



THE PASTOR'S VOICE

Insights from Church Leaders

The Pastor's Voice Podcast Season 2: Episode 10

Transcript: Church Growth, Adoption, Abortion - and Worldview

Reuel Sample: John Pflug, welcome to the Pastor's Voice.

John Pflug: Thank you, it's great to be here.

Reuel Sample: John is a pastor at Windermere Presbyterian Church here in Wilmington, North Carolina. I have been getting to know him as I am transitioning churches from Tennessee down here to North Carolina, and I have seen John preach. I've heard John preach and seen him go about running a church and I am very honored to have you on board today.

John Pflug: Thank you. As I said, it's great to be here and always love to talk about ministry and what the Lord is doing.

Reuel Sample: Well, tell us about your ministry at Windermere. Both the church and your own calling as a pastor.

John Pflug: Yeah. Well, I feel like I've found kind of a sweet spot here with Windermere. When I first got into ministry, I served a small rural East Texas church and I kind of went in with the idea that, you know, I wanted to grow a big church and do all the things that you think Western Christian churches ought to do. And you know, we had some moderate success down there, but you just you get to a point where you almost get burned out doing all that stuff. And that was a point in my life where the Lord

was really both convicting me and reviving me in many ways. And a lot of that had to do to just get getting back to the word. So what about seven years ago we made the move from Texas to to Wilmington, North Carolina, and I had pretty much determined on coming to Wilmington that I wanted to do just one thing, and that's that's preached the Bible. I had a mentor in seminary and his words are coming back to me now. He said that if you're going to, if you're going to build a church, you've got to keep doing what you did to get them there.

John Pflug: And so, so whatever that is, and it can get exhausting, I think, to say, well, we're going to have the best children's program and the greatest outreach of this and that and do all these different ministries. And maybe, maybe there are people in the church who are talented to do those things. But for me, I just I knew it was going to be pretty simple. It's at preaching the word expositional preaching is what I'm going to do. And if people come for that, well, great, they'll stay because I'll keep doing it. But so that's that's kind of where we're at right now. I think the church appreciates that it's been growing, but I guess because people like that, they keep coming. And so it's it's just been a really, like I said, kind of a sweet spot in ministry for me right now, being able to say this is what the Lord has called me to do. I'm doing it and it works out great.

Reuel Sample: John, I have read the scriptures both in in English and in Greek, and nowhere do I hear Peter proclaiming that we're going to build the Church of Jerusalem through the children's program. We're going the the church in Jerusalem and all throughout Asia and around the Mediterranean Sea was built simply by the preaching of the word of God, Jesus Christ and him crucified.

John Pflug: You're right, and it's not to discount the other thing. We have talented people with those kinds of callings in the church, but just to have that focus is just to preach the preach the word of God. It's it's a weight off the shoulders. I see pastors getting burned out, my fellow colleagues trying to do all these other things that I at one point was trying to do too. And it's just so, so much more simple to say, I'm just going to preach now.

Reuel Sample: You are from Texas, you are the son of a Methodist minister. How did you find your way into becoming a minister yourself?

John Pflug: Well, that's a great question. Yes, I was this group of United Methodist. My dad was a Methodist minister. And I don't I don't know if it's so much true now, but it was back then that the Methodist ministers moved around quite a bit. The bishops would move them pretty regularly. I think the joke was about every three years. And that was true for our family and the Bishop wanted when I was in high school. My brother and I both were in high school. The bishop wanted to move my dad again after we'd already moved. I don't know, maybe five times before now. And my dad just finally said, No, I'm not going to move my family again. So he stepped away from the pulpit and we ended up joining the Presbyterian Church in town. So just sort of the providence of God that brought me to be a Presbyterian.

Reuel Sample: Your dad, your father. The Methodist ever acknowledged that this was preordained, that he become a Presbyterian?

John Pflug: I've told him that, but he just didn't see it that way.

Reuel Sample: Yeah, keep going.

John Pflug: Well, actually, I initially. Wanted to get into law and politics, it was a political science major. And and I went to school at Texas Lutheran University and I joined a fraternity there and we got into all kinds of trouble in the fraternity. We were drinking way too much, doing things we shouldn't have done. And I actually got my second year in school. I got arrested for hazing. Wow. Yeah. And I was suspended from school for a semester, and that was the time to go back and do a lot of talking to God and kind of reevaluating what life was and where it's going. And I determined at that point that God was calling me not to pursue sort of my own selfish ambition and in law and seminary, but I mean in law and politics, but rather to change course, to seminary, to serve in the church.

Reuel Sample: Interesting, so you actually do identify more with Peter than anybody else, because I think Peter would have made a great frat brother.

John Pflug: Yeah, probably so.

Reuel Sample: Well, every summer doing

John Pflug: Keg stands, huh?

Reuel Sample: That's right. Why do you think they're out there doing fishing every night? So every Sunday, at the beginning of worship, you've very clearly and boldly proclaim that Windermere Presbyterian Church is all about planting churches that plant churches. What does that mean?

John Pflug: Well, we a couple of years ago, this was pre-pandemic we were really starting to grow pretty quickly. And I wanted the elders and the rest of the congregation as well to start to think about what do we do when we get to a point where if we get to a point where we need more space, are we going to just build a bigger building and hire more staff and do the thing that all the rest of the Western churches are doing? Or or would it be more faithful to say, let's actually take any growth that we can get? That's more than we have. We can accommodate in this building and intentionally split the plan of church. And I think that the rest of the congregation kind of caught the vision of that, that they liked Windermere being sort of a a neighborhood, a smaller neighborhood church. They didn't want to be a megachurch. And so we determined it's good and faithful for us to be this and then also to be obedient to the great commission to make disciples and plant churches. So this is the new mission statement we took on. The pandemic certainly has given us challenges to continue to see that, but hopefully by God's grace will begin to really catch that vision once again as things start to open back up.

Reuel Sample: That's kind of counter to what we see a lot of churches do, and you had that same discussion. Yeah, we see that the modern church really has dropped the idea, except there are exceptions of planting churches. They just want to grow and centralize what's going on.

John Pflug: Well, I don't know. I can't speak for other churches, but if I were if I were thinking about at other points in my life why I would want to grow a big church and have multiple campuses or one giant campus with satellites, it would be, if I'm honest, it would be probably a lot of pride sort of my my own personality. But to to approach it with more humility and having been humbled at various times in my life, it doesn't need to be about me. It needs to be about what's what's best for advancing the kingdom. And I, you

know, I think this may be the the better way to do it, especially if we think about church as an interaction of people together, not just the program on Sunday morning, because that that that program, obviously it can be exported. You can watch YouTube videos of preachers all day long, but you can't get that community except for in a church. And so I think creating more of those communities rather than bigger ones is probably the better path.

Reuel Sample: You know, I just did a podcast with two millennials who are in ministry in Memphis, Tennessee, and one of the things I asked them is What do millennials want? Because I constantly think that we missed the boat on what millennials want. And their answer is community, you know, want genuine, interactive community that can be found in a small church.

John Pflug: That's right. And I think I think some people will argue, they do argue that in larger churches, you have that too. But I'm not sure it comes as naturally as it does to small churches. I think it's easier to get lost in a big church.

Reuel Sample: Oh, it's very easy to be lost or to be anonymous. I remember the first day that I walked into Windermere is that every I clicked over to me because who's the new guy is? He's sitting in my pew.

Reuel Sample: Nobody kicked me out of the pew. A matter of fact people people turned around and welcomed me, and it was wonderful. Just a bunch of bubbling Presbyterians. And I don't know if I don't know if Bubbling Presbyterian is scriptural.

John Pflug: They're not stoic enough, right?

Reuel Sample: They're not stoic enough. No, they're good people at your church. Speaking of the church, not just Windermere, but both for Presbyterians and for the body of Christ in general. What do you think are the issues that are that are facing the church? We're just getting through the pandemic and and churches came through the pandemic as a measure of how strong they were beforehand. Yeah, but what are that or what are some other issues that you think Christians should be on the on the lookout for?

John Pflug: Yeah, I do think the pandemic has created some big sort of questions for the church. And what does it mean to be church? Can you be church remotely? Yeah. And I I don't know how other people feel, but I I feel like that. It just doesn't work remotely. I think you got to it's got to be, you know, arms around necks and shaking hands and looking each other in the eye. I think there's something essential about that. Yeah. Hebrews even tells us not to neglect meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing. We need that encouragement as Christians, that of seeing other people being, I mean, Christ came in the person in the flesh to be with us, right? He didn't send a Skype video or something.

Reuel Sample: And how can you how can you even participate in the sacraments remotely?

John Pflug: That's a great question. There have been some discussions around that, but none of them seem very compelling to me. But I think you've got to be there in person. So definitely, the pandemic has raised some huge questions. You know, rule, I think that something really interesting is developing in our country right now. It looks like the Supreme Court may partially or completely overturn Roe v. Wade. And then it's going to. Then the discussion is opened up again, once again for states as to what's the what's the right and faithful response for abortion in this country or or the prohibition of it. The church, I hope, has a voice in that I pray that that that our leaders would listen to the voice of faithful Christians on that

Reuel Sample: And the church needs to be needs to step up to to respond to that. I would often get invited to speak at pro-life events, and I would only be invited once. Because I would say, all right, you're pro-life. Great, what are you going to do about it if a teenager in your church says I'm pregnant, are you going to surround her with your love? Are you going to adopt that baby? Are you going to pay her finances? Most of the time people were just, No, we want to go out and march where the church needs to step up and do something.

John Pflug: Yeah. Talk is cheap. It's really putting action to it. You know, that's part. My, my wife and I, we adopted two of our two of our three children are adopted out of the foster system. And and part of that is because we don't want to be just people who talk about life. We want to be whole life people, not just pro-life, but whole life. And

that's advocating for life in the womb all the way to to right before someone dies. You know, the entire scope of life is something that the church ought to be advocating for.

Reuel Sample: I talk about World View on this podcast a lot because I don't think our members are getting trained in world view because I don't think our pastors are trained in worldview. How can we change that?

John Pflug: Well, and this was going to be the other aspect of you're saying what issues of the church is the church facing the culture in general, but even the church is facing an issue of biblical illiteracy like never before. I mean, how can we expect to have a biblical worldview if we don't know our Bibles? And it's sad, but true. I mean, I'll preach through some of the most basic things and have people come up and say, I've never heard that that passage in the Bible before people who have been in the churches, I'm assuming I had assumed their whole life. And so I think that may be the biggest one. Everything else may sort of fall in place if we can get biblical literacy right and get people to really open up their Bibles and spend time in it and spend time with the Lord and what his word is.

Reuel Sample: The American Bible Society last July released their annual study on biblical literacy in America, and for the first time in 10 years, biblical literacy actually dropped by close to five percent. It was at 13 percent of Americans read their Bibles on a daily basis, and it's now down to nine percent on a daily basis. That's amazing.

John Pflug: Yeah, and it's it's just not sustainable for the church, you know? Or else here's what happens. And we're seeing it. It's the it's the combination of biblical illiteracy and the big church model with the entertainment, all the programs, the church just basically becomes the YMCA, you know, or or or a TED talk on Sunday. And it just doesn't resemble anything that the Bible calls it to be

Reuel Sample: Where in reality for Christians. And it's a it's an extension of the Old Testament. The Hebrew thought that there is nothing that is outside of the sacred. Everything is secular. I'm sorry. Everything is sacred, and we think that there should be sacred and secular for Christians. The church and our faith should be at the center of everything that we do.

John Pflug: Absolutely.

Reuel Sample: Yeah. Now you, in conjunction with Port City Community Church, which is just down the road there, they're not they're not a Presbyterian church. They are a nondenominational church, are launching a World View training course. Is that do you think that's part of what we need to do is to to actively start teaching people worldview?

John Pflug: Yeah, part of it, just a little bit of a correction. The the course is actually put on by a group called I believe it's perspectives on the world Christian movement just perspectives for sure. It's a it's a a national, at least national. Probably it's international, I believe organization that puts on these classes in various cities around the world and the port city just happens to be hosting it, and I just happen to be a big advocate of it.

Reuel Sample: So, OK.

John Pflug: But yeah, but it's it's an incredible training in the Christian worldview about about understanding the way that God sees missions. And it is perspective changing. It's huge. And I would I don't know about other courses that may or may not exist, but that one in particular, I would say, is tremendous. I can't encourage Christians enough to go and get that training because it does shape the way that you look at the world because it helps you see the way that God sees the world.

Reuel Sample: And if you're listening here in Wilmington, North Carolina, you can actually still sign up for that.

John Pflug: Yes.

Reuel Sample: Yeah, wonderful. Yeah. Before I get your message for the body of Christ today, you had brought up briefly and you and I talked about this before that you have two adopted children. Yes. Scripture talks all about adoption and how. How has that? Physical adoption that you've had, how has that how has that affected your view of the adoption of us as as children of God?

John Pflug: Well, it's just really kind of I don't know that it's changed it, but it's helped me feel it more, if that makes sense to to to think about and consider what my two

children's life was like before and what it might have been had we not been there. And then and then what it's like now and then you just draw those lines to what it was like before I knew the Lord where my life was headed and what it's like now that I've been adopted in and through Christ by his blood into the family of God. It's it's incredible to to draw that in the scripture themselves. Call us adopted into the family there. So it's great. It's wonderful. I can't, you know, all these things are connected rule, and I can't encourage people to be to see this world view this Christian biblical world view and then begin to live it. And and by living it, you experience it. It's all the all the pieces match up.

Reuel Sample: The great thing is, is that you, you refer to your three children. Not as well. Here's here's my first child and these are my two adopted children. You refer to them as my children, and it's the same thing for us as Christians. We're not a yes. In one way, we're adopted children of God, but in reality, we are children, plain and simple of God through the blood of blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

John Pflug: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Reuel Sample: So what is your message for the body of Christ today for the people who are listening to this podcast? What do you want them to know and hear today?

John Pflug: Well, I always, of course, the the gospel message. You know that and I would say, because this is true for me. I don't I don't I was not a born again Christian until. Maybe eight or so years ago, in fact, I'm looking back on it now, I'm fairly convinced I was a minister, but I was not yet a born again Christian. It was the word of God that really changed that for me, my perspective on the word, on being able to look at it and say, not this is teaching me about God, but this is God's word for me, convicted me of my sin and assured me of my salvation. And so I would say, even if you're a Christian listening to this to examine your own heart on your relationship, to God and his word and and. Come to come to terms with the reality of your sin and the reality of the redemption that's offered to you and Christ. And so and then just in general, my general advice to anyone listening, it's good advice is just to read your Bible. That worldview is so, so important. There's probably nothing better that you can do with your life than draw near to the Lord through his word. Amen.

Reuel Sample: Amen. John Pflug has the heart of a pastor and doing some great things at Windermere Presbyterian Church here in North Carolina, John. Blessings on your ministry. Thank you so much for being here.

John Pflug: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.