



THE PASTOR'S VOICE

Insights from Church Leaders

The Pastor's Voice Podcast Season 2: Episode 13

Transcript: A Generation Hungering For Righteousness

Reuel Sample: Andrew Grissom, William Merriman, welcome to the pastor's voice podcast, I am so glad that you are here.

William Merriman: Yeah, we're really honored. It's a it's a real joy. Andrew and I have a big heart for this and we're excited to have a good conversation today.

Andrew Grissom: Thanks so much for inviting us. Super excited to be here and get into our conversation today, folks.

Reuel Sample: If you can't tell Andrew and William are millennials, and one of the reasons why I invited them on the podcast is that they have a really, really great podcast called The Wandering Years, and they talk to millennials and others in a transition stage of life. Like How you how you put that first off. Please tell me, please tell me about your podcast and tell me why you started it.

William Merriman: Well, Andrew and I, we we do young adult ministry. We serve at a church in Memphis called Christ Church, and it's been both of our hearts. And the more and more that we thought about it, we thought, you know, one of the greatest tools to reach people right now is is through podcasts. So we kind of live in a an auditory or oral age. And so with this idea, we started to kind of think about the narrative or the vision for the podcast. And gosh, and young adult years, especially those years outside of college. Moving into a world that is really chaotic, really feels like a desert. It feels like a

wilderness. And, you know, readers of the Bible are, well, familiar with that image. But our hope was to kind of be like, like a John the Baptist, like a voice crying out from the wilderness. Someone who's saying that, you know, not all who wander are lost. You know, the wilderness isn't a place of being lost, is actually a place of strength. And we want to come in and be alongside of you and walk with you through it. Because all the all of the people in the wilderness and scripture, whether it's the Israelites or whether it's Jesus going out after his baptism, it was actually a place where God met them and walked with them and then put his sovereign hand over them. And so that's really the heart of our podcasts. And it's been really fun.

Reuel Sample: Andrew, it's interesting that William uses the term wilderness for the 20 to early 30 years.

Andrew Grissom: Yeah, it really is. And I think that I think that it's really interesting that and it kind of goes back to the original formation of this podcast. We started this podcast under a different name, kind of a little bit more in-house at the church called Perspectives and. And it was out of this idea that for so many young adults throughout throughout their years of whether they're in college, whether they're in their 20s, they're in their first job, they're moving to a new city. It's so easy for them to just feel like, Hey, I'm always in transition. Will I ever get to a point of feeling like where I am? What am I? What I'm doing is home? Well, I find a community of people that I can really connect with. And and so often as as William and I were communicating, and I really feel like the Lord really just had his hand all in this, that it really is this idea of wandering. And if you were wandering from one place to another to another to another. And the hope is that as we thought through that idea, we felt like the idea of the wilderness was a place that a lot of young adults really felt and connected with as we talked with them and and we wanted in our prayer and hope was to provide an opportunity and a resource that could equip them as they wandered and hoping that they could still find truth. They could still seek after Jesus, even as they experience those feelings of real wandering, which a lot of our young adults right now are feeling that. And so that's what we wanted to speak immediately to,

Reuel Sample: And that's not really an unhealthy thing. I think all of the people that we see throughout scripture and throughout church history spent wandering years. Yes. So

can you share with us a little bit about your own faith journeys and your own faith wandering years?

Andrew Grissom: I'm a Memphian born and raised, grew up in the church, grew up blessed by the world standards of just, you know, I'm thankful in a lot of ways that that, you know, if there was something that I needed, I was able to get that. I'm thankful to have parents who who spoke Jesus into my life from a young age. And and I think so often, though, there was a sense of comfort that I naturally fell into because of that. And so when conflict came my way, whether that, you know, walking through different periods of my life, both in middle school, high school college, where I was questioning both who I was, who God called me to be, but also seeing a middle school when my when my mom dealt with cancer, our grandparents deal with Lou Gehrig's disease. I looked at God and was like, What is going on? I don't understand this thing that is going on. Why is this happening? And the Lord really convicted me of a lot of things in my life because as as my family dealt with those things, as my family dealt with those things, I finally kind of came to a point where I was like, OK, God, you obviously don't know what you're doing.

Andrew Grissom: So I'm going to take over here. I'm going to be I'm going to be the leader of my life. And you can probably imagine that how well that went because the Lord, what ended up happening was the Lord really began to take take out these little building blocks that I had around my life, whether that was friends, whether that was community, whether that was whether that was what I thought was involvement in school or whatever that may be to show me that, hey, everything, get it all out of the way. Because no matter, no matter what happens in my life, it will all fall short to the glory of God and to God's presence in itself. And I fell to my feet. I fell to my feet when I was in middle school and really just pled and cried out to the Lord saying, Lord, I don't understand. I need you like this is not working. I don't have anything left. And he showed me really. He took everything away to all that was left was him, and I realize that my life, I couldn't do anything apart from him. I couldn't get up and be here and be on this zoom this morning if it wasn't for his goodness and his faithfulness and and and I walked through high school and entered into college and and so much of my so much of my faith wrestling and my journey happened in my college years, asking questions of who I was, who got called me to be.

Andrew Grissom: These things that I had been exposed throughout, throughout my entire life. Is this really what I believe, not just what my parents believe, not just what my home church believes. Not just what my pastor told me to believe, like, is this what I believe and I and I'm so thankful that I've had that, not just through the Lord and his goodness and making my faith personal to myself and and really affirming his goodness, not just generally, but personally. But I also had great mentors in my life during those years who, when I had questions, who when I felt like I was wrestling, who did they spoke truth into me? They said, Hey, this is who Jesus is. Hey, I love you. Hey, I'm here for you. I'm here for you. And the questions that you may have. And I'm so thankful that even now, as I received my call to ministry, that God has just continued to show me that apart from him, I'm nothing.

William Merriman: Yeah, absolutely. So funny enough, Anthony, we work together, but we've also been going to the same church since we were babies, so no known each other for for forever. It's it's really cool. But yeah, so I grew up really in an idyllic church home with a really wonderful, God fearing family and was just poured into and loved abundantly. I became a Christian really early on. I was eight years old, just through conversations with my mom about what belief is and what it means to really know Jesus. And I can remember one night giving my life to Christ then and after that, it was just a journey of like Narnia, further up and further in into life with God. And so confirmation at church was the first part of my life when I really worshipped God. And then moving into high school had some really wonderful mentors who took the time to hang out with nerdy kids like me and like play FIFA and video games with me and go to my soccer games and they just really loved me. I could feel that that spirit of adoption through them. And so and then I was I was surrounded by Christian guys who love the Lord that were my age, that really walked through, walked through life with them. And so it gave me a taste of what life with God really is. Even before I left home. But you know, Andrew, we have such a heart for the wondering years because we both have been there.

William Merriman: Leaving home and going to college was a really, really tough experience for me. I went to a school that is pretty dark spiritually, and I felt really alone. I felt ostracized. I felt a lot of shame. And it was a moment where God took a lot of things away from me and it left me with radical dependence on him. And so faith became my own. I started reading scripture, not because I had to, because I needed to.

And in classes, I was buffeted on all sides just with some pretty radical teaching and ideas. And it was a time when I really when God really called me to him and to pursuing truth and then and man, by the end of my college years, I'd really made it kind of a ministry. It was like I was on the front lines of the mission field every day at a small group of Christian friends, and my heart was really just to serve God in the classroom by pursuing truth, goodness and beauty. And then outside the classroom being being Christ to others and ended up just being a really incredible, fruitful mission field. And after after college, I found my way back to Memphis and started working at Christ Church with Andrew. And we've been doing that same heart for young adults is carried over to what we do now, and it's it's just a real, real fun adventure.

Reuel Sample: Interesting. Any anybody else or a lot of people who go through that experience that both of you did at college, most of them, the studies are showing that it's about 80 to 90 percent fall away from the faith. And the two of you are not in that. Is that William? You were buffeted that strengthened you? Yeah. And it it didn't make you bitter at all. I don't see any bitterness in your bearded millennial face. I see I see kindness and and love and joy in both of you. And that's that's a testament. So amen on that.

Reuel Sample: You are both pastoring in a church or serving in a church, and you are working with young adults your age a little bit, maybe a little bit younger, a little bit older. I am convinced that the modern day church has missed the boat on your age group. We don't understand you. We just don't. And so we we think we know what you're facing. We think we know what you want. I don't think we do. So what are people in your age groups facing? What are the issues that are on their minds?

William Merriman: Well, I can. I can start. I can start this morning. We well, I mean, the stereotype of millennials and even even Gen Zs is that we're a people of a revolution that we want, that we care, you know, heartily about, about big issues. And you know, while that's a stereotype, it really it really communicates something true that we are a generation hungering after righteousness and after justice, and we have this spirit of of really hungering after new creation. And it's a good thing. But like all fire, when it's outside of, you know, the fireplace, it can catch and burn and spread really, really far and wide. And ultimately, Andrew and I both believe that the the place for that zeal to really find its home is is in the church. But the issues that we're facing are there's I

mean, there's a lot, but I think one of them is just this kind of wider cultural spirit of distrust, of a distrust of institutions and then are real. Just spirit of suspicion of all of all truth and evidence of this is just this kind of process of deconstruction that you've heard Christians, young Christians specifically just kind of latch latch hold of. And so how does that apply to the church? Well, millennials and young adults, Gen Z, especially, they're hungering after really places of order because the world is so amorphous and they're hungering after truth, because you look out and there's so many, there's just so much distrust. And the thing that's I think most damaging part of trying to find a church home is when they see people in churches preaching the gospel but not doing the gospel. So they might have orthodoxy right from a sense of right teaching, but not living out, you know, gospel culture. And the reason why I think a lot of millennials aren't coming to church is because they look at the church and they say, you know, I don't think that you actually believe what you're saying because we don't see that spirit of love. We don't see that spirit of adoption. We don't see that spirit of of justice here.

Reuel Sample: Andrew, you're looking for places of order in a world full of chaos.

Andrew Grissom: Yeah, you know, I think that and I want to I want to take it even a step further because I think so often a part of this journey and questioning and figuring out what the church is meant to be. So often what people don't realize is young adults are in their hearts figuring out who God has called them to be, what is their identity, what is, who is the person that they are, what do they believe? What are they going to fight for? What are they going to? What is truth? And so they're seeking they're seeking these places of order and chaos because so often going back to this theme of the wandering years, they feel like so much of their life is wandering, and they feel like so much of their life is in transition that they are missing the point and they're really not there seeking for an identity of who they are. And and I think, you know, I think so often the world has told a young adult that that their source of identity, their source of truth is subjective to them, subjective to what is what they feel like is important to them, what their source of truth is, what their foundation is.

Andrew Grissom: And so when they look at the church and they're told that, hey, no, the source of truth is actually objective and his name is Jesus. It's something that's it's different because it's very contrary to. The world says, and I echo William in that so often they hear this source of truth and they want to believe it. But for so often our

churches on a global sense are seeking to put on the programming, put on the teaching of what it means to follow in this truth. But when they look in, they see people who may be talking the talk, but they're not walking the walk. I tell people all the time that a young adult can smell fake. From a mile away, they can smell, they can smell fake people from a mile away. They could smell in genuine and genuineness from a mile away, and they're going to turn and run from it very quickly.