



# THE PASTOR'S VOICE

Insights from Church Leaders

## **The Pastor's Voice Podcast Season 2: Episode 12**

### **Transcript: Local Missions and the Failure of Seminaries to Teach Worldview**

**Reuel Sample:** I love the idea that you are teaching your congregation that mission work is not just something done overseas or someplace far away, but mission work is local. Yeah. How have they responded to that?

**Alex Zenk:** They they were ecstatic when when we made that decision. I think that really helped kind of spark some of the movements and draw some people in. I've had a couple of people from the church or from the town come to church and, you know, say, Hey, you know, I heard you preach, I heard somebody talking about you preaching and I wanted to come here, you. And we appreciate what you do and, you know, this or that mission. But every month we change up our our, you know, mission approach. We have different people that we serve and we try to at least here in our little geographical circle in Iowa. We try to hit a lot of the things that people would normally be, you know, be affected by, whether it's a like January's a domestic and sexual outreach center. We're going to do one on our local food pantry. We did one last year with our local elementary school as they were in need of winter wear, and so we pulled together cash from the congregation and donated it to the school. And I think that was really impactful. I was featured in the newspaper taking a picture with the principal. And so it's just doing these little things. And again, it's not for the publicity or the fame of it, but it's doing these things to show that this our church is willing to take charge of helping this community move forward.

**Reuel Sample:** It's a powerful statement, because churches often say, well, we'll be part of something, but they never take the initiative to do something. And what you're saying is, no, you're you're taking the initiative to do something and to make something happen big or small. That's your mission field. I just love that.

**Reuel Sample:** Alex, one of the goals of of of this of this podcast is talk about worldview - Christian worldview. We all we all have a worldview. But I want to encourage people to live a Christian biblical worldview. The problem is, is that in my opinion, I've been around churches all of my life or I was ordained and oh, good grief, 1993. I was ordained and I've served small churches. I grew up in a very, very large church. I've been inside and outside churches, and we're not teaching our people Christian worldview. We're not teaching them how to respond to the daily challenges that come up from your from your podcast. You talk about theology and and apologetics, which were not covering in our churches. Why aren't pastors teaching their people worldview?

**Alex Zenk:** I think there's a couple obstacles that they may face. One is, you know, comes back to this level of. People would be more turned off by a sermon or teaching series on apologetics or how to live a Christian life amidst the world that's incredibly dark and hateful towards Christians. I don't think those messages from a pastor's eye would be tantalizing to a congregation versus, you know, eight ways to be not stressed during the holiday season. And so, I mean. I get it that we should do topical preaching from time to time. I've made a stab at it, I'm not very good topical preaching, and so I stick to either the church calendar or I do a Bible series like right now we're doing it's called Sunday School Bible Stories. And what we've done is we started in Genesis one and we're teaching through all of the big things that we learned when we were in Sunday school and we went through creation, we went through the fall. We went to Noah's in the in the Ark. We went to Abraham and Isaac, and now we're going through Jacob's life and we're touching base on these, these big things that happened and how are they relevant and affect us today? And. I've really appreciated that sermon series because it's helped me to teach through scripture in a way that I've never done before, but also I've noticed too, that it allows me to bring in other facets of my, of my, my skill set and teaching through some of these things. And you know, and then this bleeds into. The Bible studies that we do as a church and teaching them the relevancy of scripture and how this is applied.

**Alex Zenk:** You know, I will take a piece of scripture like, for instance, we're going through Romans right now. We're in, we're still in the first chapter. We've done two weeks on Chapter one and we're probably going to do another week on Chapter one. And it's just each time I go through it, you know, I'll get through about two verses and then I'll I'll be just I'll go off on a rabbit hole and talking about how we fail today to understand this. And you know, I'll go for 20 minutes on on two verses and then I have to circle back. And so our journey is very slow through the books. And and I think. I've got I've gotten a lot of good feedback from people again, I don't like to toot my own horn, I'm definitely not the most seasoned pastor. I don't have all the answers. I don't know everything like somebody who's been in the field even five years or 10 years does. But I've had a lot of people approach me within my first year ministry and they tell me, we really appreciate how you stick to scripture. Explain it to us and then give us, you know, the pieces at the end of whether it's an application to life or how can we recognize the sin in our life or whatever it may be? Have you even had people come and say, you know, because of the way you teach, I've gone home and been more obligated to open my Bible and just read it. And they're like, We've never had that, you know, pressure to to read scripture like that before.

**Alex Zenk:** And and I think that really comes to whatever particular facet you find yourself, whether you're an apologetic preacher or you expository preach or law gospel preach, you know, you're bringing God's word to the forefront of people's mind, and you're delivering to them the truth of what God has given in his word, and you're explaining it to him and you're unpacking it for him. And through that, that is the encouraging factor. And then on the opposite side, we've got all of these churches that don't care to do any of that, as we've talked about on the show so far that these churches have moved away from creeds and confessions. They've moved away from apologetics. They've moved away from what it means to be a Christian. And and it's becoming, you know, just a sensational preaching. And I don't want to name drop people, but there's a particular pastor very popular on social media and there is a little real, you know, a little one minute clip of him going around and he's. Doing this little jig on stage, and he's talking about my faith, life will be my bills paid and my family healthy and all, and it's just like, No, that's that's not promised to us in scripture. And and people eat it up because it makes them feel good. And so I think, you know, it's I think for the pastor who has found their niche and preaching a popular message, they get paid a lot of money to do that. They do. They get paid a ridiculous amount of money.

**Reuel Sample:** So and so they keep preaching it and they're not preaching it. And it's no it's no longer preaching. It is right. It's selling or it's something else. But it's not preaching because preaching is linked to the gospel properly preached for for Presbyterians. And forgive me, I'm not overly clear on or knowledgeable Lutherans. But for Presbyterians, we have three means of grace prayer, sacrament sacraments properly distributed and the preaching properly delivered and only one only one of those can happen outside of the church, and that's prayer, the other to take place in the church. And we often forget that preaching is a means of grace. We are proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and to do that improperly or to make sure that our wallets are padded. I think that is that is dangerous at best. So are we just not preparing pastors properly in seminaries? Are our pastors coming out of all this training? And for Presbyterians and for Lutherans? If I remember correctly, it's at least three to four year seminary program. Are they coming out not ready to teach worldview, not ready to teach apologetics and not ready to be following of the gospel and all they do as pastors?

**Alex Zenk:** I would think seminaries by and large have absolutely failed pastors and preparing them to deal with the issues that the world throws at them. And I think a lot of it has to deal with, most recently with the emergence of the online seminaries. And I think it's easy to sit behind a screen, listen to a lecture, put some notes in and then get a grade for the class and then you move on. But are you absolutely absorbing any of that? Are you taking that into heart and learning it? Now I'm still in seminary myself. I got about another year or so left on it and it will be a four year course when I'm done and I do have to take it remotely because I'm three hours from where the school is at. But there's a big difference between what I do and what other schools have done that I've investigated. So the other schools, I've looked at other seminaries and other coursework and that and it is solely self-driven. You are. You're giving a confines of a class. You have to complete a few assignments and then you're graded and you move on. There's no there's no, you know, mutual connection or mentor type connection that you get within these organizations. They just you're just another student ID that gets a grade and you pay your ridiculous amount of money to this college and then they give you a piece of paper saying you completed their course. My seminary is much more personal. They do encourage online or not online, but in-person meetings and the but you know, with COVID, that's kind of we've tried to find new ways around it to be

appropriate to the people that face challenges. But there's people all over the world that go to the seminary and.

**Alex Zenk:** The thing that I find to be tremendous blessing is one it's not expensive. I don't have to take out loans. I just pay a monthly subscription fee to them and then I get a faculty mentor. I am. I have to choose a pastoral mentor and then I have a personal mentor. And those three individuals help guide and govern me through my program. And so I sit in a weekly class when classes are in session. I have a weekly fellowship group with other pastors and students, and we sit and we talk and we ask questions and we and we engage with each other and we provide feedback for each other. And then I've got my mentor meetings that I meet with once a quarter and we go through like the topics and assignments that I'm working on and then answer questions and show my progress through things. And they have been instrumental to me learning how to become a pastor. And and I think that's that is what's missing because there's not that individual connection between the pastor or the seminary student and the teachers. But in, you know, I get that in my school and I noticed that I wouldn't get it elsewhere. And so I'm very blessed to have stumbled upon Sioux Falls seminaries where I go and. There's it's funny because Sioux Falls in itself and its construct is a Baptist seminary, but nestled inside, there's a segment you can you can do denominational tracks like you can do a Presbyterian or Methodist track. But I have a small group that's affiliated with the school through Luther House, and that's where I take my my coursework through.

**Reuel Sample:** So it's it's a covert Lutheran operation within the state, basically,

**Alex Zenk:** Basically, but we're infiltrating and taking over.

**Reuel Sample:** So we talked about some of the challenges that you're faced as your church has faced over the last year or so. In your opinion, what are the things that are coming up for for Christians that we have to be aware of? What are we going to be facing? What challenges do we have in the year ahead?

**Alex Zenk:** Well, I think maybe not quite in this particular year, but definitely coming. That could be. Are coming our way, and it's almost one of these things that's always on the horizon. We just don't know when it'll happen, but I do believe church persecution in the West is going to become a very hot topic for for Christians. And and I think because

we see it in Canada right now with these new laws that are being passed that are explicitly targeting preachers who preach a biblical message on, you know, especially against the sexuality that's being progressed in the Canadian governments.

**Reuel Sample:** But churches even more so the the anti-conversion laws that yes, that Canada and these anti-conversion laws actually started in India and have made their way across to the West and Canada has passed a pretty draconian version of them. Yes.

**Alex Zenk:** Yeah. And I know a number of pastors up there who have been fighting tooth and nail to continue preaching, but they do. And some of them, I know, have faced jail time already and they've they've faced heavy fines and they keep preaching it. And so I think one of the things that Christians have to be prepared for it at any time is is the persecution from the local government or the federal government or anything. Wherever you are, in whatever part of world persecution is always on our doorstep and we're never promised a perfect life as a Christian, we're promised to be to go through suffering and to face these things and to face a world that hates us. And so I think it's always something that we should be prepared for. But then in a maybe a more narrow scope, persecution can be a broad topic to deal with. But. I think personally, Christians need to be prepared for the the incoming flux of teaching of Salafism and subjective truth and all of these new ideologies that are essentially trying to eliminate God's word as being the objective morality that people hold to in this world.

**Alex Zenk:** And so I think apologetics is crucial for the Christian, even at a basic understanding. You don't have to know philosophy. You don't have to know. You know, Aristotle or Socrates or any of these guys. But you need to know your basic tenets of faith. You need to understand why you believe what you believe, and you need to be able to defend that. And you need to be able to confront people in your life that are going to try and impose a different viewpoint upon you and even maybe potentially bring some persecution into your life because of how you handle yourself. And so I think apologetics at a basic peace is crucial for Christians to understand and grasp. And, you know, I think there's just a whole range of issues that can be brought up that we may face. I think it's just, I guess it's just, you know, based upon local environments like I feel here in Iowa, we're a conservative state. I don't feel the pressure that churches in California or Illinois do or in New York.

**Reuel Sample:** With all that being said, what is your message for the people of God today?

**Alex Zenk:** Stay true to God's word. Spend a few minutes, just just 10 minutes a day. Wake up in the morning. Open your Bible. Read your Bible. Pray. As often as you can pray throughout the day, as Paul says that he's he prays without ceasing. You know, when he wrote the letter to Romans, he is always praying for them. He's praying, you know, and giving thanks to God for their faith. He does this in all of his letters that he's just continuously praying. And I think prayer has to be a fundamental aspect of the Christian life. It's one of our easiest means to reach God in our own personal life. And as you'd said earlier, it's the only one that takes place out of the church. So we have to root ourselves in prayer. We have to root ourselves in God's word and understanding of it and teach ourselves whether we pick up a study, Bible or commentaries that are appropriate to our denomination. And we we invest in our own knowledge to what God's word is because his word doesn't change while the world is actively changing and in a great flux and ebbs and flows. God's word never changes. It is. It is concrete. It is planted, and you should root yourself in that. And so that's what my advice would be for people.

**Reuel Sample:** Alex is the host of the Undying Light podcast, and you can find that on Apple and any other podcast platform that's out there going through Ecclesiastes right now.

**Alex Zenk:** I've done Song of Solomon and Esther so far. Verse by verse. So yeah, it's and I've done the book of Revelation, verse by verse. So yeah, I've taken I've bitten off a lot in this.

**Reuel Sample:** Alex, thank you so very much for joining us today.

**Alex Zenk:** Absolutely. Thank you for having me. It's been an honor.