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SPEAKERS

RC: Ross Cochran

ST: Shawn Thornton

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 today. Today, we welcome back to the podcast, a man who has accomplished a lot, but I would dare say being a friend of the show might be your greatest accomplishment... Senior Pastor of Calvary Westlake Shawn Thornton. Pastor Shawn, it is great to be with you again.

0:00:21.7 ST: Great to be with Ross. Really looking forward to this conversation.

0:00:25.4 RC: So you and I had the privilege of talking... People are gonna hear this in context, so it was several months ago at the 2021 Child Discipleship Forum, and I've had the opportunity to hear your story to resonate with your current ministry, reach your book, etcetera. But I wanna start, I find something about your story, which for those who don't know, might be surprised to hear, incredibly encouraging, which is you are a living, breathing testimony to, as we would say around here, the power of a loving, caring adults. For folks who aren't familiar with your story, I think it's helpful to provide some context, but can you explain how you felt the difference with adults who surrounded you, particularly because not every adult in your life was a loving, caring adult...

0:01:19.2 ST: Yeah, I would say one, I grew up... That part of my story is, I grew up in a Christian home, but my mom had been affected by a traumatic brain, anstruther left her emotionally mentally and physically started, and they just didn't do to kind of follow up after an accident where she was left doctrines for three months in 1962, they didn't do the follow-up they would do today, as far as occupational therapy, all that, even to her, you should learn to write, walk and talk and all kinds of things all over again as if she was starting from scratch And... So that left her with stuff she took into the marriage with my dad and into our home of one brother Troy, and so our setting was pretty chaotic, we were going to the church any morning said that parents were at of leaders that became Awana commander, but mom had a lot of emotional mental short-circuiting was institutionalized for a time, and so there's a lot of cases in our home throwing being screaming, call in the next minute, way out of control, the next... And so that church, I grew up in a Northern Indiana, became an awaiting the people that church became critical to just some stability in my life along with family and friends outside of the church, but that church to invest Bible Church and the chicken Indiana just became this oasis, they didn't know what was going on. And at home, they knew that it was tough for us, but they had no idea about the chaos, and so the individuals in that church, and the Awana ministry, the children's ministry is just... Even then, I can remember Mr. Atwell, they would greet us every Sunday morning and handsomely as we walked in the door, and I'll really man, they didn't know what was going on, but they were refreshing voices and faces for me in my life just by being there.

0:02:57.9 RC: Yeah, well, and I think I wanted to start there because I think especially at this moment in time, it becomes so easy to feel discouraged and cynical, and none of this matters, the culture has already won kind of conversations are thinking very easy to have those thoughts into our heads... And what I appreciate the most about your story coming from the... As you described it well, in your book, your home life, that these adults who saw you, these adults who made you feel as,

again, as we would say around here, like you belonged in that church context, just by being themselves, they weren't... They weren't pastors. You said to me once, one of them wasn't even a particularly nice person, but they were there, and that made such a difference in everyone who is listening to us talk already knows how to do that, and they're already doing that for so many kids in the context of their life now, you have the unique experience where you grew up, gain the level of platform wrote a book and had some of those adults come back into your life because they saw you reflect on that, can you share with folks who are listening to us, what that process was like... Because I've said this before, but I came to the Lord as an adult, and one of the things that I love doing is for anybody who came to Lord as a kid asking about it, because everyone's face lights up and they name people, they need people from 10 20, 40, 50 years ago, and it's like it was yesterday because of the prominent... But what was it like having those adults come back into your life?

0:04:37.2 ST: Well, the way they came... One major way they came back into my life or the book... The book was released in 2016 in the summer of 2016, and Tindall publishers published my book right there in the Chicago area. Here you... They organized a book signing at the Barnes and Noble at the University Park Mall in Mishawaka, Indiana, right there, and Southside, I grew up, and it got publicized, of course on my Facebook and it got publicized even the local solarium and so I didn't know if anybody would show up and really about 50-60 people outside, family members and friends show up, people I didn't expect to show up, teachers from my past coaches and we're talking to and to see these people, some of them in 40 years, and some of folks were my home church showed up, who had been involved in in children's ministry or student ministry is when I was there, and it's a small church, but we got it the most, maybe 300 at a height. So it was a typical average church in the 1970s in America, and people would come up and there were some showed up intentionally to apologize for not knowing how the troubles were in our home and not doing it more report in my life, and I would just look at that and some of my... Took her hand, some of these dear sweet ladies who were now very elderly, and I said to them, Look, you didn't need to know that you did exactly what you were supposed to do, you showed up each week and I wanna... You showed up at VBS and you showed up for the children's ministry on Sunday, for Sunday school, and you just being there, and I would remember when you would stand at this point in the room each week, we'd come in and... I didn't realize that I was on a... Do looking back, I remember coming in that rotunda and my eyes and immediately go to where they would stand because seeing them... And again, I didn't... As a five-year-old and 8-year-old, a 10-year-old or 15-year-old go, Oh, I need to see Mr and Mrs Smith today. It was just now looking back, I realize if you asked her, What was my home took, see certain people not just upfront, teaching or leading or haven't... They took score... Some of the game time, I see people that weren't even up front, platform-wise, who were there or present in the room and the space regularly with me, and that's where the caring adult in the life of the child regularly showing it up, you don't have to be... Super well-trained, you don't have to have certain spiritual gifts, you don't have to have a certain position of authority, or what have you, just showing up makes the world of difference. I do. No, don't please don't apologize. Some tears, apologize. Meeting them and say, You have nothing. I was Rossi, had no clue that was coming, I thought I'd see people, we have a nice time talking about good old days, but I could not believe how many of the church folks, and then some of them... Their spouse had died. And they would say No. If Bill knew too, I know he would be your apology, the... Please don't call dogs, you did exactly what was needed in my life, and God used... Doing wonderful ways.

0:07:42.6 RC: AMEN to that, and I think it speaks to you obviously we... The desire is for someone in a church ministry context to know what's going on in the life of the child, we talk about that a lot, taking the time in the name, the home life, really does make a difference, but I wanna just highlight one that ultimately God's doing the work and their plan, people, God's gonna put you in your life

who are just meant to reflect His heart, nothing more, nothing less, 'cause that in itself is so profound. My wife and I've been foster parents in the past, and we... One of the things that stands out to me about caring for kids would come from trauma is just one day of light makes a difference just on standing in a corner so that you feel safer walking in a room than you felt before you walk into that room literally rewire your brain. And pays dividends, where as you as an adult, are able to use the love of Jesus that they gave you in your administration, in your life, and that's actually what I wanna bring the conversation to next, which is, you operate as a senior pastor in a large church context, but I know because I've gotten the chance to know you a little bit, how critically important it is to you that love and caring adults are everywhere within the context of your church, is that a formal call out that you say explicitly from the pulpit to the church, is that just something that's like just in the water and people pick it up, how do you say that... I don't know if you use the language members, but how do you say that to those who are involved in your church?

0:09:26.3 ST: Well, let me make one comment on something you said when you said that, like the day you would have a foster kid coming out of a space of trauma, how one day of light to make such a difference and when you shine Christ, I think two. Those folks in my home church and people listening to us who are faithfully showing up from industries, and they may not be the upfront crazy person or the wonderful Bible teacher or whatever, but they're showing up faithfully to be a part of Children as ministers to ministry. Is that when you show up like that faithfully, you allowing the light of grace to shine through you, two people and in places you didn't know was needed, you may know, obviously, and this kid's coming in and we heard his parents or divorce, or this person's coming in from that neighborhood in our community that's really challenges financially, it was a lot of poverty, there's a lot of unemployment, and so you may have those things where you say, We gotta shine light on this person in this situation or that place, but when you're faithfully showing it up our family was a part of the church over there all the time, people knew it very well, but they had no idea they were just being Christ by being present, that that light was shining to people, to kids and in places they had no idea. I was needed on the side of them, how do I as a pastor emphasize that it's funny because I would say since resilient disciples came out and since my friend yours Norvell started talking about the importance of the presence of a loving, caring, adult rigor and in life of a child. Until that point, I didn't how to articulate it, and I didn't really have anything, and even those folks who came to see me at the margins and not... I didn't know how to put what they did into a category, 'cause everything about my Bible college and seminary training in any seminar I'd ever been to, any mentor I ever talked to me, it's all about helping people to know their spiritual gifts. Equipping them with a program they're using, getting them to actively proactively engage with kids, it was all about being present in a very proactive way rather than just being present is a starting point that can make a deep impact in a child's life, so when that... We started using that language. I can remember where we were in the board room at Awana, and I remember when she use that language, there was this light bulb that went off in my head and said, That's what I've been trying to figure out... What do you call that? Where by being there, you can make an impact and you can shingles by your face, unless that began to reshape how I talk to our staff, I've now talked about the statistics, Valerie shared one of us, and even some articles and things, I've talked about it and then you know what's happening on our staff, whether they work with children or students are not, as I talk about the presence of a loving, caring adult in a regular way, that they're showing up... You kept people say, Oh, there was a coach like that, he wasn't the best coach, actually, it was a pretty bad coach, and as soon as he can get another parent to replace him, he was replaced, but he still was there a bench on the vantage with us. People immediately know what what you're saying when you say that, 'cause everybody has that even if you're a drug in a pretty healthy environment, a healthy home, you still need those kinds of... Column, anchors in your life. These people, they just show up and they show up for Christ, and they show up for you, and you make that connection. And so for

me, I'd say it's... But it's only in the last two years that I began to articulate that in a clear way. I talk about it a lot with our children's ministry staff, and when I get to speak to the volunteers, I just spoke to some volunteers, I said, Hey, I want you to know something, something you probably think, Okay, I'm gonna be here to care for children, keep them safe, help them have fun. Teach some things, but I said, Just your presence. For some kids, and I gave a little bit of my story, I talked a little bit about what a Anis discovered and in shared even in resilient disciples of the presence of caring adult is so important. And you know what, I had a great response from, even though she volunteer, a couple of them came up to be some in the hallway and say, I never heard that described, but I had a person in my home church... It was the pastor's wife. It was a real small church, and she just was there. There are a lot of people are intimidated about being with kids, being upfront, singing, teaching... Even playing games with kids. That would show up faith.

0:13:52.1 RC: Yeah, well, and I think there's a ton of... There's just a ton of great stuff there, I wanna make really clear for people who are listening in real-time that in the show notes of where you're listening, there'll be a link to learn more about Shawn, a link to get Shawn's book as well as I like to get resilient, the Book of referencing, in case you haven't experienced it yet, but what I so appreciate about what you're sharing is that the... Yes, we have research, now we have data, now we have the ability to speak to how important this is, and now we also have some language, but everyone is describing that person in their life long before we had those data in those things.

0:14:39.5 ST: And they couldn't articulate why they made it a difference. Right, yes. Sometimes we'll say they had a smile, sometimes it'd be... They asked me about my day, but to articulate, we have security here at Calvary, and we live in Southern California runtime way, and we can have some allelic to administer, we can have some odd character, when I first heard I'd have security with me every week and get walking with me in the lobby and standing near me, they're not wearing uniforms and all that, but they're usually off-duty, share-step, these FBI agents, different ones like that. One of the guys who works with me every Saturday night has been an undercover sex trafficking of minors to... Yeah, so he... And I was telling him about this concept, and he said, Oh, and he's kind of got to see... You can imagine another cover guy where we're on the corner, world's gotta have a little bit of certain gravitas to his, his edgy-ness and he just looks to... No question. He said, I can tell you if there's a loving, caring adult regularly in life of a minor, they are to and times we just talk from experience, so this is more of an anecdotal arson, just some research, but he said, I can tell you 100% that that child, even if they're in a vulnerable community, in a neighborhood built with poverty and maybe they are kinda like the kids home alone for a time or whatever, he said, I guarantee you, if there's a loving, caring adult who really regularly notices that child, they will not be sex traffic, they will not easily end up on the street, they will not end up in the hands of bad people to the most extreme Dangerous for children. This is true down to, I never had that kind of threat in my life, so I was in that part of the vulnerable category, but it's still in a difference in my life, so this is something that's just true about adults caring for reminders and then carrying Christian adults have the opportunity to reflect. Jesus in a beautiful and simple way.

0:16:46.6 RC: Totally, and that's... I wanna go there next because... And I also extended to you and I essentially had opposite childhoods, however, Spike was the name of a high school guidance counselor, he wasn't even mine, but I had not been in his mind because he was that person for me, even though I wasn't following Jesus at the time at is such an innate need that no matter your context, you probably have someone like that to say.

0:17:11.9 ST: But that name I picture a guy wearing a white t-shirt, School and cigarettes rolled up in his sleep or something, he... That's a guidance counselor. But as a parents thing, I had to go to my

guy in this counselor... Hey, what's his name? Like I was like, I think I Austin's really gonna appreciate. But the image I got when you said, spike, my guidance counselor was... And he were meeting him in the alley behind literary much, it gets pretty much... That, Man, I'd love to Gladiator the way, I don't mean the little... What's important in your life?

0:17:48.5 RC: I would love to spend the next 20 minutes talking about how funny that is, but where I'm actually gonna bring in the conversation is you just hit on a really key point, and I think it's helpful for folks... This is probably one of those questions I imagine, especially after a service, people are coming up to you and ask you questions, and sometimes they're embarrassed to ask certain questions, but since it's my job to lab into a microphone and I get the privilege of raising something with you that I would imagine, is often on the minds of people, but I would really appreciate you articulating, which is on a super basic level, can you articulate for folks with the biblical... I'm gonna use the word mandate to reflect that it's a leading question, but what the biblical mandate is around child discipleship, what are we as adults called to do for the next generation?

0:18:39.5 ST: Well, I think you could go all the way back to creation, of course, even pre-fall, there's a call of God upon Adam and Eve to multiply greenish. There's something happening there that's generational, that's what generation point generation that you see that rout the patriarchal era, how important that it is one generation on another. Then I think probably the core text for me that gets down to some of this basic stuff is donor on me, is the Shama passage where heroes of the word of God is one, but then it goes into it, how do you tell the next generation about that how do I to sell your children in your branch when you're sitting up or sitting or you're sitting down, rising up when you're walking the way, when you're going into the gates, when you're coming... It's in every day life for us today, that's why you're driving in the car to school, while you're walking up to the bus stop with your kids while you're waiting for the practice to start and the other kids to show up, all those different things. Those are the places, and I think still, that is a key part of that in terms of just a principal of... And notice in those times like Detroit, it's not... When you're formally teaching a family devotional or you're formally explaining a passage to a child, those are a part of it, but it's much simpler and much more profound that you are thinking and looking for the every day moments in life to share wisdom with your children and grandchildren, you get into the New Testament, then of course, Jesus, when the disciples are pushing children away, is now let them come, because it's this kind of safe to the whole kingdom, you get... These are the example of what kind of faith I'm calling people too, and then you can get into the New Testament of Epistles, you've got Paul commanding Timothy is a mother and grandmother for how they poured into him the gospel. He's known the scripture since he was a child, they were able to make them wise unto salvation, so there's this clear thread, it's not just one place in the Old Testament, or Jesus said it, or it's in the Epistles, this is the clear threat of scripture from creation forward to the church age now than we were to pour into the next generation, and we're on the disciple and saying a kid, just like we see adults Follow me as I follow Jesus, coming to of Christ, get to know them and growing him. And children need a context because they're taking in the world and developing so quickly that from birth to a senior in high school and maybe even beyond that, they need godly examples who first informal show up and they're faithfully there and present with them. And you're talking about Spike. I think I told you we talked in a couple months back that I had... Mr. Carson had cars and Li's name. And he was a widower, probably was about 75. He didn't have much of an outgoing personality, he was a very nice, kind man, we would even come sweet, it wasn't like he was going out of his way to learn a lot about you, whatever, but Mr. Carson in the Alana ministry then, and this is probably a 175 or so, he would be standing in the corner and he was the fall guy, they keep the scores as the game leader, yellow red team, 50 points to 20 points. He's writing on that and he would just sit there in the click forward really quiet, and he was kind of my line leader and one of the collars for the games and he

would... He was there every week. Just present. And if you said something to him about your dog, I had a puppy. Use a month, you might say, Did you name those puppies, did people pick them up and take them? And he didn't really know how to continue the conversation... I wasn't that again. Outgoing and nurturing, if you will, but I remember him being there. I also remember though, he was always out there with the kids, even if you wasn't engaging with them, and there were other leaders who would take the game time to go in the hallway and talk to their friend leaders, it was like hang out time for leaders and I say to our children ministry folks, those people who are missing the prime time of ministry, Mr. Parsons was taking advantage of the prime time, he was present with the kids in the downtime of laughing and playing, and these people saw that as the silly time, the non-important time because they were gonna leave the Co, they were gonna do the devotional, they were gonna last listen to the verses, he did those things too, but he didn't see game time as a break, he saw this the time, you just are there with the kids, and that's what we're talking about here too, is even if you are the diversion, which is great if God's giving these gifts and skills, wonderful, if you're the upfront person, but don't think that it's a great place of ministry, but those non-teaching times, those non-formal program times to... Those are the precious moments where the light of Christ shines into a child's heart and sometimes again, shines into people, to kids and to places where you didn't know what's needed, that's why those folks came in, apologized to me, they didn't know I needed the light. They were trying to go up the kids who need it, but when you just present all with this, you get an opportunity to have a shine places you didn't expect Manhattan, those godless, Mr. Carson.

0:23:45.5 RC: God bless minor Carson. Because I think... I'm laughing at myself because we're about 10, 10-ish episodes into this, and I do think this is the first time I asked somebody for a definition for child discipleship. So I appreciate that, because I think what stands out to me about that is that I feel like the church, both over broadly speaking, obviously, both over-complicates it and then over-simplifies it, where we treat it like child care or we treat it... It has to be this formal thus sayeth, the Lord at

0:24:16.1 ST: A seminary class. Yeah, sits, very deep. We've gotta teach them how to argue apologetic, ally for the resurrection. And there's a little of both. Right, they just show up and have fun and care for kids, and unfortunately, you and I both know unfortunately, it's been exposed to the Catholic Church, and even though a lot of Evangelical churches, that part of the lowest levels of child established provide for the moral physical, emotional well, being of children in that context, sadly, we assumed that was true for so many years, and now it's been exposed that it wasn't always that way. And so that's very important. But you're on the discipleship part, two with kids. I think sometimes we also... The one thing we do, Ross, is we think discipleship with adult has a different definition of the SIL-ship Eris in the sense that I think it's all... Like Paul said in ports, 111, follow me, he's not saying, Just follow me, though he follow me as I probably Christ. And so the best thing we can give our children, the best thing on a leader or challenge ministry leader can give the kids in their club is that they see them growing. Another memory I have a mister Carson over there in the corner, if you can score, is at some point, and I heard some adult City and one day before it, clothe walked up to me to... Cornerstone was ready to go, and they said, Hey, I hear your work and feels on wheels. And then that's for sure. I never heard that term, Meals on Wheels. And he said, Yeah, they said, If you like delivering meals to Alice people, course he's older, he... He said, Yeah, he says, a very shy guy. He says, not always my thing, but I like seeing them. Get that meal and I physically will have a car, and for me, that was seeing him growing in Jesus, even not was a very simple thing, it was him to saying, Follow me as I robotic, just by his living that out and taking another step of serving someone else... And I think that's all the discipleship is, I know Jess, I'm abiding. You do know Jesus too. And when you come to Jesus, then follow me as I follow Jesus. And that's what

we're doing, the children too, and that's why the caring adult becomes social kids. One day I get to have it and I say to Mr. Carson, I remember you in... You were starting to help with Meals on Wheels, and that really spoke to me as a kid, like eight... And he'd probably say, really, you heard that. But all that's important.

0:26:46.1 RC: Totally. Well, and I think we're in the series of conversations that we're calling hallways in homes, and the simple parts of this series is just that discipleship happens everywhere, and because today's kids are going into a context that is entirely different than the context that we as adults came from... We have to assume that they're already listening, we have to take advantage of every single moment because as we say around here, the church and the culture of 250 is gonna demand that. Where I kinda wanna land the plane is for folks who... I think there is often disability or where we started, which is in this place of cynicism where you've re-started back up a lot of program stuff, and it's 60% of what it used to be for it... Maybe 60% is actually a dream, maybe you're nowhere near 60%, whatever your context looks like, but discipleship is still happening. Can you explain to folks how when you're focused discipleship and your metric of success, the numbers and the other things that can sometimes we like noise can begin to have their proper place in the line, the long list of church or parenting priorities, if discipleship is the main thing, what happens next?

0:28:13.7 ST: Well, I think one of the assumptions too, as you're mentioning a few assumptions, one of the assumptions is not only these kids gonna grow up in different context than their parents data did, but there's also going... We also have realized they're being discipled by someone, These are wet sponges that are not just sitting there soaking, but they're observing, they're taking it and their eyes are open, they're physically developing fast or mentally and emotionally, their cognitive skills are coming on, there's spiritual, wakes and awareness this is coming on. So if we just say, Oh well, we had 100 kids before at this ministry and now we've got 50, how are we gonna get the other 50 back, and don't think about the 50 are there, or don't think of new ways and creative ways to do this, they're being discipled by the media, they're being discipled by their friends are being discipled by their teachers, are being discipled by coaches, and now all those people are gonna necessarily decide to them in the wrong direction, but the majority of the voices in their life in this culture, even more than I was going up, are going to be pulling them away from the things that are near and dear to the heart of God, the things that are a part of God's kingdom values and priorities, get a... Point them away from that. And so if the church just titles his thumbs trying to figure out how we get back to being what we were, or we gotta wait for the right numbers or whatever, each church or individuals in the church to the discipleship that happening from the world's perspective, it's getting stronger, they're finding new ways to get it to the kids and more apps and more disputes and Opal pluses and Netflix and peacocks and all kinds of stuff are coming, and we're missing the opportunity where if we... Even in our case in Southern California, there are a lot more restrictions. We're finding it very hard to do. I wanna... Right now, we probably won't be able to want until next fall, but I've said to our team, but whatever we do, even if you're standing in the hallway on Sundays between services, we gotta be President in the life of kids, we can't... And we work hard to do that online, I know a lot of the folks listening work turn, I wanna say thank you to the churches and Jonas ministry leaders and parents who were very hard to hearing a lot of the shutdown, all that. To actually stay in the life of kids, because we sometimes think if the program isn't working, we can't get in their life, the program is the accent to what we really should be doing, which is being present a life with child saying, Follow me as I followed Jesus and sometimes it's just so simple as showing up and being a regular, caring adult in the life of the child, I think when we get to heaven, if it's possible, if this is possible, I think the Mr. Carson and the spike types, and all those individuals were in the front row, have people like need and served in negate who settings and a little more attention or notoriety within a certain context, we get to back row the Billy Grahams and all the people... You know, their

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names will be toward the back, whereas the people like they had Parsons, I think... 'cause I think Jesus lived that way. Is how he lived, he was just present. A meal and a rich man's house, and the poor people where they're waiting for scraps and by His presence, great ministry came out of it just by morally present. And so I really think that what you're talking about, and I hope people get the vision for this, and I hope those who may be guilty that they didn't know something about a child's life, and just say Thank you God for giving the opportunity to be in that child's life in a blessing.