

Please Note that this transcription was prepared automatically by a third party. Please excuse any typos or incorrect timestamps and reach out to podcasts@awana.org with any questions.

SPEAKERS

RC: Ross Cochran

PC: Phil Comer

DC: Diane Comer

MM: Matt Markins

MH: Mike Handler

0:00:00.0 RC: This is the resilient disciples podcast powered by Awana. I'm Ross. You know who you are. Thank you for listening. Thank you for being here. If this is your first podcast, you picked a very special one, 'cause not only am I joined by Matt Markins and Mike Handler, two people who... Let's be honest, guys, if it was just you on the podcast, I'd be very happy, but I'm also joined by Phil and Diane Comer. Phil and Diane, welcome to the podcast. ... I wanna start, I'm very familiar with your work, those of us here, and odds are, most people are familiar with you with you guys, but for those who don't know, what is your ministry, what does the scope of that look like?

0:01:06.7 PC: Yeah, well, yeah, it's called intentional parents International, and it came out of our church. So we've been married 43 years, and Diane has been with me in ministry together for 43 years and that whole time, and I was a pastor for two years before that. And so in the local church, I've been a worship guy, but I also do some teaching, but we were first generation Christians, so it was our personal passion at the greatest thing we could ever do would be to see our kids grow up, to follow the way of Jesus, so that was a passion of ours. Personally, we never thought we'd be leading a ministry, helping parents do that, so fast forward many years to 2004, when our oldest son, John, Mark was 23 and I was 53, and this is a long story, we ended up planting a church together in Portland, and God answered the prayers of saying today gone before praying for Portland, one of the most liberal cities in the country, and there was a move of God, and it ended up being multi-generational at half The church was over 30, half was under 30, and John Mark started this thing on Friday nights called The Way. He had a vision of a 1000 18 to 28-year-olds, passionately, worshiping Jesus teaching the scriptures and taking communion together, and so this influenced the church, and it just kept growing and growing and growing, and it got to where we had five services on a Sunday and 800 coming on Friday night, and after about five years of that, they were getting married. The 18 to 28-year-olds are getting married, having their first baby. When I was turning 60 and John Mark was 30, he's first born out of the gate, visionary. I said at some point, by the time I'm seventy years, maybe 65, I wanna be looking for somebody to take this 'cause of my age. But why would I do that when John Mark is here? And so I ended the lead role to him, and it was kind of strange because I wasn't ready to stop doing ministry, but we had this conversation like, "What's dad gonna do?" And John Mark really birth this ministry that... I'm going someplace with this, so our son said, Mom and Dad, you need to teach on parenting, because none of my friends grew up in a home where real discipleship was happening, so honestly, we looked at each other like Diane had taught something called Hearts on fire to about 60 young moms when the church was young, and John Mark was taking notes and running

sound for her, so she finished that and he said, I'll never do this again. Unless you do it with me. Because we have to reach fathers. And so we looked at each other, we go... We've taught together before, and we realized, no, we never happened. So it was quite a learning curve for us. We got into arguments, and there was spiritual warfare, we were being opposed by some group of demons in Portland, because this is such an important message, God wants mothers and fathers to raise their kids in the way of Jesus... Long story short, we finally came up with a conference and to our shock, there were so many people wanted to come here to turn people away, we had to do it again in 400 more people came. There was such a hunger that we realized, Hey, I think we're called to do this... That's a story behind it. It came out of a move of God in a church, a move of God among young parents, and interesting, that's mostly who follows our ministry, and when you're older as we are, that's really a joy. And Awana was hugely influential in our kids and our love for the scriptures, because everything we do is just routine, put... This comes together, which is like, What's the Bible say? Yeah, yeah. And how can we bring Biblical Health and practical help to Portland.

0:04:37.6 DC: Even more? It came out of our story as first generation Christians, not raised in Christian homes, and we looked around people around us, and it just seemed like everybody in the church just seemed to know what to do, of course, we realized that wasn't really true, but that set us on a quest from the minute our first born was born, to just search the Scriptures because nobody seemed to be... They could tell us concepts and principles, but when it came down to practical, what does Biblical discipline, what does it look like? Is that different than punishment, and so we spent really the better part of our lives just diving into the scriptures through the lens of first generation parents wanting to not only pass knowledge about our faith to our children, but as first generation Christians were... We understand how awful and how empty the world's way of thinking is, and we did not want that foretell...

0:05:44.4 RC: Yeah, just thank you guys for your work. You don't need to hear that from a random 30-year-old dude from Chicago, but just know, one of the things that is so impactful to me about what you guys have done is it started from that passion and it started from that place of humility, because I think so often, when it comes to parenting, it's the source of my greatest insecurity, it's a source of many parents greatest insecurity, so it is not surprising to have something flourish because people feel like they can come with those questions, they can come with that baggage, they can come, not knowing what to do, and that community begins to help shape them, you're gonna say something, but I wanted to at least respond to that...

0:06:47.6 MH: Yeah, no, one of the things that I valued about your book, and for those of you who are out there, and I haven't read the book Raising passionate Jesus followers by Phil and Diane, you really should pick it up, they didn't come on here so that they could sell books, but being body who has read it and who enjoyed it thoroughly and has a notebook full of notes from it, it is an invaluable resource. That being said it, as you guys talk about being first generation believers, so oftentimes what we're finding are that the parents who are bringing kids to church, perhaps at one point, walked away from active church participation and are now feeling maybe some sort of stress or pressure, whether assigned by themselves or assigned by other family members to get their kids in church... Right,

maybe it's a cultural pressure, maybe whatever it is, there's this kind of, Oh, I should return to these things, as you have coached and walked with many young parents through that kind of first generation, the first generation experience is God, as you guys wrote about the second generation knows God, but maybe doesn't experience Him, and by the time we get to to have a third generation, oftentimes the knowledge and experience are gone, you talk about this, you bring this up in terms of even like how Israel went about things and things of that nature. How should the young parent who's feeling the pressure to get their kid back in church or instill these things that they feel might be far beyond their expertise, how should they go about even kind of re-introducing Christian principles, truth and doctrine back into their lives? So that they're young children like Ross whose kids are six and 2.

0:08:20.6 PC: Yeah, how can parents re-engage in a faith that maybe they took a break from or walk away from for a little bit... Well, Ross, you're not some random dude from Chicago, so we're blessed that God used or a ministry in your life and you get... Use you in our life. Now, I think it starts... Your question, my answer to that, that's the second step. How do I get my kids back in church, the first is for the parents, so that's why our ministry is intentional parents, be intentional because you can't pass on what you don't possess, so when we get to the end of our conference and we just film the... It's a film now, but one of the things we say is, in our humility, are you a passionate Jesus for, if not, what is it in your life that needs to go, because usually there's other gods that are there and things that need to be cleansed in the heart and in the home. And then Once Mom and Dad are truly walking with God. Like the mouth speaks out of that, which fills the heart. And then there'll be this inner desire to bring my kids along the way, so it's not like just, okay, but this does happen, having kids is so beautiful because it does make parents suddenly look at this miracle that they've been done, and then they suddenly start out in the hotter questions that hire to get them in church is good, but the first thing, I guess to answer you question, first thing I'd say is to the mother and father like Man, have you just really discovered the joy of experiencing Jesus... I mean, really walking with him and seeing him lead and guide and are you in the scriptures daily, and then when that starts happening, then you can then pass it on on your children, select a new... Want the parents to be the heroes, right?

0:10:13.2 DC: Yes, yes, we're trying to produce this year, especially some materials for parents to be able to not read somebody else's book to their kids, but I actually lead their kids and an understanding of who God is by the use of his name, 'cause Names describes his assets that's coming really soon. But you know the story... My story of coming to faith started with my parents who had at one point had some sort of an association with a faith, didn't raise us that way, but when we were in high school, for reasons I don't even know, they're with a Lord now, decided, Hey, our kids don't know Jesus. And we're not sure we really do either, let's go find a church. So they packed up all five of us, three kids, fine the family, and started visiting all these different churches with no real criteria, just waiting to see what was the one... We stumbled upon a church, which is actually the church where fell and I met years later, but I was in high school by this time, and heard the gospel for the very first time, my parents knew the possible, but weren't following Jesus and could not have explained it to me, no. So that's a good way of bringing your family is all of you get in the car together and instead of sending your kids to church, all of you getting into a church together, that it meets all of your needs is able to speak to children as well as to adult, and honestly, within just a couple of years, our family was completely transformed

0:11:56.1 PC: Just as move of God, and so she didn't stumble into some bad church, so I know teetering are talking about Jesus and are they saying, Turn in your Bibles to...

0:12:20.2 MM: Yeah, we find that a lot of parents, even parents who may be in the Word and they're trying to orient their heart toward Jesus daily and to love Him in worship, we still find that parents can sometimes have the sense of being a little intimidated talking to their kids, so what one practical thing would you give that part, how would you encourage that parent to get started and somehow taking steps toward disciplining their child or sharing their faith experience with their job... What would you say to that parent?

0:12:35.9 PC: Yeah, I would say, don't overthink it and think you have to come up with some big intricate program, most parents think I'm blowing it as a dad and blood as a mom, and Satan loves to shoot that into the... He does she do into the mind of any father who steps out in that direction, there's gonna be some opposition when her father tried to do family devotions the first time they were all laughing out of... And it was hard as like they were on... I like to tell parents, Look, you need to realize I steal from my wife. She says, Your parent out of relationship, no one has more influence over your son or daughter than you, and they never will, and you have a relationship with them in the course like merit, every relationship takes time and tending to it, but once you stay close to your kids, and you love them. And this is where, you know, I like to say, God is using you to shape your kids, he's also using your kids to shape you... Right, you be like, get some angry. I lost my temper, and you kneel down to that two-year-old and you say, Hey Daddy, daddy was angry, and I was actually I... I asked God to forgive me for yelling it, will you forgive me too? And they're two-year-old is like, whatever, sure you do. That is so powerful because you're showing your kids that you live under the authority of God and you're just... They're gonna watch you and they are gonna copy you and sure they're gonna pick up some of your calls too, it's painful to see your faults walking around a little leg, right. That's a joke that we crack, but... But we get to see the good things too, and then there's just so many ways you can do it, you could take your three by five card with one short first that you got from Awana, and you just say to a father, Hey, start passing it around the dinner table, while you talk about whatever, you know, have a soccer game today, Hey, let's memorize this first you read it, then you can do that. As soon as our kids could read, they'd already been getting up for years, calling up in Diane's lap and this big green chair that we destroyed, and she's got our prototype, got our Bible, and they're leaning her head in her shoulder with the Teddy bear and they're experiencing this... And as soon they can read, we just say up, Hey, now you're gonna go through what you've been watching, and then you guide them and you make it really simple, and you say, Okay, I want you to read someone and tell me one thing about God or if you don't understand it, come talk to me, so I just think we overthink it, then when you do that, that's why Deuteronomy Six says, When you rise up, when you walk by the way, when you drive in your car, when you lie down, it's an ongoing conversation. And if mom and dad are truly walking with the Lord, it just comes into every day life. Yeah, that's good. So many stories like that.

0:15:23.9 RC: So this might not be the most dignified way to ask the question, but I'm actually, I'm curious to respond from all four of you, because I think if someone's listening to this and they are then intimidated parents, one of the things that they're intimidated by is

this understanding that they are the primary influence, they may not use that language, but they get that they're the primary influence on their kids, but this fear of not knowing how to do it, and I love sort of lowering the bar of entry to make that more accessible. But all four of you have done the thing, all four of you are raising disciples, and then your guys's case, you are raising disciples, who are... We're now raising disciples. And we're all human, we all fall short. So I'm curious, when there is this temptation to follow, we'll say messages from outside of outside forces, where it's things like... The joke I always use is, if you're a practitioner listening to this, it's filling the snack cabinet before you're working on the primary discipleship of that particular weekend, and I'm curious, for all of you as parents or for you guys as you listen to parents, how do you get back on track when you have felt pulled away from the primary thing being the primary thing, what are the things that God says to you, or the practices that help you get refocused on... Discipleship being the most important thing you can do with your kids.

0:16:52.0 PC: I think number one has to do with the practice of getting up earlier in the morning and spending time in the word of God, and as just spending time in the Word of God, and you're doing it as a mom, or you're doing it as a data for those shoes. Not as a preacher thinking of how you're gonna teach it, but as a mom thinking, I want this for my children, or is it Dad thinking I need to make sure I'm developing some of this. And my children, then all of a sudden the Bible just comes alive for you as a parent, as a disciple maker, and you're thinking, Oh, I want... I just discovered this, I wanna pass this on to my kids 'cause I don't think they know it either, so I think number one is the practice of a morning, quiet time, time in the Word when you're praying for your kids, you're praying in the future for your kids, all of a sudden open your reading Proverbs and you see all these verses about godly relationships and what it means, are you reading Ephesians and you're seeing how we're to treat each other, what good communication is, and then that just translates into conversation, it's your kids your kids start calling each other names, for instance, and you just read that morning in Ephesians not, do not let not alternator receiving your mouth, but only such as good for edification according to the need of the moment.

0:18:21.9 DC: And you memorized it with your family because you have a lot of moments that are needing the domination of races, all of a sudden now it's become ingrained in your family culture of, This is what we believe, we blow it all the time, so what... Don't we apologize to each other because we believe that this is the right way, and above each other is edifying encouraging words, and by eliminating unwholesome words towards each other, and you do that over a 10-year period of time from when they're beginning to talk and relate to each other and argue with each other, and to like, this is who God is, this is who He wants us to be. This is the way of love in our families, which then even as parents, even as adults, then changes the way we say, discuss politics, because no, unwholesome words proceeding from our mouth, only words that edify, changes the way we are as people, then changes the way they raise their children, it starts with one family and first family Phil and I, we had to break a lot of really unwholesome words out of our caucus, we hadn't been raised this way, we've been raised more like the rest of the world as being based and very antagonistic. Tell the truth. We wanted her help to be a safe place, and the best way to make it a safe place is to align it with God's word and how we treat each other, especially...

0:20:04.7 MH: That's beautiful. Wow. One of the things I value about what's even even

available in your writing is the fact that you guys aren't afraid to use humor, humor is such a bridge, if you will, as it relates to parenting and as it relates to passing on faith. And I love how you guys incorporate that into even some of the practices that you have written about and certainly went into disciplining your kids, tell us a little bit about that in terms of like just how that helps that he... Parent be the hero and maybe take a little bit of the intimidation factor out of that...

0:21:19.1 PC: Yeah, well, for the intimidation factor. So a couple of things, if there's young parents listening to this, they need to know that no one gets to the end of the parenting journey and says, Man, nobody did it better than I. I didn't make any mistakes. No, nobody feels Milbank and they marvel at the grace of God, and so when you're fearful, if a parent feels the weight of, I'm the primary influence, that's a good way, that way to drive them to Jesus. Like Jesus said, Apart from me, you can do nothing. And so, but I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength. So I think it's that pressure, that reality of, Oh my gosh, this little boy, this little girl is a creation of God given to me by God for a time given to us by God, and so that's a good way, but then you have to actually... Am I afraid it's usually, it's what people will think, or... And I just turn the proverbs There says, The fear of man is a snare to trap, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted. And so God is just... I don't if you take one step towards the decide, making disciples of your kids, the only spirit is right there with you. When God is for you, he's with you, he's helping you. And so when a father and mother understands that like, I have not been left alone now, God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and I have the power of God with me, and this is the will of God, that all would come to know him. So I feel like when a parent gets that, it's just... It's exciting as far as the humor part is just... I mean, I'm a fun... When I can be a fun person, so I played in a rock band for nine years and I got saved out of all that, and I was like radically saying, when I turned every your music completely off for probably 30 years, 'cause I was addicted to music all secular music was, I'm blank slate, I know everything up to a certain point on a blank slate, and I was just... But I'm a fun person, and so I didn't want my kids to have some stiff... I go up in this stiff Dead Church and I just wanted life and so... I don't know, I don't know, I like it. That's why I came up with you on stuff like the number Rollo Bible, not retired, you say, No, I will go get the kids would get up and she'd be cooking and it smell good, and to mark him starving, I get to reach a Bible. Yes, no, I do keynotes, but I can say, Go spend an hour with God, I said, We gotta take five minutes to Mark, read Psalm 1 and Proverbs, Proverbs East 10 verses, and then let's talk about it for one minute and your pancakes all ready. So they knew about the unit rule, but then the tiny thing is later on, it became a habit in their life, and then pretty soon they're getting up on their own... They didn't need that anymore. Right. So, I don't know, I just think the fruit of the spirit is joy. We should be the most joyful people in the planter, if our sins are forgiven, we're gonna be with the Lord forever, we have the best message ever given, we get to share it and we get to start with our kids. And so I think it should be fun.

0:23:51.0 DC: But if the highest value really Phil is fun, everything is fun, Christmas is then the grandkids come over here last night, aforesaid, he had lined up on the diagram table probably 10 Christmas movies for the Chand. They knew they were coming over... This is Juarez, they knew they were coming over to pops and Ali's house to have fun, so there's Christmas movies, there's great food, there's... I create was implanted. Jesus... Just woven throughout all of that. But in the morning, I could say, Hey, did you read it? You grew the bay

we up. Okay, I hate because John Mark started in them and they're like, Why would you ask me to read you... But they're like, Oh no, I have it yet. Okay, where are you gonna read me here that come back and tell me something you learn, so it's like I'm able to now reinforce what my son is doing, and that's God's plan in the scriptures in some... In Psalm 78, the generation, he'll tell the next generation that they might rise up until the next generation, so when you get that, Here it is flowing. It's really powerful, and I think the three of us will be over next Saturday night, if we're doing Christmas here, I wanna watch whatever the night watch... I have quite a collection.

0:25:31.5 MM: So our organization, and obviously 72 years old, we've been around a little while, we've made a lot of mistakes along the way, but one area that's been a core focus to develop a core competency is how do we help the church in the homework together in forming faculty disciples and Jesus Christ. And along that way, we've also done it quite a bit of research to know, although there are a good number of parents who are actively in essentially discipling their children, there's a pretty good significant number who are not, but many of those parents do get their kids to church, and so we've been doing research since 2013, we just are in the process wrapping up a significant research project with the Barna Group on really answering the question, What is it the church does that produces last lasting faith in children, and we found that there's this group of about 40% of students, children in the United States, who in addition to their parents, they have one love and caring, at least one loving hearing it all at church who also loves and cares for them. Now, 60% do not, but 40% do, and of the 40% who do have that other love and care at church, it's not even close, every other cross-tabulation data point reads the Bible has a friend, a church feels a sense of belonging is surrendered their lives of Jesus. And so our question to you is, how do you guys in your ministry, what would you say to the church, how do we get more loving, caring adults in the church community looking out for these other kids whose parents may or may not be stepping up, but how can we really maximize our experience at church to get more kids in relationship with the mentoring...

0:26:57.3 PC: Caring adults. Yeah, well, I think that's gotta come from the leadership of the church, they have to decide upfront, the children are that important, and they gotta put dollars there in staff, and then they've gotta spend time with you guys, and they've got to see the results of your studies and so I think everything rises and falls on leadership. Right. And so we always sought to have our kids that we left one church because the children and youth ministry was not really what we knew needed to be... What I said about me wasn't about making disciples, it wasn't even about... So I always think you gotta start with the 40%, and then Jesus said to the multitudes, if you wanna come after me, Take up your cross and is follow me, so he wanted the whole multitude. So I think you wanna reach out to the multi-tools, but then you have to start with the ones... The 40% of them as far as reaching out. Yeah, I think that's really up to the church, they have to have... However they're gonna do it, they've gotta have Awana, they've gotta have some tool that they then really talk about and really get back to pastoring at...

0:28:11.3 PC: I'm on, right? ... walking out the door, you gotta find out those out here and how they're doing and how you can Telecaster in, but the church coming alongside the family is the way to go. It's just in the 80s, they've got in a little bit. In the 90s, it was more like, Oh, if I just bring my kid church for up 'em off at church, they're gonna make a disciple

out of them, and you guys know we kind of figured out that isn't gonna work. It has to happen in the home. And our youngest son, Matthew, he was a youth pastor, really going for a long time, and he's super passionate, like John are completely different personality, but it broke his heart when he would see a herding kid and realized he couldn't fix the problem because it was the father and he could help and he could come alongside and he could cry with them and He could pray over them, but the problem was in the home, and so I feel like it's a both and so it's like the home is the world and miniature, but when the church comes alongside. And you have that partnership. That's the way God intended. And that's what Jesus meant when he said, Who are my brother and sister? Mothers, anyone who does a little God, he wasn't dusting the nuclear family, he was just saying that's what the family of God is for, is to come along side, that's good.

0:29:19.1 DC: Because we do raise our children and community for... And how much stronger will be if it's in the church community, and when we have community groups that don't exclude the children, it's very convenient to get a baby center, but it's so much healthier if a community group is meeting together regularly for a couple of years and the adults are getting to know the children and the chore, getting to know the adults, so that is just a healthy and safe environment where we do actually... And then if we kind of gain some of the same terminology, so we are understanding and supporting each other in the discipling of our children, that could be really healthy, especially to kind of bring parents along who don't have a lot of strength in these areas yet, but they've got mentors within their own community group.

0:30:13.4 MM: Can we just make this really explicitly clear, are you saying it's okay to form these community groups where they're intergenerational, where you have the children who are getting to know the other parents, and you're really forming a web of relationships around that child. So what you guys are saying.

0:30:30.4 DC: I'm saying that's the healthiest way to raise our children in a community of Jesus followers, now, maybe the kids when they're young, are not right in the middle of the living room while some sort of a study is going on, maybe they're shuffled off someplace and they have a teenager kind of entertaining them a little bit, but they're eating a meal together and I running around together, and so we talked earlier about the country of Albania that were all kind of love... Well, I was teaching a Bible study to moms, so there were about, I don't know, 18 moms, and I don't know how many kids they were just hanging from the rafters in a little part... Like it was crazy and chaotic, but what impressed you so much about the church in Albania is a really parent together, they really actually parent each other's children, they're what... They know what the mom wants. And so they're watching over each of us to get each other's children together, because Albanian Christians really live in close community, and we are largely missing that in America, that the younger generation is catching it and are trying to put an emphasis there, and I just applaud that I wish we had more of that in America.