we are engaging with a conversation on any given day. So a lot... What I can tell you is, is that what I've been most blown away by and reassured of is the resiliency of the church and how beautiful and bright it can be, and she can be in the midst of a dark culture, and so in pockets all around this country in little communities and big cities, we saw the church mobilize in many ways and take its message into the digital space with a lot of energy, with a lot of... We're not sure, but we're gonna go for it, and I think for those churches that were willing and pulled out the stops and said, Hey, we may not be experts in technology or media, but we're gonna invite people to come alongside help and slingshot had the privilege of doing that, and I walked with several churches as they pivoted to online

digital ministry strategies, and so again, I think overall, what we saw was just a resiliency of God's people and really kind of a re-alignment, I think in a lot of ways, is what churches are experiencing right now, as it relates to who's in my church, and I think we're seeing a lot of that where churches are saying My attendance is fluctuating week to week, sometimes wildly, as people are starting to re-settle and we work in the world of staffing, so we've seen all of the great resignation that the term that's being used, and we've certainly seen the results of that, 'cause it's touched those in vocational ministry in the very real way, so there's been a lot of transition both of leaders and congregants. And so right now, I believe there's a time of resettling that's happening and kind of a re-gathering and a calling back to mission and to the foundation and the roots of our faith that

0:04:23.9 RC: A frighteningly small minority of parents heard from their Kidman pastor during the pandemic and we're seeing how churches have gotten smaller, the great resignation, how pastors have reached the point of no return and have had to step away from ministry further because of how exhausted they are to bring this conversation a bit into what we talk about every day. One of the things that we are at Awana obviously most mindful of is how this all impacts kids, and obviously you're not speaking for church, you're not even speak for slingshot, but anecdotally, like you said, I'm curious how you saw some of that pivot, some of that resiliency play out in, particularly in the world of child discipleship.

0:05:09.4 KR: Yeah, great question. Or maybe pose this question to you to our audience today, do you remember when you got that first guilt and duty notification about how much time you spend on your screen... Yeah, yeah, it was like, they just showed you a mirror of your proclivities and then you find yourself saying things like, Oh, it was under eight hours this week. Right. Yeah, you feel rewarded in your screen, time was down 20%, but it still... Unless hours and you spent binging. Digital is a space that we occupy. And I think that that framework is really important to help understand the choices that we make in these spaces, because all spaces that we occupy, the space we inhabit affects the choices we make, not first, no. Is this in my two teenage sons, so I'm a veteran student pastor, so I'm a student pastor in 10 years, but for 10 years, I ran in the ANA student ministry and I get to serve churches in the area of student ministry, and in addition to some of the other areas that served the church in including digital communications, but now being on this side of it as a parent and having teenagers in my own... I first noticed this idea that digital is a space that we occupy, when I notice that my two boys, when they play video games, it's a lot different than... What that experience was like for me growing up. If I wanted to have a night of playing video games in my buddies, but we had to get everybody into our house and around the same television, and I remember when technology came out that we could link our TVs together, just such a mind-blowing thing. But today, if my son plays a game, a video game, it's usually happening online in sort of a cooperative game mode, right. So rarely do I go into his bedroom and find him playing a video game by himself, it's a community experience, it's a space that he's inhabiting in the digital world, and so the sooner that my wife and I figured out that technology was gonna be a part of their lives in a more profound way than what maybe I was used to, the sooner I could stop fighting against it and really help our children understand what does responsibility look like in this space? What are the things that you and your friends are talking about in this space, what are the things that you're viewing and watching, and so that began to frame a lot differently how we approach parenting, because it was more of a community experience than it was an isolated

individual experience in technology. So I think that's one of the things with adolescents, growing up with these tools with these powerful devices in their hands and in their pockets, in adolescence is a relatively new thing in the history of humanity, there's a enormous amount of pressure on kids today that wasn't necessarily created by social media, but it revealed it, and now that it's out there, I think adults are the ones who have the responsibility to engage their children in a conversation about what is and what is not appropriate, what does being a believer even look like in adolescence in this space... And what I would say is, our kids are always gonna get this right, and the same is true in every area of life for them, but when it comes to technology, our children's behaviors online, whether negative or positive, for me, they all become teaching moments for us as parents.

0:08:46.4 RC: That's good man. Oh man, there's a lot of things I wanna unpack there. So here's what I find particularly compelling about that you and your wife are bound in this position where you have to shift your mentality, you had to shift from what your pre-existing relationship was with technology and recognize that your sons were operating in an entirely different world. If you have ever looked at a teenager in like, I feel like we're from different planets, it turns out you are... Right. Yeah, that shift has been harder for churches, that recognition to move it... This is my label, so if you have an issue with it, you can email podcast, I do wanna dot org, but to move from a culture war perspective of internet, bad technologies, bad... Social media is bad. So what I would argue is much more fruitful for discipleship, which is trying to figure out how our kids in this space that they occupy... Which is a beautiful way to describe it. I can be like Daniel in Babylon, you can thrive in an environment like that and reflect Christ in an environment like that. And I'm curious, the churches that made the pivot, well, whether broadly for their ministries, but the churches that were able to make their digital engagement about discipleship. Again, anecdotally, how your organization able to support them, what was that sort of those initial... Like because they didn't happen without a high level of intentionality... Yeah.

0:10:31.7 KR: That's really good. Well, as we were forced into it, or either we jump into this space and figure it out, or we're gonna lose connection with our community, I think the mission and the heart of Jesus and leaders said, Let's go for it. And the perfect... Does all of that was... Even for the ones that had a head start, I will tell you that it wasn't all perfect, but one of the things that I think that helped the churches to see this as an opportunity to be... They saw the opportunity cost of digital, it's for those, it took a moment to step back from the frame and reflect on how digital was already impacting their own choices day-to-day, because technology has changed the way that we as humans form bonds and build relationships. Fundamentally, 100%. Period, if that's true, then what does that mean for the church, and that's true of humans in the world today, 20 years ago, Ross, you couldn't talk to strangers that you didn't know it today, we go sleep in their beds, we drive their cars, and we trust their opinions who... Everything for the dog groomer, we used to the pad thai that We're gonna be for dinner tonight, and so the moment we realize that there's this false dichotomy and we're going on between digital and physical, and instead realize these are a complement to one another, as we integrate digital into our ministry strategy, that's where all of a sudden possibilities and opportunities and creativity began to fill up with these churches and leaders saying, Yes, we do foreign bonds and build relationships differently, digital is a tool in our hands to the trust and reliability with our community that's what great brands have been doing for the last 20 years.

0:12:29.9 RC: Yeah, and we have a more compelling story because I think that my concern with these kinds of conversations is always for the leader who already feels overwhelmed, the leader who, for whatever reason, they're not necessarily as much of a digital native as they'd like to be, they're much more... Somebody rides crib between one, a digital immigrant to this conversation, is that this doesn't feel like an item on their to-do list, that it feels central to not only their mission, but also reflects things that they're already doing, and we talk about child disables IP around here, is this three different components of a long, highly relational, leave deeply scriptural and become highly experiential, and I feel like the digital space is full of opportunities that fall into all areas of that discipleship, but it requires a level of involvement from us that mirrors the level of involvement that you dear listener, have with a kid in your mobile smarter. And to bring it back to what we've been talking about, I'm curious. You talked about creativity and innovation. I'm curious what that looks like here. There's a bunch of people who are listening who want to engage in that, but because it is so new to them personally, they don't even know where to start. What did this look like? When it was done really well.

0:14:07.6 KR: That's good. I'm gonna make a statement here that I really believe, and that is that the digital disruption has given us the greatest opportunities for evangelism in 2000 years. And the reason I can say that with confidence is because there's something that excites me, and this is gonna just stay with me on this, but all over this country, there are these little coding schools that are popping up in neighborhoods and communities, and you pay to have six sessions to teach your kid how to code, and they're learning programming language, they're learning skills for a digital world, and I say this with a great deal of respect and sincerity, at the same time, I worked in the world of staffing, and I see a massive skills gap in the leaders that need to be prepared to lead in the church today, and what I'm burdened by is the fact that we are seeing the great resignation. We know, according to Barnes research in recent years, I don't know the exact step today, but I know just a couple of years ago, it was the average age of senior pastor was 55 plus, and so with an aging vocational clergy, what are we facing? Except a crisis for leadership in the next generation. And so, while Bible colleges and seminaries have done a great job at teaching theology and the practicums of ministry, one of the things that I believe that's missing of the times is this tooling, this preparation that happens from learning the actual skills of what it means to be a visual storyteller in our culture, because that's where people are, and if we want to reach and we gotta be where they are, so in many ways, I think that the culture is far ahead of where the church is and understanding this, preparing leaders for tomorrow's needs and I think the church needs to lean into that and say, what kind of investments should we be making in our young people today so that they can lead in the future, and if we really are honest about that question, it will change and influence the sorts of ways that we invite them to volunteer and to help out and to serve you when it comes to child discipleship and involving them in technology now, the student pastor and Next Gen pastor for years and now I have the privilege of seeing former students of mine that came along in the ministry that I served in, and they're on the mission field now they're adults, they have kids of their own, makes me really old, but it really does bring a lot of joy to your heart when you see... But one of the things I've been intentional about with that is using technology to stay connected to those missionaries wherever they're a lot day around the globe, but not just that, but inviting my children into that conversation as well, into praying for that missionary

and seeing them in their city, wherever they're at, knowing that technology is that bridge that keeps us connected, so I think there's just... There's just so much that we can be doing to stay connected and to be preparing leaders for the needs of tomorrow.

0:17:27.0 RC: And I think what I would hope people hear from... I think I have accepted for far too long. That our website is kinda lame, our Facebook page hasn't been updated in a long time, and we don't do that in any other area of our ministry, we never say like, Yeah, our mission is a... Our worship team isn't really that great, but we've settled in this area of technology, in this opportunity that you speak of, is so exciting to people, the environment, but I am able to stumble across some of these tiktok evangelists who are engaged in that platform in such a creative way that I would never even begin to understand, because essentially, that platform is not for me, and what does it look like for us as leaders to be able to lay down the authority in some of these digital environments and let the people who... It was made for... Engage in that work because on a child as Abu level, and obviously, I'll just qualify by saying like I'm not advocating for breaking digital safety practices, like follow-up best practices as far as your kids are concerned, but on a child discipleship love, oh, we know and we have data to back it up, how crucial and how impactful it is if you're able to let a kid lead, let a kid that become piece at highly experiential piece of child established is so fruitful and to limit that is incredibly detrimental to the discipleship process.

0:19:10.0 KR: I resonate what you're saying, and this is something I wanted to highlight because you ask, what's one of the things that I've seen and this in churches throughout the pandemic, and I'll tell you something that's so exciting that we've seen, and that is... I was just at a church in Las Vegas two weekends ago, partner church, visiting within, and had the opportunity to be with them during a Sunday morning worship service, and during those services, they had young people with these camera rigs that they're walking around the service and they're filming the Worship Team, and it's all like... Because I got room happening and they've got their online experience, and they all look like they were a junior high, which everyone looks like they're in junior high are... They couldn't have been 14 or 15 years old, embraces, and they're running around and they've got this camera gear on and they're holding cables, and they're uploading the content to the YouTube channel, so if you feel overwhelmed, just know this. What takes me 10 to 15 minutes to do to just find the right sticker for my Instagram, my kids can do that in like a split second, and they get mad at me when it takes too long to make a post, like Of course There are people around you who would love an opportunity, this is a sand box, and one of the greatest opportunities I had as a young leader was I had older leaders who were armature willing to let me fail. But gave me an opportunity to play in that sandbox of ministry and to go for it, and I see the sort of approach that we could take with young people, and if we do that, we will continue to produce disciples and we won't have this gap of skills that exist right now in the church. That we desperately need.

0:20:53.2 RC: Yeah, so I wanna make sure people are tracking the sort of the sequence of this. I think the conversation that you and your wife have with your voice is incredibly important, and I think in many ways that winds up being the first step with kids directly, but I would argue it was probably also the first step of the church of being able to communicate, what are you trying to accomplish in the space, what are our values, how are we gonna reflect that, how can we reflect who Jesus is in an environment that is where the people are,

is where the lost art, there is no shortage of opportunities for digital evangelism. In a time like this, and then in that sequencing, when you've gotten the value, it moves from that point into more of a layer of, we'll say, execution and how we are engaging in that space on a regular basis, but what I'm curious about... And this might be a good place for us to land the plane here, is I want people to understand what the fruit of this looks like when it's done well, when covid-19 is a thing for the history books, that there's going to be innovation that has happened over the past couple of years, that the church is gonna have shifted, that are still going to be true, however, may, hopefully months, but probably years into the future. Right. And when I think about my kids who are 6 and 2, This is the church that they're gonna grow up in, and then show it up saying, No, I've been here, I've just been online for the past six months and that kind of thing. But what is some of the other fruit that exists when this is done really well?

0:22:35.8 KR: Yeah, absolutely, yeah, I have those stories. In fact, the church I was just in in Las Vegas, he met a woman that was sitting in the same row as me who... That's her story, found the church during the pandemic, online attended per month and then finally started to come in person and now it's become a member of the church, so just really cool. But I think... So we all have those. And I think in some ways, those are the stories for pastors like, yeah, we know there's one or there's two, but what impact are we gonna make culturally? And so I would just encourage church leaders and parents as well, any believer right now in our culture, think about this, we live in a world and a culture that feels with its eyes, that's why visual content is so... That for me will be, as I continue to see it, that will be the defining mark for that leverage, this tool. While going forward, I believe that empathy is our strongest play and culture right now, because compassion has always been the church is super power. That is what makes us unique and distinct. Jesus said By this, they will know that you're my disciples. By the love that you have. So I think when we turn the spotlight up on the ways in which we're loving one another, loving people, loving our cities and our communities, that is the invitation for people to say, Wait, who is this? And what's this about? If you wanna stop the scroll, visual content that tells a story of where guys at work in your city, in your community, those are the things that will get people to pause and get him to stop and to pay attention to what you're doing

0:24:22.8 RC: In... Into that, and it's such a more compelling story than what the church has said about technology first for too long, so many churches have basically said, Yeah, it's a little sketchy, but... what isn't? So let's off some level of content out there just so that we're also there as part of the conversation, and the vision you've just painted is one just infinitely more compelling, but also mirrors what every person who's listening to this podcast has already done in the physical world. You have already done that kind of evangelism, you have already helped kids feel like they belong, and I know that because otherwise you still wouldn't be listening to me. So since you're look, thank you so much, not only for our ministry for your time, but also for being able to speak out from the seat that you were in about the direction of the church. I said last word before, but I'm actually gonna make... I'm gonna change that because I'm the host, I get to do whatever I want. But I imagine there's folks who have listened to this or feeling that sense of conviction, maybe this conversation around technology has been overwhelming to them, or they feel like they're not skilled in it, and they're trying to ignore it and they're realizing that they can...

0:25:44.1 RC: I'm curious, with the idea of you live in a world that feels with its eyes, what is that first step for that person who's overwhelmed, that overwhelm leader, what is that practical thing you wanna make sure that people who are listening to this walking or walking with understanding or being ready to do in their context, it's good.

0:26:01.8 KR: So I'm gonna talk to parents first, see I'm right there with you, and I'm walking this road with adolescents who have grown up with technology in their hand... I don't say this that, especially for my youngest son who's in middle school right now, technology has become a great connection point for us because we share a passion for sports, and I've never tried to force those things on my children, just whatever their interests are, I wanna get behind a fuel that... And so when my youngest son, it was easy for me because it was baseball and sports, and then like a walking all Monaco sports history, and so we just... We share a lot of content through social with each other, we actually are watching a training series right now for one of his sports that he's in, and so we connect over social, instead of me like trying to be the spy and look over your shoulder and there's a way to do that, and I think there's appropriate ways to do it and to make sure your kids know, Hey, I have access to this any time, and our kids know that, but I'm using it as a tool to build relationship and to form a bond with my son... And so that's been really interesting. So with parents, I would just encourage you to use it with your children. And I sons don't like me posting about them, they don't like me in... They hate all that stuff, so I can't do that anymore, but they're totally cool with that sharing memes. Nice. And every once in a while, I look for opportunity to share that inspirational content or that content that might speak to the heart of the soul, so that's what I would say for parents, for leaders, if you're in a place of influence and you feel like your digital strategy or your use of technology is just not hitting the mark, you know there's an opportunity that you're not... You're not hitting. I would encourage you to invite some young people around you in your local church, start with maybe some key families that represent that younger demographic, maybe 25 to 35, and just start asking them questions, take some surveys, you'll be interested in what you find out by asking just a few questions like, What can we do to make our website better? And, do we need an app? And there is not right now. Let's work on some of these other things. The sequencing of those things sometimes get out of order for senior leaders, 'cause we don't even know what questions to ask. So measure twice-cut once. When it comes to this, by inviting some younger leaders to get around you, at some point, you're gonna need a professional to help you to sort that out, especially if you wanna do effective digital marketing to get your message out. And there are some really good pros that can help you with that at some point, but I think, again, it's finding that place to have the conversation to see what you might be missing, if you're a leader who knows the opportunity is there, but you've experienced the great resignation and right now, you don't have that leader who can run point on all your digital communication strategy and making sure that your message is getting to those audiences, and we love to have a conversation with you a slingshot about how to find of that pipeline for you.