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### SPEAKERS

RC: Ross Cochran

SL: Sam Luce

**0:00:08.9 RC:** So this is the Resilient Disciples podcast. I'm Ross Cochran, thank you for being here. Thank you for listening. I am thrilled to welcome one of our faculty members for the Child Discipleship Forum... Sam Luce today. Sam, thanks for being here, but I just wanna start saying you are... You're not only a leader in the thought leadership space of child discipleship, I would highly encourage people to check out the show notes where we'll link to the same website so you can read some of his writings. I think you're a very gifted communicator over a variety of issues, but you're also someone who's invested in the local church, and you are a local leader and have been for quite some time, so tell people who are listening to us about your church and how you have come to this place of being a faculty member of the child discipleship forum, which sounds like a very fancy title.

**0:01:00.6 SL:** Something. Yeah, so I'm part of Redeemer Church in Upstate New York. So the UN-famous redeemer. So that is who we are, and we are in Utica New York, which is kind of on the way between Albany and Syracuse, located there. We're a church that really believes in the power of the Bible, the power of the Gospel to transform human lives, and the greatest need that we all have from the youngest child to test, the oldest adult in the room is that we need forgiveness. We need redemption, we need the power of God to open her eyes by His grace, to see His goodness, so that we can model that and be transformed by that and model it to the world, and so we're a church, we've been around for... I don't know, 40 years, maybe 40 years. I've been here at this church for 24 years, six years ago, I transitioned out of campus ministering into just a full-time pastor, families. Next, yeah, so I oversee all of our kids and youth programs at all of our locations, and I'll leave those teams and try to disciple those who disciple those who disciple kids now, all

**0:02:21.1 RC:** That's exactly sort of where I wanna begin because what I hope people hear in everybody we talk to, but especially for somebody like you, is how similar your kind of story and journey is gonna sound like to lots of people who listen... I may not, I may be talking to you on the podcast, but there's plenty of people who are listening to this who have been invested in the lives of kids and families in their communities for over 20 years, and the lens that you have on this, the ability to be able to apply it on both a local and kind of a macro level, I think it's really valuable for people... So you just talked about discipling people, those who are discipling kids and equipping those, all that is such the heartbeat of a church... We are coming off of a time that was unprecedented history, and I think... I get a little nervous when I see a lot of conversations of like, Let's get back to normal. Let's go, let's do... And it feels like it's sort of saying, Let's do what we were doing, and I've had the privilege of being able to talk to you a couple of times. I know that's not quite how you look at the sort of post-covid world. If someone's listening to this and they're looking at the fall and what their church is gonna look like, what should they be keeping in mind now?

**0:03:31.7 SL:** Yeah, I think in many ways, covid was the greatest challenge that we faced in our generation, for sure, in many ways, not the greatest in every way, but I also think it's one of the greatest gifts because it allowed us... The thing that we always talk about, "I wish that I had more time to just spend time with my family to think things through", and it gave us a... It wasn't a sabbatical in any way, and because it was so taxing mentally in terms of every decision was excruciating, there was no easy decision, there was um... You take just masks for instance, whatever decision you make about masks, someone disagreed. So it was difficult. No matter what you said, if I'm a pro mask, anti mask, it was hard. People were... I read this thing on Facebook, or Instagram, it just broke my heart. This guy, he was, he said, Please pray for the church. He goes, a friend of mine who is a faithful pastor in his local ministry, he buried people and prayed for people, and served for 20 years was driven, out of the church over massk. He said, I'm not saying what side he was stood on, because it's not about that, he's saying that this is a time where we have to really dig deep and we have to really figure out how are we gonna lead in this cultural moment, how are we going to glorify God and the difficulty. And so leading isn't simple, but what I think it has, what cover did do is its simplified or schedule in the sense of it allowed us to focus on... To ask questions. Hard questions like, Okay, is VBS still worth the effort, you know what I'm saying? Are we getting from BBS what we're putting... What we're hoping to receive from it, and for us, the anthers, and we just did Bs a couple of weeks ago, but I think we have this culture, we have this addiction to events that because we were driven by the wrong... Numbers were driven by the wrong things like that, because we feel like the more people that participate, the more people that observe, the more that we are achieving our purpose, which can be true, but often isn't true, and I think for me, the question we have to ask ourselves is, is not when comeback to normal, but what do we need to change? What can we do differently? What do we have to stop doing and what do we just start doing a result of what we know can happen and may happen again.

**0:06:05.5 RC:** So just to kinda make sure people are tracking... One of the things that I think is really important to ask for somebody's been in this world as long as you have, is to highlight that this is not something you've been through before, 'cause you've obviously seen how children's ministry has changed from when you started compared to now that this moment in time is unique, and I'm curious, when you were looking on a real practical local level, like you talked about asking those questions, how is that feeling... What we would at least articulate is the difference between children's ministry the way we've understood it, and child discipleship??

**0:06:42.6 SL:** Yeah, this is definitely a unique season that we've been in, and I think being in the same church, so just starting with that, in this for 24 years, what you see is there's benefits and there's drawbacks, the drawback says You become sort of part of the furniture, you know what I'm saying of the place. And so there's that, but then the benefits, I would say is, is it humbles you because you realize that the result of what you do is not your good ideas or you're innovative thinking, but it is God's grace, and so it humbles you because you realize that the temptation I think that we have is we have five years worth of good innovative ideas, and often times we're tempted to take those one, our time is up to the next church and do our five years of innovation, but when you see people... When you start doing the weddings of kids who are in crawlers, you know what I'm saying? It has this profound effect on you because you realize that you see the mistakes that you made and

you see the place for God's grace for this evidence, even in the midst of your ignorance, in the midst of the mistakes you made, how God's grace was still at work through your faithfulness. And so there's that, but I think overall, in kids ministry across the board, like what I've seen, the change is from kids Ministry has gone from kids pastor as expert, "Okay, bring your kids to us and we'll fix them and give him back to you after an hour," that's where it sort of was when I first started back to a transition and then the pendulum swung as it often does to the opposite end, which was kids, pastor as cheerleader, we're here to note here to parents or the primary disciples, and our job is the cheer and I think both of those are right, and both those are wrong... Sure, think where we need to be as this is... How can we be... And this is where I think covid is sort of bringing this out, is that we can't... As the experts, we didn't have access to kids... As experts, we didn't have access to the kids because they were at home, and so we were putting content out there up on YouTube, hoping that someone was watching it, but then we also weren't even able to share parents because they were so busy trying to be Tutors to be parents that figure out the remote work situation, it was like they didn't have time for our encouragement. So what we need is, this is, I think the Pennington, back to your point is this is as a disciple, which you should be, as a ministry leader, you need to... We have to figure out how we're gonna disciple parents, how are we gonna deal with kids in such a way that should we not be able to be able to reach them directly, that they will be able to... That parents will have been disciplined enough to be able to disciple their kids as in some church...

**0:09:47.9 RC:** Well, that's kind of a mind-blowing thing, and not to be super alarmist, but it does raise this upcoming season, even particularly, this is just upcoming minister as an opportunity to practice what you've reach because this won't be the last time we could shut down... They just want the last time, I don't think so, and to be trained and to learn what we've learned so that we're not making the same mistakes three months into... Whatever the next pandemic is, I think it's gonna be really, really critical. And I hope people hear too... And you've talked about this before, so I don't mean to ask us such a leading question, but you've talked about the difference between the ways in which the world is discipling our kids versus the way that we have the opportunity to do till the kids... You've used the word incarnation and how that the incarnation makes a difference. Can you speak you just for sake of example, because I'm pretty sure it's what my kids are watching currently, can you speak to the difference between the work of what the church can do even in a socially distant environment versus the work that Disney can do, let's say 'cause I'm sure right now there's a show on Disney plus that my kids are streaming...

**0:10:56.6 SL:** Yeah, I think... Yeah, one of the, I think one of my most popular, I guess, or most accessed blog posts was the difference between Fred Rogers and Mr. Rogers and Walt Disney, what are the differences? And to me, the difference was how Mr. Rogers saw the world as he saw the world through this idea of forming kids into the fate that he professed, and not in a way that is even as overt as we would as kids pastors or ministry leaders by he was an ordained minister. He saw, this is my mission field, and I am going to model for a watching world what it looks like to be conformed in the image of Christ, and so he did that in so many ways because his goal was transformation rather than just having kids be entertained. Entertainment has value, but not much, because it's until they're on and the next thing is, until they flip to the next YouTube video, it keeps them pacified, but it doesn't change, it doesn't mold them into the image of Christ, it doesn't make them more

like Christ, and the role of us as leaders and his parents is This is who are we becoming... Who we are becoming and how is that informing how we leave the kids that God has interested in our care. Right, and so leading in kids ministry, it should be engaging and should be fun, right, but it should definitely be more than that, it definitely should be about Who are these kids, who are these kids becoming... Are the kids that have been through our ministry and did they look more like Christ, they... Are they grounded in the understanding of the historic faith handed to us... Right? Are they able to stand in the midst of difficulty? Even in this shot down, this is... I'm not saying this is persecution or whatever, but what I'm gonna tell you is about persecution, I'm not equating the two, but I'm... I read a book a while back. In the book, he was talking about this: there's this guy, this author, he was interviewing what was the difference between Christians who would face persecution versus Christians in the West who had faced persecution, like how was her fate different? And so he interviewed all these different people that have been in persecution and he was at... He was meeting with these leaders, and I think it was in China or the Eastern Europe, and they were talking and there was all these people that had gone to jail, that was going to prison, was there a seminar, but that's how they want... This is how you didn't become a pastor until you've been in prison, and it was just mind-blowing, and then he said... Then he said this whole thing is, they arrested some people. And you said that the people that don't make it, right? You said there was two people that went in, they didn't make it, and he said, Why didn't they make it? In prison, he said, Well, because you only have with you in prison and what you bring with you... Oh, wow. And it's like, to me, that is a profound reality is like to me, that's what child discipleship and Diablo, to me, it changed the way I looked at me, discipling me with kids, is I have to prepare my kids to bring with them into the world. I don't believe that we're being persecuted or anything like that, but I want them to prepare if that ever does happen, what they bring with them is what's gonna keep them, so those that brought in memory, they only brought with them what they had memorized the... Now, Awana is huge in the scripture memorization, that was what was huge was for what the scriptures that they memorize, the songs that they had sung and that they remembered, the books that they had read, all those things were the framework by which they had the courage and the faith, those things inform their faith, like some people memorize certain parts of the Bible and they recited them to each other in prison as a way to strengthen and encourage each other, so what we bring to difficulty... I think what we can take from it, it's not apples to apples, but what we can take from it in discipleship as this is what we bring to the hardship of our lives. How we get through those is what we're doing to them.

**0:16:16.5 SL:** I just took a class in seminary, one stand... One of the statements that just stuck with me throughout the whole thing, I read a TIME baronet, and one of the things that stood out to me most was this guy said "The reason why pastors don't disciple people in the church is 'cause they don't... They've never been disciplined in themselves," they don't know what discipleship looks like, we said they don't disciple the people in their church because they've never been disciplined, and I think that how... I take that and how I learned that is, this is the reason why parents are leaving the hand-outs in the bottom of their cars to be stepped on in their mini-vans because they're busy, but they've never been disciplined. And so the best thing that we can do to disciple parent kids is the disciple parents as a kids faster, and not how are you discipling the parents in your church, what tools are you giving them, how are you discipling their kids... If they're not going to do it. So I think that's a broader conversation than just saying We need to be a cheerleader for parents, because

parents need more than encouragement, they need a model, they can walk out for their kids, they need a structure by which they can say, This is what we're doing today, this is what it looks like. And there's been a lot in kids ministry, and the kids mirrored off this thing, no one would disagree that parents are primary... But when you ask somebody, How do you do that? What does that look like? Well, we just... Her parents on where you do... Like what? We meet on Sundays. How do you disciple kids? And they say, Well, we have Sunday morning service. And that isn't the right answer. You're giving a good answer, but it's not enough, it's not just to attend, an event does not make you disobeyed belief that is backed up by 20000 years of historical face that encourages and forms and frames a cultural moment we live in is discipleship. It's a lens by which our kids can see the world and see the changes that we don't even perceive better through the way that the church is historically been through them, because there's no new heresy, there's no new Harty that's gonna come down the pipe. That is new to the church, it may have an elfin, you know, I'm saying a look for a zoo. But it's same heresy. And so what we have to do this, what are those? Harass, how is the church dealt with those in a way that has been where they remained faithful to what scripture is, and how do we help our kids identify truth, to see truth as truth, but also to see Jesus, you know, talking about incarnation, like he came into the world as a person, he didn't just send us a book, okay, as a person embodied the truth of the book that he sent to us about Himself... Bible is not about you. It is not about me, it is about Christ for us. It's for us, it's not about us. And understanding that will change everything because it's... For us, because we realize it's about knowing Him, that He embodied him, he became a person, He dwelt amongst us. That reality is so important because that's so much of discipleship is who you're becoming in light of knowing and trusting Him, and how is that... How is that framing who your kids are becoming, what are they seeing in you as a parent and that's frightening. Honestly, it is.

**0:20:00.4 RC:** But I think what I hope people also hear from that is obviously that's a tremendous responsibility, but all that we're talking about it, it's not about adding to do, list to items here to do list, it's about what you're prioritizing making your discipleship as healthy as it is, is going to accomplish... Churches aren't going to accomplish a lot of the work that we're discussing, there's so much that you... And there's a... I do wanna ask, the current plan is... I edit all of this out of this one up not being the case, but the current plan is you and I are talking before the child is in emotional form, but then we're actually... People are gonna be listening to this after the form... Yeah, you have a particular heart for people who come in to an experience like that, and then have to come out into the real world, so let's say that someone was listening to this who discover the podcast because of their attendance of the form, and now they're trying to figure out what's next. Do we begin to help people bridge the sort of forum conference... Vibe back into the real world. What does that look like?

**0:21:06.2 SL:** Well, the reason why I'm excited honestly to be part of an honor to be part of the child discipleship forum is because I believe that is what is really gonna be transformative going forward in youth ministry and kids ministry is, is... 'cause that is really the question is not how many people come though that's important, it's how well are we producing disciples in such a way that they're producing disciples, right. How are we doing that? And coming to a conference where you're gonna hear lots of people say lots of amazing things, the tendency is for us is to try to replicate what we hear. Is it gonna say, Okay, that work for them. I'm gonna do that here. And then sometimes I think it can be

either overwhelming or it can be discouraging, 'cause you come back and you hear what you're being talked about is not evidenced in the ministry that you serve, or you come back and you hear all these amazing things from... Sometimes people have in really large churches, and you're like, if we only did that in my small church, then we would have a lot of church and you're missing... I think missing the overall point, I think sometimes our conferences, unfortunately, I can bring discouragement particularly to people from small churches... Right, even more so I remember I was at a conference and this guy, I was sitting next to a guy and he's like I was just at a break out, and he said that We have to have... If we want to see a break-through in my kids ministry, we have to have the same people serve every week, he goes... I have a church of like... I have a church of 100 people in my church and we only have... We only have a volunteers. If I have them serve every week he goes, It's gonna live one service, I was like less... You have to understand what they're saying, right? For you, that is a huge mistake, you will burn out your people, you'll have no one... You know what I'm saying? What you have to realize is that they're a large church, multiple volunteer potential, multiple services, people can attend one and serve one. Right. I said in your case, I said, I would not do that. I said, I have a bigger church, I'm not making sure. We have a big church, and I don't do that. So I wanna free you from the burden of thinking, That is the only way... What you need to take from what they said is This is how can I produce consistency for our kids... Yes, how can I help our kids have a more consistent environment where they feel safe and welcomed, and where there's people that know them and are known by them. How can I produce that? That's the question. And so that's what I wanna encourage people that come to the form is don't just try to reproduce what we do because what you don't see behind what we're saying is that there's a lot of trial and error, there's a lot of fire, there's a lot of victories but there's also a lot of losses, so it's... How we got to where we are was a process of time, so it takes time. Number two, I would say, look for the principal behind the product. So I'm saying, Hey, this is what we do. What was the principal behind it? Right. So at our church, we do... We do catechism. We do catechism from preschool all the way through college. Right, so does that work for everybody? Now, but what it is, is it creates a framework of biblical truth that... I know some Baptist people that are listening to the Forum aren't fans of catechism. I know that, but you can have... Biblical truth is where there's a question and answer for him, and one of the ways that the way that we found that was through the historic... We used the Heidelberg version of the Heidelberg for us. And it works well because it creates a framework for kids to understand what the Bible is about, it doesn't replace the bio, but what it does for us is it disciplines them understand What is my only comfort in life and death as a question, we want all of our kids to be able to answer that, I am not my own, but I belong body and soul to my faithful savior Jesus Christ. Right, we want them to answer that with boldness and with clarity, because we all want comfort. Yeah, the goal of our lives is comfort, we find comfort in something that is what is so attracted to us about our idols, is because we think that those things will buy as money, sex, fame will give us the comfort that we want so badly. That can only come from knowing that I am not my own, that I belong to Christ, to the principal behind it is, how can we help our kids to week in and week out, come away with this idea of answering better questions rather than the question I used to ask was, did you have fun? Right, the questions I ask now are, who? Where did you see Jesus is greater than anything else today, you love... What did you learn about who Jesus is? And so it's more about... We can do that in fun ways, but it's more about the content, 'cause the questions that you ask, tell the kids what is the most important thing... Totally. About what you're doing and why you're doing it. Totally.

**0:26:31.5 RC** Well, and I think I particularly resonate that with that because I think there's a lot of folks who have this perception of a Awana, that was never an intention of that it has to be done a certain way, then the method is what's most important. Right, and what I hear from you, and that is when you talk about... You're on stage speaking about a particular method or a particular idea that folks need to pay tension in the mission, and I get really excited about being in the space I am where I get paid to go into a microphone. Because I feel like the church is in this opportunity where an in other organizations like us have never had the ability to be less prescriptive, I have no idea what works for your church, because I'm not a part of your church. And that's never been more true. Be self-aware about that when you walk into an environment like that, because it will feel tempting to be like, Oh, I gotta go do everything Sam said today, and that's not at all what Sam is suggesting.

**0:27:38.5 SL:** I think that is where we can be most helpful. And to the church... And as the church is to say, We don't have all the answers, but here's how we do it. But more importantly, here's why we do it. Yeah, I go home and say, Okay, and that's what I encourage everybody. Take these notes that you've taken to talk to the people in your church that have the influence, parents and leaders and pastors and say, Hey, here's some things that I heard, how do you think that these things would best play out, how can we accomplish some of these things within the context of our church, through the personality of the leaders of our church and the mission that God's called us to, and the place where God's plan it is in the northeast is a very different... The place where I serve is very, very different than the Northwest, than the South than the southwest, and so where you serve is also hugely important, you have to take that into consideration as well, is something don't have... We don't have a ton of mega churches in the Northeast, we just... We don't have that, we don't have a cultural cultural Christianity in the Northeast, we don't have the... People don't pray for their food, you know, I'm saying that's a notion a check for and people are interceding before they eat, and I'm like, What in the world? I never... It's just, it's important retrofit. I do it, yeah. It's weird to see people... Other people to it? Yes, no one, I've never... In 24 years of living in New York, I've never seen someone pray for their food in public ever, and I go down within five minutes of staying in the Marriott, people are praying over there, which I would encourage you, you should be a... Interest at a hotel, you gotta pray for those rights that God would Make them come alive.