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SPEAKERS

RC: Ross Cochran

MM: Mark Matlock

0:00:09.1 RC: This is the Resilient Disciples Podcast, powered by Awana. I'm Ross. You know who you are, and I'm really glad you're here, especially today. Because today we have Mark Matlock. Mark is the president of Wisdom Works and the co-author of Faith For Exiles. He is also... Mark, I believe this might be your greatest accomplishment. He's also a friend of the show.

0:00:30.3 MM: I am a friend of the show. Yeah, I love this show.

0:00:34.8 RC: I know you are just constantly refreshing your phone on Thursday just waiting for the new episode to drop on you...

0:00:41.8 MM: Yeah, in anticipation of it, always. But...

0:00:45.8 RC: It's really great to have you back. And I wanna jump right in because you and I are talking before the Forum, but this conversation, most people are gonna hear this after the Forum, and I wanna jump in specifically on this... just tension that I see for people independent of the child discipleship forum, independent of all the areas that you're an expert in, people who are within the sound of our voice right now are hopefully coming off a really great experience, and now they're hitting that sort of like...What do I do now with all the stuff I just learned? And all the stuff I'm feeling like, How do I begin to make this happen? What do you say to the leader who might be feeling overwhelmed, but wanting to implement some of the stuff that they just heard, including wisdom from you...

0:02:51.8 MM: Yeah, you know, it's interesting, as somebody who's put on events like this before, there's kind of like three kind of head spaces that people get into and presenters get into, one is a reflective space where people are thinking, draining, more theoretical, that's where you get more... Sometimes data-driven things or theological reflection on what does it mean to disciple a child or what is the theology of discipleship? And so you've got this kind of reflective thing that happens really important that we have that, and then you also have what I call the strategic or the social scientists, and those are the people that are like, What is the research saying? What other reflective is doing and what does that mean? And they're kind of applying a lot of different disciplines to the work that we have to do in the church, and they're thinking about strategies, they're thinking about approaches, they're thinking about what is the theory of change around all of this and what evidence do we have for that so reflective is very high ideation, very abstract, the social scientists, the strategists are thinking a little bit more about how are we going to do something or what makes sense, or what evidence do we have for the approach that we're taking? And then we have the third group, which are what I call the tactician... Okay, and those are the people that say, Hey, here's a book. Just follow it and do it. Here's a curriculum, if you do this every week, this is gonna help you, and so it's interesting to know this about ourselves because we tend to gravitate as attendees at a forum toward one of these kind of lenses... Right, we tend to like, Oh, I like this high ideation stuff. I don't know what I'm gonna do with it, but I love thinking about that. Whereas people that are more on the tactical side go, I don't even know what they're talking about, and what could that possibly

have to do with the fact that... I've got 400 kids showing up on Wednesday and I don't know what I'm doing with them. And you're pontificate about this thing, and then people are really into like, I love the psychology, I love the human flourishing studies and how this is helping us inform our faith and proving up the stuff that Jesus taught us to do actually has... It's grounded in neuroscience, and we can leverage what we've learned about neuroscience to actually do what Jesus told us to do better... So there's all this wonderful stuff and we tend to gravitate toward all of these things, and so I find it coming off of a conference, really looking back on it and going, Okay, what are the bigger ideas that need to explore, because unfortunately don't often give ourselves enough time to do things well, we're usually working up against a deadline, and so it's not... We're never really doing our best, we're doing the best that we can do in the time that we have before people show up. Right. And so having that reflection time to sit there and go, What is the best I need to be doing without a deadline? And it may take a year to figure that out. So sitting down and going, What can I implement? What are the bigger conversations, taking that reflective thing that I need to be thinking about, What is discipleship being for our church, what is the theological basis for our child Ministry, what do we believe a child can actually experience before their 12... What should know if they have been a part of our children's program, what should they know by the age of 12, those are things you're not gonna try to have sold by the next Wednesday or even next month, they're gonna be something that takes months to really work through with your team. So figure out those things. What are the long-term conversations that we need to be trying to answer, then what is that research... What is that social science stuff, what the strategy things that inform our theory of change, how do we believe we're actually changing children? A lot of us believe, Well, because I do a program that's changing them... Well, is that a good... In a theory of change, just because they show up every week, frequency actually is a theory of change. Frequently connecting with people, Harvard research on human flourishing shows that just attending, attending and participating in religious community that's not in anything with depth or what you believe or whatever, but just that has a huge impact on your flourishing, and so that is a theory of change, but if the more we learn, the more we understand what levers the pole and what we can do to maybe improve on that and to do that more effectively. So thinking about that, what is our theory of change and what did they say at the forum that informs how we need to be operating strategically and strategy... The interesting thing about strategy, as people always, sometimes things that strategy is operations, it's not strategy. Basically helps you know how to make a choice. Strategy is all about choices, and when your volunteers, when your teams, when your parents understand your strategy, they can also make similar choices so that they're all supporting the same thing. And so every day we're faced with thousands of choices, most of them we don't even frame as choices, but even my decision to be on this podcast today... That's a decision that I had to make it. And so how do I know to make this decision? But there's a podcast I also turned down, which will be remain nameless, but I turned down today... Why did I choose that one to turn down, but this one to say yes to, there was a strategy that inform my choice, I didn't randomly just say, I'm gonna toss a coin, decide which podcast I'm gonna give time to today... There was something behind it. And in the same way, when our teens understand the strategy, they can make the right choices, and we can make the right choices all together, and it really empowers your teams are really thinking that through... What do people need to know? So they can make the right choice, the choice that I would make as a leader. How could they make that same choice when they can do that, you've got a powerful team dynamic.

0:08:04.1 RC: Absolutely. Well. There's so much gonna sum the man, and I think to folks who are coming off this form and like I said, hopefully coming off a great time, we'll find out a little bit, but particularly for this community, the cadence of regularly taking that time, like you were talking about it takes a year to begin to answer some of those questions within their context, so regularly taking that time to evaluate, because there's gonna be a whole bucket of stuff that you hear or experience

at the Forum That's just gonna be enriching. It's just gonna be like, "Man, I'm not alone in this. Man, it's so good that God is so good that he's brought a community together, folks are focused on this," but then there's gonna be hopefully a lot of stuff that you feel like you can directly take from the form and apply to your context. Giving yourself a space to do that work well is so critical and really hard for this community. Now, you said to people one or two things that either they either don't have the long-term conversations, so making sure that you put it...

0:09:36.6 MM: You budget time for it, you know what I mean? And realize that over the course of the year, we wanna do this in every quarter, we're going to spend some time kind of addressing this and who are the right people to have in the room to do that, because you do have the tactician... Right, and that makes up the majority of us in ministry, just tell me what to do. A lot of the volunteers that we have, they don't have time to sit down and develop their own theology of child discipleship and spiritual formation. Right, so there is like, What do I need to do? So we wanna figure out that right balance of helping them, if they have a strategy, they can apply the tactics even better, they're not just doing something by rote, they understand why they're doing it, you wanna give people that way, but also what are the tactics that I can put in place today, 'cause there's a lot of low-hanging fruit that their people are gonna hear it, the child discipleship for them, where they can say, I can do that this week, I can do that next week, I can do that next month, and we can make that change and you will see huge benefits just from making a certain shift in a tactic, so thinking about the reflective, the strategy, social science part, and then the tactical, it's just a helpful way to break down your summit experience.

0:10:28.4 RC: Totally. And you said something about the strategy that I wanna lean into next because you are someone who is uniquely positioned in... I feel like the shortest way to describe it is you were talking about Gen Z before, it was cool, you are also working on a project with the folks, Pizarro and his team, which I know internally it's called The Emotionally Healthy teams prior. Can you give... Folks are listening to... Any sense of that and what to expect there?

0:10:57.4 MM: Yeah, so earlier this year, Pete Scarszo and his team reached out and basically they were looking at how can we contextualize emotionally healthy discipleship, which is emotional, I'll be the relationships and emotional, Healthy Spirituality. So I love God, emotionally, spirituality, love others, emotionally, healthy relationships, that makes up the two has of emotional Athy discipleship, and how could we do this for teenagers, and I've been involved in doing some team versions of other books for JP Morland, who's a philosopher. We did a book called Smart faith together, ten adaptation of love or Agarwal, your mind. And what was interesting is when I sat down... So he said, What we want you to do is take J's book and dumb it down for teenagers. I go, It looks called Smart faith. You don't dumb that down. And I did a God story, your story with Mexican, and one of the things that we're really trying to do is figure out how do we contextualize this... Right, for a teenager. So what I love about Pete was he was saying to me, I don't just want you to write a version of this, I want you to actually lead youth pastors and teenagers through this over a three-year period, so this is like a three-year journey that we are just embarking on the September of 2021 a great...And we'll be doing multiple cohorts over the next three years before it actually gets to a pub-ready version, because we wanna walk through a team and think about that. A lot of why The pete's work on Emotionally Healthy Spirituality has resonated with so many pastors is that they were spiritually unhealthy and emotionally unhealthy, and Pete is so transparent about his 20-year journey of recognizing his UN-Health and then trying to get there, and he's documents and everything that he's done, I just documented what he did and what worked, and then he did it with his leadership, and they did it with his church, so it makes sense that I can't just take his book and put some ten lingo in there, and at work, and the other part is, is that a lot of the people that are reading the book, our

adults, they're in their 30s and 40s, and their classes half empty, they're realizing... I'm lacking the teenagers glasses, not half empty, it's half full. It hasn't been filled up all the way yet, and so we're actually putting something into their life... That's a really different approach. So I love pets, vision around just we really need to contextualize is for teenagers, we need to take this content and we need to walk with him through their life, so I'm working with him, and then Matt Mann, who's the next gen pastor at New Life Church, where this is a part of their culture. He and I are co-leading this project to get that done, and it's exciting just to be a part of people that want to really help people follow Jesus, and the last time we talked.

0:14:09.9 RC: You said something recently... That's just stuck with me that was very compelling about this idea of nostalgia and how I'm gonna bad mis-quote you to you, which is, for those of you out here who have a podcast, I guess always podcasting 101, but in your... But what I think is so critical for this particular generation is that the rest of us recognize that this is an entirely different world, and we are trying to disciple them through something that we ourselves didn't experience the same way they are experiencing. And I'm not an expert in this like you are, Can you begin to unpack just unlike a really macro level, the ways in which what this current generation is going through is different, what the leader who maybe was Gen X, maybe was a baby boomer, maybe even with the greatest generation experience. Just on like a macro level, what is this generation experiencing that is, we'll say most often misunderstood by those who are trying to disciple them.

0:16:40.1 MM: Yeah, so that's a great, great question. I think a life feeling the pressure of this division is like the buzz word, right? Everybody's divided. Families are divided, denominations are divided. Division is just everywhere, and it's just the polarization of things, and it's like, How do we get here? But generational division is really critical because of my work, wisdom works, we're all about how does one generation passed down or accelerate the transfer of wisdom into another to young persons, like the Bible seems to indicate that we can accelerate our acquisition of wisdom by following the Word of God by living in the way of Jesus, right? And that there's this wisdom that comes down from above and the wisdom that comes from below the... So we gotta discern those two kinds of wisdom, but if we have a generational divide, there's no way to pass that generation that wisdom down from one generation to the next, so what we've got is we've got a lot of... We've got a generation that for the first time actually has a bunch of skills, and our living, have grown up in a world that is very different than the one everybody else is in and actually knows some stuff that the older generation needs to know, and it's more than just setting your vcrs, but it's a whole new imagination, I look at me, some of these tiktok evangelists and I'm going, I... As much as I am in the media and I am on the edge of what's going on and try to keep my finger on the pulse of today, I would never think to use tiktok in a way that some of them are thinking about using it because they are imagining it from a different place generationally than I am, and so their basis of imagination... Even though I'm tolerant, I'm accepting of it, I'm embracing it, I'm on it. I'm just marvel at, wow, they're coming up with things that I just never would have thought of. So this is the first time, and it would really start with the millennials that we had a generation actually had something that was really valuable for the older generations, but the older generation still have something valuable for the younger generations, and that is wisdom, that is experience. Knowledge that has been earned and forged over time, and it can be passed down if that generation is willing, and what we're finding is, is that generation Z-liminal are looking for metrics, they're looking for older people, but older generations often shut them down because it... They try to get them to conform to a world that no longer exists.

0:18:53.4 MM: This idea that there is a global reality, that the Internet has brought a global cultural globalization of a secular culture that is very different than the world that we've lived in and the

United States because of some of the Christian values that shaped and formed has enjoyed a pseudo, experience in some segments of this American dream and what's happened with our ability to now hear all of these diverse voices, we find out, well, not everybody's experienced that dream, and you know what, there are other histories that are now available to us that we didn't ever have access to before. We were only taught what we were taught in school, and we all know that history, the victors are the ones who get a shape history, but all of a sudden you start hearing some of the the things you're not going, Well, wait a minute, that's really different than what I grew up believing or whatever, it's very disorienting for older generations, there's a lot of... And we just want to go away, but the reality is, we have a generation that's growing up in it, and they're very secure, so that's the first thing we have to realize we're living in... We are no longer living in a bubble, we are living in a very diverse... The census data just came out and we're seeing an increase in diverse people and that... I don't see a thing wrong with that, that's what God called us to, but that is going to create some district for a lot of people, that kind of news is threatening for all white people, that news is probably threatening. And so we have to be honest about that. Oh my God, I hate... We have to get in touch with that and we have to realize that maybe we have a bubble that's gonna burst a little bit, so that's the first thing...

0:20:46.8 RC: One of them, can I lean into that really quick? So what I find so compelling about... You had framed it around nostalgia, is that immediately... So I think about this in the context of my dad at right, my dad and I are very close, but we're obviously different generations, and when I began to look at it, at some of this... Some of the ways in which he looks at the world, and I look at the world differently. When I begin to recognize that he is looking at it from a lens of nostalgia, of recognizing that we've lost something or something's changed, and that was just the water that I grew up in, he immediately gave me a greater sense of empathy for his world view and I'm communicating that he was able to understand that I was coming from a different place, and I feel like that generational divide is so easily crossed when you begin to look at it the way that you're talking about...

0:21:36.2 MM: So when we have some humility, but it is disoriented, it is like a fish all of a sudden realizing they're breathing water... Yes, and that's what's happening to a lot of people are realizing, Oh, I didn't realize how comfortable I was with things and now they're changing and I'm aware of it, and that's a very disorienting experience to realize, Oh, I'm in a fish bowl, and we all are every one of us is to some extent... And you brought up to her also at a certain level, there is no putting the June back in the bottle, so I do hope that even for folks where some of the more polarizing conversations just bring them great distress or discomfort, also recognized that the church has an opportunity to be a leader in this position, the church was designed to lead people through this greatest work. And this is why the body of Christ does not have age limitations on it. If you have the Holy Spirit in you, you are a member of the Body of Christ, right? You have been grafted into the body of Christ, and yet we wait until people reach a certain age before we really start asking them, so as you're part of the body of Christ, how does your peace function, how does your organ in form and alter and is dependent and I'm dependent on you. And that's where generationally, because they're growing up in this different world and their imagination is different around things, we have to lean into them a little bit more than maybe traditionally, we've... And I don't know that I was ever right. I didn't live back then. But I think it's always been healthy to pay attention to what younger generations are, how they're seeing and experiencing the world because of the imagination that they have or what the body of Christ can do.

0:22:40.5 RC: Totally, you... And just really quickly, you touch on that, which I think is really important when I think about older generation, my father, thinking... 'cause you had said when you're in the

stage of life where you're a teenager, you're... Some of this is all very natural that every teenager in history has thought, I have a better idea than the generation before me, but the difference, the magnitude of what this generation of kids is experiencing compared to what I experienced are my dad experience that we have to pay attention to that Delta because otherwise we are selling the change short and we're making the division wider before we can even start doing that work.

0:24:04.0 MM: Yeah, Gary Thomas and sacred parenting, he kinda talks about this idea that our children shape our faith, and I call that a Luke Skywalker effect, where Skywalker redeems His Father. Right. And in some ways, as older generations, we have an opportunity to expand our capacity for the kingdom, I'm not paying attention with this younger generations thinking about and how they're seeing the world because they are exposing fragile parts of the way that we viewed things that we... Few some things together. They're un-bundling them, and that's very difficult for us. And the other thing is that the center of Christianity has really moved out of the United States, it's in Southeast Asia, it's among the African continent, that's where we're seeing. Resilient, discipleship thrive, we've done a project for World Vision called the connected generation, where we were looking at the faith practices and beliefs of millennials and millennial Christians in particular, we're doing one right now on teenagers, a global state, teenagers in 25 different countries. Just like we did with the millennial study, and what we're finding is, is that the kind of the center of where Christianity is dynamically being practiced has shifted in the globe, and for Gotha is hard, and they're kinda looking at it going, Oh, I don't know that American Christianity, that's a little too few politics, it's a little too little as a certain lens that is reading and interpreting the scriptures from, and we have an opportunity to learn to breathe in from our brothers and sisters globally, and learn and get a richer picture of what God who God is and what He's doing in the world. And that's always exciting, always city, but that's why we have to think about the Body of the Christ and the fact... And if fact, the while I have my part to play, I'm dependent on all the other parts, and that means it dependent on the children that are believers as well, late are not... Well, they are physically and generationally maybe dependent on me. I am spiritually dependent on them somehow, according to what Paul talks about the Body of Christ, they are a part of the body that is necessary for us to function, we don't always treat them that way, we treat them as well, this is our farm team, and we have to realize, I always ask that in my own parenting, how am I dependent on my children right now for who I am becoming as an... Identifying with my children less as a parent child and now more as, especially as they're getting into their 20s, seeing them as we're more brother and sister in Christ, and we are a parent child, and that's a powerful thing to start thinking about generations that way. And another really big thing, generationally is mental health. We know that this generation, your millennials are starting to be called the most unlucky generation, because they've had some key moments in their development, they've had major disruptions, every institution, every hero that could be counted on failed them during their identity formation years and beyond, and the pandemic just, Hey, as we're entering into the middle age in our 40s, now we got this thing, it's like one more thing. But Gen Z, this has become much more normative, but Gen-Z is growing up in their identity forming years in the most un-Christian population in the United States that we've ever experienced, and so we have to ask ourselves how is that shaping a generation... There are... It's a different world. They don't know a lot of basics. I was just at a church in Atlanta, in a house church, and they had all these several people that aren't really typically church attending, and I'm just even seeing the worship going, These people... Could they even understand what grace means? And we're talking about the blood of Jesus, and they even know exist on gross, I'm washing in the blood of Jesus, what I mean. For me, these are very deep, they have deep meaning, and they're the result of years of reflection on these concepts, but for somebody coming in from the outside, it's like, Oh, you're... Washing in the blood of a lamb. So we have to realize that we have a generation that's emerging that doesn't have this happening, like the Ten Commandments. I learned about the Ten Commandments a lot through

on Easter on one of the five channels that we got, the Ten Commandments was on TV, and the big thing was my dad always saying that didn't happen, that didn't happen that way, you when... And so I learned that kind of the bible through the mistelling of the story in some ways, but also you just realize the culture in general had some knowledge about things, not so much anymore, it's a different thing, and so... That's a different world. The other thing is in the area of mental health, because of all of these changes, what people don't realize is, maybe when you went to college, you had five options, if that... This generation has thousands of options when they graduate from high school, and they're not even sure that a higher education is the right option, the pandemic even increase that. Right, they are stressed out just by the number of options, we sit there and I go, Oh my gosh, you guys have it so easy, look at what you have access to, they are overwhelmed by it, because we are now mature, we have the discipline to make the choices. And to navigate some of that, they are just overwhelmed and the fear of, I'm gonna pick the wrong path or I'm gonna do the wrong thing, that's created a lot of anxiety in this generation, even though they're hyper-connected, they also are feeling very lonely, and so while they're connected, there is this loneliness and isolation that they're feeling, it's a very interesting thing, and this is in the United States, this is... We're observing these things globally among the generation, but the other thing is this generation's grown up in an era of positive psychology, where strength finders, that was all high idea for a lot of us, what I should live into my strengths and not worry too much about pulling my weakness is up, this generation that is the water that they swim in it, and they've been told how to identify those things, how to live in those things, they've also been told how to set boundaries, how to have a whole healthy life. Now, they're obviously not living into it because we're seeing these high, but they also... Mental health has been designated, so they're a lot more transparent about it, so while some of their numbers are up, some of that just because they're willing to share it or... They have a name for it, and that's not a bad thing. So it's hard to know, are they really more emotionally and healthy than generations before them, or are they just more willing to say I am depressed because they can acknowledge it, is that they have a language and a vocabulary around it, as older adults, we don't have that and so when we see young people setting boundaries or saying, I'm not going to do that, or whatever, they've been empowered to do that... This whole Simon Biles thing that happened at the Olympics where she said, I'm not going to compete. First of all, too many people talked about that they have any idea what it's like to be her... Oh my goodness. Is a summer podcast about the internet action. That one specific incident. Yes, right. My goodness, yes. But let's just look at this fact and go, she felt empowered in a way that athletes have never felt a power of our part of it, 'cause she has an audience, she has a power as an influencer that no other athlete had, they were all handled by managers and coaches and PR people and all that, but now they have a lot more direct access through Instagram, Twitter, things like that, they're much more closer in touch with their fan base, and so they're feeling empowered that, you know, I can say no to this and I need to say, notice I didn't say no. Or, I didn't speak up when this was happening, and now I need to speak up because I've learned that that's the healthy... So we have a generation is doing that as older adults, we need to stop being jealous of them for doing what we wish we could do, and kinda start saying, You know what, that's awesome that you're able to do that, even though as your employer, I'm not real happy about that choice is your parent... I don't understand, I just wanna say Suck it up, you know, and do the work, but maybe they're making the better choice and maybe you need to reward them for that and apply them for that.