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SPEAKERS

RC: Ross Cochran

VB: Valerie Bell

0:00:00.1 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. And those of you who are watching us on YouTube, we're grateful to have you here. I'm here in my South studio, Valerie Bell, because of all the technical issues I had getting this started. But thank you for your patience with me. And welcome back to the podcast.

0:00:22.4 VB: Thank you. I love it when somebody besides me has technical issues...

0:00:27.6 RC: Literally all the time. Literally all the time. Listeners, don't know this, but one of the first interactions Valerie and I had was me not being able to get it into a Zoom meeting, and then when I got into the Zoom meeting, the audio wouldn't work, and there was this look and Valerie's face of...

0:00:42.8 VB: We just hired him?

0:00:43.9 RC: Which was totally valid. Valerie, you are here today because I think there is a very critical conversation that I wanna make sure people are going into these conversations after the child discipleship forum best equipped to change the culture or influence the culture or change the direction of their ministry, because of all of the fruit that we saw God bring to light in the child... Somewhere, people are listening to this, it's been a couple of weeks since you've been at The form, if you did not have the chance to join us, first of all, we would love to have you check out some of the content that you couldn't actually access, so if you go to the show notes, there's more information about that, but we would love to have you still experience the forum, even if you weren't able to join with us in person, but if you were there, whether they're being in person or online, I trust and I pray that you have the same kind of sense that God was up to something. As we did, So Valerie, I just wanna start, you are someone who has been operating at a high level leadership capacity for a long time, this is not your first conference, this is not your first big gathering of people, what stood out to you as unique about what God was up to with the child discipleship forum?

0:02:05.6 VB: I think there was a wow... That kind of... Everybody felt it was not even what I expected particularly... And you have that sense. I was telling our prayer to the group yesterday, in my devotions I had read about Palm Sunday when Jesus came, and it ends with this verse that says they did not know when the Lord came to them, and of course, they were expecting a king and an army and that kind of thing. I feel like at the form, God came to us and we knew it, we knew it. And so that's just one of those... Like you said, how many million conferences have I been involved in? And I've loved parts of all of them, but this was one of those things that was beyond planning, this went and it was part of our dream when we put this together, we've been actually Ross, we've been putting this together for years, it was forming in us for years, we wrote the resilient book, but we, of course, we didn't know about covid, that would put exclamation mark on a book called resilient, that something like 17000 or 20000 copies out there. Now, we didn't know that that was going to happen. We didn't write a resilient with that a mind, but we did write resilient within mind of movement of God. So everybody at Awana knows that my favorite one of my favorite verses in the

Bible is the one out of the mouths of babes and suckling has how or Dane strength? Because a dinners that they might still them in The Avengers, the enemies are obvious, the Avengers are strong, and isn't it just like God to embarrass and humble them with the praise and the beauty and the power from the children's wing an... I see from the children's wing, the possibilities even stronger now, this is not just a dream to me now or any of us, the possibilities that from the children's wing of the church, a great fire of faith were up and God would... Bless that, and the event would be skilled and this faith would move into the aisles of the church and up into the pulpit, and we will see a different day for the church, and I think it started.

0:04:53.1 RC: Yeah, well, and that's one of the things I sort of... Was a big takeaway, which was the conversations that I heard in the lobby, was obviously incredibly encouraging, and I say this in the least sort of Awana self-congratulatory tone as possible. But this is something that we've been talking about for a long time. We have often said in person who listen to this podcast on regular basis, you've heard me say Awana has been about Resilient Child Assisi for seventy years, we just haven't always called it that. And one of the things that stood out to me was that you were in those rooms when this conversation got started, y'all have been, like you said, dreaming about this for a long time, and seeing how God was not only honoring those dreams, but going further than any of us could have ever imagined from the first big gathering, everyone who has an awana dot org email address, walked away from that experience feeling incredibly encouraged and ready to continue partnering with you, the local church.

0:05:59.5 VB: I think one of the really beautiful things about this and maybe shocking things about this was this wasn't about Awana. Anyone of our people weren't allowed to wear their shirts... Awana had a very strict dress code. We didn't have a lot a literature on all the tables, there weren't advertisements for Awana, we didn't want to be a distraction to something that we see as a movement of God, and that could be so inclusive because... Yeah, we do a certain kind of discipleship at Awana, somebody said to me one time, Awana Valerie, is that that organization where the kids run around in circles into poles, reciting Bible versus... Really? Yes. Okay, what we are really about... Yes, does this discipleship of a global generation of kids... So we use this phrase, raise up the greatest generation of disciples. And when I hear people other than I wanna be at this conference who are a four means everybody talks, Who are... They can't stop talking when they get out and more alders, the lingering around the tables after a presentation, 'cause they've got to debrief it. I had two friends that came, just 'cause they love me, they don't have anything to do with Kidman anywhere, and just to support me, and they were writing notes furiously, and the saying to me, You didn't tell us this wasn't about Kidman. This is about the church and what we haven't been hearing anywhere else... Yeah, it's amazing.

0:07:47.8 RC: Oh my gosh, I love that, and I love that. The friends of yours didn't have a connection to kidmin... other than you.

0:07:55.2 VB: That's it.

0:07:56.5 RC: Right? Because folks, it is a goal of mine for this podcast that it begins to reach more people who are just passionate about the future of the faith, the fearless feature of the faith, as the book said, rather than folks feeling like they have to have a certain title or have certain letters after their name to feel qualified for the conversation, one of the things... And actually, let's shift the conversation here, because folks like that, I imagine the reason that they care about the future of the faith of their grandparents, there are folks who have maybe operating in a sort of a leader position in the context of their church, but you have spoken for a long time about why we need

those people at the table, why we need the value of you who are just connected like that, why... I'll ask a very obvious question that Why were you so encouraged either feverish, note-taking.

0:08:53.5 VB: Because you don't expect that from Kidman. You think you're gonna go to a leadership conference and we met... Right. Meant, realize that there's a seat at the table for you, 'cause you love the church, just 'cause you're concerned about what's happening, so I always kind of nickname our book resilient. I wanted, I subtitle it something like a love letter to the church, because there is a vision in that of a restored, renewed, powerful, loving global body of Christ that has the complete cooperation of the Holy Spirit of God Himself to minister as he would have us minister in the world. And to me, that's such a beautiful picture, but their seat at that table for pastors, Lars, moms who maybe go to most women who are Bible studies, that there's a seat at that table, and I continue to stress, Ross, this is a form for me, every voice, everybody speaks into it and 'cause we don't have all the answers, but we're going to find people who are able to put some light on in the pack a little bit further down their own... Maybe it's exciting, I'm sorry...

0:10:22.9 RC: Yeah. No, never apologize for that kind of passion, Valerie. The thing that I think stood out to me about it was obviously, it is a higher of ours to have everybody talking, it was a desire of ours to hear that sort of buzz that comes from a room when you know that the content that's being shared in a form or conference type setting is really engaging, but to hear that actually happen, to hear those plans come to life and to hear and to know that the people who were there with us in person or there with us, there with us online, all came from a variety of different backgrounds in context, but had this United Mission around child discipleship, I do wanna lean into both the sort of senior pastor type as well as the Kidman leader type, because obviously you have thousands of different relationships for both of those camps, because I think either privilege of hosting the online experience for the form, and one of the things that I said a lot, but the last thing any of at Awana want is for the conversations that started at the Forum to end at the Forum. And it feels like the sort of fire... And I wanna ask the cliched question of what's next for you, we'll start with the senior pastor type, what's next for the senior pastor and how have you already begun to see that live out?

0:11:55.5 VB: Yeah, so what's next is you get them there next year, you incentivize them to come to the Bahamas afterwards. You get him there. So Ross, I attended a virtual church service of one of the pastors who had been at the forum that Sunday, right afterwards, and I was so blessed because he was preaching, he picked up the words and the concepts, and he was using them with his people, and this is a super smart guy. He doesn't need our help. But we used it, it was helpful for him, so he talked about how important it was that we examine whether we are motivated by ideology or theology, have we strayed from the Bible into some other areas and made them primary... See, that was language that we were given at that time, and then he used this Stetson, call this our gang symbol, 'cause we use this ideology so much, but it talks about how the shifting culture of faith has shifted over to... Secularism, I guess, is the best way, with a much smaller group down here who are still great followers of Christ, he used that and he did that to his congregation, and I'm just feeling like we can do that for every pastor, we can give them the words, not just from IANA, but from the best people out there who are navigating the culture, we can navigate this culture, we can give it to pastors who will give it to their churches, and we can unite a tribe of undivided believers, not divided, that this broken world needs a United Church name into that. That's our vision, to see that happen, so how wonderful to get to spy on that pastor and to a... We administered to him and helped him that way...

0:14:00.5 RC: Cool. I think that there's so much the... I love... And we were able to talk to lots of pastors who... They were there the first year, they didn't need convincing, they got it, they were

people who were already passionate or concerned or about the future of the faith, or about what's going on in the children's ministry in their church, and they were there and we gave them language, I wanna... This is a bit about the sort of more kid in practitioner type. But if this is a conversation around the pastor, you've mentioned get them there next year. How does someone who maybe feels distant from their pastor or they're really fired up from the forum, but they don't know how to engage that conversation from the pastor, how do they begin to make that bridge so that we are not undivided Christians within the context of our own churches?

0:14:55.7 VB: I read a stat that 30 to 40% of our pastors want to leave, and I say as somebody in leadership, this has been a horrible couple of years, 'cause no matter what you say, either because we're divided, you get hit from either side or both sides, so I would say start befriending that pastor. Start, don't tell them your ideology, don't tell them you don't even tell him that he should have a... Wanna begin to care for that person and try to look at life through what he or she is going through and become the person who he can trust enough or she can trust enough to come along with you next year. And like I said, you know, if he wants to bring five friends and you don't have the money, talk to us... We can make that happen. I so want to emphasize that having a relationship with a one at this time is so much more than having a club in your church, that's one arm and important are... But we have a whole mission. Part of Awana, five million kids around the world. Maybe your church would like to actually be a part of some of those incredible things that are happening... I mean, I could sit here Rosa just tell you story after story about the international things that are happening 'cause... Totally, it's incredible. It's just a, maybe your relationship with one at this point is going to be coming to these Thought Leadership provoking meetings that we're gonna have every year, and making sure that you've got a tribe of people with you, because what you don't want to experience is to go home and try to put this into translation for everybody who wasn't there, you were to bring a group of people that you can share this with and you can pray with, and you can forge a pathway in your own local setting on this discipleship journey for your whole church. Not just for kids.

0:17:03.1 RC: Yeah, well, I wanna highlight a couple of things there, one. The CEO of Awana just said, You don't have to Awana. And I think it's important, but I think it's important for people to know I've been at Awana for just under two years, you have a much deeper relationship with Awana than I do. It's important for people to hear explicitly what our heart is here, what our passion is here, and I think it's incredibly valuable for you to start by just making that really plain. And I would also say really, practically, yes, we have the child assumption form next year, it's September 22nd and 23rd. But I would also encourage you to just stay connected to us... we're gonna have an event... We just had an event last Thursday where Melanie and I were starting the processing of the child discipleship forum. We're gonna have a few of those and evaluate them. And this is a bit of your wheelhouse, they're gonna be tied specifically to language, how to talk to your pastor about, how to talk to your team about it, that kind of thing, and part of this is just continuing the regular rhythm of processing of evaluating with the sort of future of the faith in mind, but a lot of this is, we are here to do what we as an organization have always done, which is partnered with a local church, and we're trying to do that in a way that is most beneficial and most impactful to you.

0:18:24.4 VB: There are a lot of child ministry conferences, and they all have a little bit different slant on things. This was what I heard was... Well, like I said at the beginning, and one of the Kidman leaders, she has a thousand children, can you imagine getting volunteers for administration... My hat is off to her.

0:18:48.1 RC: It's been two years. I'm trying to get volunteers just to watch my own kids...

0:18:53.2 VB: That's what grandparents have work anyway, but she said, No, I've gone to all these conferences, but this instead of 101 for starter people who are just learning about it now, this was 4001 and it was exactly what I needed, it was far down the road, and it was exactly where I need to be stimulated and encouraged and challenged, so I thought that was a great way to explain what the child discipleship forum actually is.

0:19:26.3 RC: Yeah, and I love that feedback from that person because I think it's so critical that we honor the experience in the intelligence of those who are actually doing the work, because I think sometimes as someone who gets the privilege of being able to gab into a microphone every week, I always wanna be really careful to not make an assumption about things I know that the audience doesn't know, but also to honor the fact that I don't know that much, and to lean into what people who are actually doing the work are experiencing, what they need and then give them the things that are going to equip them, you don't need to hear this from me, but you do a great job in your talk for the form itself, and I know that one of the things... We've said it before in the podcast, but I think it bears repeating is how the Scriptures description of the men of Issachar means so much to you. And when I think about that, practitioner, the person who is trying to take all of what happened from the form and adapt it into their context, it's important that they live out the full meaning for those who are hearing this for the first time. Can you give them some context into how that verse fuels everything that you do within Awana.

0:20:44.3 VB: Absolutely, we are in shifting times, our culture shifting, some things are good, some things that we know aren't good, but there's just so much just orientation, I think that's happening right now, and there's this verse in First Chronicles 12-32 that has jumped out to us for years because it's taking place during the time of Israel's shifting culture, King Saul is... They're defecting from him, and they're coming over to David. And it says Of all of tribes levy, 4600 men, it gives accounting basically accounting, but I come the tribe of scar, it just jumps out, and I tell you, Ross in jumped out from the pages of the scripture, from their time to our time in 2021, because it said exactly what we need. Every culture needs as shifting, every church needs... That's in a shifting culture, every organization needs a car, understood the times and knew what to do, and it's really important that we look at those together, because I have found in these shifting times, a lot of people are building a platform based on understanding the times, ion analysis. And they're peddling discouragement. They are high in telling us we're gonna lose and we better declare or in all of this stuff. They don't know what to do. We need to listen to the voices that know what to do, and what we say in that is, we need to focus in on, be dedicated to some other things go that are in the way of discipleship, because the muscle that discipleship bills as resilience. You don't have to have a special course in reasons, all you have to do is become a disciple. Now, that is the process that has been the process for thousands of years of building a strong resilient, able to withstand so many outside forces, church. So that's what we're saying now, let's be the tribe of sanat, the form, we're trying to gather the tribe, we think we're part... Whoever understands the time is going to be the thought leader... Right, yeah. Yeah, that's natural. It may not be coming out of our seminaries, it may not be coming out of our Bible college, I'm telling you, Ross, it may be coming from the children's wing of the church, met those people who understand the times and know what to do. And some of them who have been volunteering for 30 years, come on, that's not the choir, we're not... We're talking about the saints of the church. Where you see people serving for 30 years in the church, it's in the children's wing?

0:24:06.7 RC: Every time. Every single time.

0:24:08.4 VB: Let's bring Jesus back into our churches, puts me the gospel back into our churches,

you know, Let's make sure all the basics are covered.

0:24:29.8 RC: And something that I've heard you say a lot is, let's bring the kids back into our churches. What a concept. So I wanna wrap up with just... I'm just gonna give off a couple of different practical things on how we continue this conversation, what's next, and I would love to have you sort of wrap us up with the things to keep in mind anything we may have missed in the course of the conversation, some of the why behind this practical stuff. So first and foremost, if you have listened to this point in this episode with Valerie and you're not subscribed to the podcast, I really would hope that you take the time to subscribe, the whole mission of this podcast is continued the conversation week after week, those of you who were at the forum, because you were listening to the podcast and I was the first person to tell you about it, I hope you hear how similar all of this conversation is. Secondly, stay connected to a Awana, not because we're trying to push you any particular program, any ideology as you so brilliantly communicated, but it's 'cause we wanna have this conversation with you. We're gonna be doing that in a couple of different ways, the online events, through just being active on social media, through free resources, particularly around Advent and holy week, those are gonna be a couple of free resources that are gonna be coming out that we're really excited about that, we would love to equip you in no matter what your context looks like, but I think it's critically important that people understand that when we talk about these practical things... That they are not the most important thing. Everything that we're describing between Awana, brite to bright families. This podcast itself, these are all different methods, but there are methods about the mission, so to ask the broadest question I possibly can, coming out of the forum, thinking about this concept of what's next, what is the mission of people who have listed for people who have listened this long into the podcast who are there at the format is the seas they come onward for the future of the faith.

0:26:41.2 VB: I think we start by admitting and acknowledging that we need God... If we don't have a movement of God, we are in a mess. Yeah. Yeah, but we're not gonna stop there. 'cause I believe that I have maybe boldly said What is actually in a lot of people's hearts and going forth, believing that God will meet us, believing that God will show us how to even speak to this culture, we don't know how to even speak to this culture, that show us the words that help us understand how to live Christian-ly, and then the shifting culture that he will show us how to love our churches again and how to be church people again. I think there's so many expressions of it, but I just say, Come or Jesus, Come, Lord Jesus, and we are humbled by that invitation because we acknowledge... We can't do this without God's help. So that's where I am Ross.