

Interview with Val

Josh Yates: So, Val I am so excited to have you on as our first guests and our season, two the Sonlife disciple-making podcast and An honor and a privilege, but more than just being here, guests, you actually on our staff and our team. And so and to have someone join our team , during the pandemic was a surprise.

And actually we have another person who's helping facilitate this as Wayne. So we have Wayne and Val who are part of this new season and , I could be more thrilled. And , so Val share with us it's a little bit of, kind of your story and why you kind of came on to the Sonlife team.

Val O'Brien: Yeah. . Obviously 2020 has been a wild ride for all of us, no matter where you are, what you're family is like or your job or whatever it is. It's just shaking this all up in many different ways. And for me, obviously, it was a lot of you know, just the personal figuring out, you know, what is life going to be in this pandemic?

But then also, I just felt like the Lord had been for a while to doing this deep work in me in terms of just. , what my next step was going to be in ministry and where he wanted me to be. And, , just spend a lot of time while I was in my house. Just like probably most of you, , to spend a lot of time praying and really seeking the Lord about those things.

And then just, he started to put these pieces together that I just was not expecting at all in any way and that just kind of led me to Sonlife. I got reconnected with you guys. I was trained by you guys. When I was in college, I had worked with kind of different affiliates through the years.

Ended up on a zoom call with one of your staff members, had just an awesome conversation and just kind of planted the seed in me of is this going to be my next step? And so just felt in the middle of all that, that the Lord, just paved a way for me to join even in the middle of the pandemic and all that stuff, but I'm just, I'm thrilled.

I'm surprised, but I'm just thrilled that the Lord has brought me here and just excited about the different projects and the different tasks that I can perform you now need to do so.

Josh Yates: Yeah, absolutely. And to step out and to raise support. So he came on our team in September and you raise support and fully funded. Really miraculously within a couple of months. And so you're able to start full-time here in January. And for me, I just

also see the timing of God because during the summer months I was on a, on a prayer retreat praying through just okay guy, what are you doing?

What are you speaking? we know that crisis is a mother of innovation. And so thinking through what are you innovating? What are you creating? What's this, what's this new work that you're bubbling into my heart, into our ministry. What things do we need to be rethinking about and engaging with? And so this idea of kind of intergenerational ministry has always been on my heart. But just praying through how to, how does this income to the surface and how, what do we do, what we do next? And then along comes Val, and some of the things that you were thinking about things where we are kind of just automatically was like, God, you're doing something here. And so we, we've kind of launched a new initiative that you're part of.

And I'm. I'm really encouraged the reading, the research and things we're already wrestling through. God is God is doing something here. So now he is this kind of a season two for Sonlife , and this podcast, but also there's something that we are praying about and a new initiative that Val you're kind of spearheading.

So Val wants you to share us a little bit, kind of what God's been doing with Sonlife and this new initiative called traverse.

Val O'Brien: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, we started just, even when I was still in the interview stage and we were having conversations over the summer, just kind of sprinkling in this idea of, you know, intergenerational disciple-making and what does that need to look like in the church? And. Even in those moments, I felt like my brain was just like, like shooting off in a million directions, just thinking, yeah, my heart, so resonates with that.

And the importance of that. And being in student ministry, I've been working in vocational church ministry for about. 10 plus years in the context of the local church. And I feel like I've seen so much change in the 10 years that I've been in ministry with students and with this next generation.

And so even in my own heart, I'm like, yes, I, that resonated with me so much because I'm like, I see that things are different now. And I've often said, you know, What, what do we need to do? What is before us now in this new generation of students and how are we going to reach them with the gospel of Jesus?

And so kind of the opportunity to take even what I had been seen for so long. And it just kind of ruminating in my own mind, combined with where you guys are at. Um, just as a SunLife team, just not like, okay, Lord. Um, this would just be an amazing thing to step into. And, uh, really since I started, you know, really working in January, right.

Um, my main projects has been just research and reading and just trying to gather as much, um, hard data kind of, as I could, you know, like I said, I've been doing it, I've been in the lives of students and just have loved that, you know, with every ounce of me for the last 10 years. So I felt like I had a lot of.

Soft experience and kind of all these, um, yeah, a lot that it just built up as far as what my observations have been and what I had experienced and what I had seen and what had been frustrating. But then starting in January, I started to say like, okay, is this just me? Is this just my corner of the U S is this just my church and my students?

Or is this more of like a wider scale thing that we're going to need to work on as a church together. And so just kind of started looking into that in a more serious way, starting in January.

Josh Yates: Yeah, the whole, whole generational gap. Isn't anything new. You know, I remember starting in ministry 25 plus years ago and talking through how do we reach my generation? You know, the gen X-ers and then, you know, how do we reach them then later on millennials and now with gen Z. And so we have kind of four generations, the boomers, Xers millennials, gen Z, that are now kind of part of leading the church today.

So, and the gaps. Sometimes there's overlap that, that, that there's there's connections or similarities, but the gaps that we're seeing, what sociologists are talking about, there's this disciple-making opportunity that's in front of us really is, is unique. And, and start asking some, some questions of how is the church positioning itself to.

Engage and support and encourage and disciple. What are the unique trend lines? And, and again in ministry, sometimes we have to, uh, we're so busy running our, our next message, our next program. We don't pause long enough maybe to actually kind of do some, some inductive research kind of looking at that.

So what are some of those findings? I mean, you said this comment to me, A few weeks ago you go, Josh. I wish I would've known now what I've read. Yeah. When I was leading the last 10 years of ministry there's some things that have kind of come to the surface as, as you've read thousands of pages stacks of books, listening to podcasts, trying to, to digest this and having some sociologists also kind of advisors to the process.

So yeah. Jonathan Cathermann, who will be another guest on our podcast. You know, guiding us along the way. Can you, are we asking the right question? So what are the things I've come to surface for you? Some of these aha moments or , you know, some of the insights you've seen

Val O'Brien: Yeah, no, that, that's a great question. And no, I did make that comment and I've told . Some of my supporters and some of my close friends that in some way, feel like, you know, the first six weeks of 2021, I was joking. I'm like, this feels like the sabbatical that I never had. You know, like I felt like I just got to dig so deep and just read and research with mostly just like my Bible and lots of stacks of books around me and start to answer that question.

And I really did, you know, like, There's so much written out there. There's so much written about millennials. First of all, that as a millennial, I'm like finally glad the attention is, you know, on somebody else. So finally the gen Z years are stepping in to take some of the attention away from us.

Josh Yates: There we go, the battle, even of the battle of the gen Z mocking millennials in their dress. And what they're wearing is hilarious. The side part, we'll show you some and th in the, in the show notes, some of the funny things that have been out, that's actually pretty, pretty fun as well as your findings as well.

Just so you know listeners, we will put a link to some of the books and some of the comments that Val has done. I think there's about 10 plus books that you've read that if you're looking where to start, where to read you know, , we'll put that in the show.

Val O'Brien: There's some really, really good and helpful stuff out there. But. I think kind of what, again, like what I was, what I was really trying to figure out. And what I wish I had known was that what I was experiencing in ministry was not unique to me that that was something that was going on for people all over and that they were talking about it really good and important ways.

And. You know, I, I wish that I wouldn't have just like suffered in silence for all that time. Like I wish that I would have joined that conversation way earlier because I think first of all, I think it would have deeply encouraged my own spirit and my own heart in ministry. But also I think just kind of give a little bit of clarity and a little bit of direction for just addressing some of the issues that I saw.

So, and that way I just wish I would've done that in. And I did. You know, just feel regret like, man, I should have been doing this this whole time. And yet the just the pace of ministry sometimes does just get away from you. But I hope that long-term like one of the gifts that traverse can be just to the churches, like, Hey.

Val read all these books and did all of this research for you, you know, like here is traverse is kind of like the gift to the church and to people in ministry of something that they can wrap their hands around and say, okay, now this makes sense. And I want to

take some next steps in this way, but I think kind of to answer your original question, that was a little bit of a tangent.

But to answer your original question of like what some of my findings were. None of this was really surprising. It was just wonderful to see it articulated. So clearly. Anyone who works with students knows this. Anyone that's been frustrated with young people knows this. But the gap of the generations is just a larger than normal.

Particularly between gen Z and the millennials. But then like widening, ever still then to gen Z, you know, it no longer really is you know, kids will be kids or it's just like when we grew up for, you know, think back to your years in middle school, it's like, no, those aren't the same experience anymore.

That generation gap is huge. It's larger than normal. And so what we're dealing with here is not the typical, you know, just. Annoyance with young people, the way that they parked their hair and the way they dress, you know, but it's something way, way deeper than that. That's causing an even bigger chasm than in years past.

Josh Yates: What are some of those gaps? Would you help me understand that a little more? I think I you know, what, what is that, what is the differences that you, that, that will come to the surface? Can you articulate any of those? The, you know, maybe those, those gap pieces

Val O'Brien: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So one of just the cool findings, that, I was kinda able to unearth a little bit and shed a little light on things was just the history of postmodernism that we're living in now, you know, the church has been talking about postmodernism. Sociologists had been talking about it for a long time.

But it really was this kind of aha moment for me to understand why that gap is so. Big because we really are in the middle of just earthquake between modernism and the modern era, which has been 500 plus years long, you know, not just, you know, the 50 years, the last 200 years. 500 years of human history in a way of thinking.

So this transition into something different, which is the post-modern era. And we are like right in the middle of that earthquake between those two. And that has provided just that huge generational gap. That really is a massive worldview gap. So it's not just. A generational gap like between the boomers and the X-ers.

It is, it's a cultural gap. It's a massive worldview gap that we're just in the middle of. And really it's this, the shift of thinking, you know, they say that the pre-modern era, how they thought about truth was that truth is found in the divine. The truth is found there

somewhere that was pre modernism in the modern era, which started somewhere around the 16th century.

It was that truth is found in mankind. And so truth being found in mankind. That's what brought us, you know, the Renaissance, the enlightenment, the industrial revolution, kind of this, like we together like can know truth and can build on truth with each other and can know things and figure it out. And now with postmodernism, the worldview shift and just the way that they see truth is that truth is found in myself.

That I am the one who decides what's true and what's not true. And that, that's a huge shift. And that's huge shift between how a 15 year olds in our churches and in our youth groups and in our neighborhood. And you know, my parents who are in their early sixties, See the world and process the world around them, thinking that, you know, my parents thinking truth, you know, no truth is knowable.

If I study, I can figure this out to a young person saying, well, what does that mean to me? What makes me feel happy? I the source of all of my own truth. Those are two super different ways of just seeing life around you. And just provides, you know, when all of those pieces. People are sitting in our pews on Sunday mornings.

That's a huge challenge for the church right now. Much less just as you're against, but then even like up the ante to the people that are leading the churches because we have those worldviews themselves. And so if it starts with the leadership of a church and then trickles down to the congregation, like how are we addressing some of those differences?

Even at the leadership level and are we doing a good

Josh Yates: Even how, even in how truth is communicated, how truth is received how they're internalizing that. And so if your truth comes from within yourself You know, there's a connection to that in terms of anxiety and depression as well as because you have to be right, do you have to hate the pressure?

So immense that if you don't get this right, and how do you know what is true? And so there's a given a connection in terms of thinking in that emotional and mental health, which we see a huge rise of. And so some sociologists associate it to right. Really this, this idea of postmodernism and how, how we understand what is truth, how we internalize that.

So that's really, uh, that's super fascinating about what are some other things in terms of that, that have been helpful for you in this study.

Val O'Brien: Yeah. I mean, there's been so many things that you can look at this research and, you know, and have a sense of the sky is falling or something like that, you know, but it's not. And I think that the church, you know, we need to remember that as well, that. The church that the Christ church stands. And there are some things that don't change.

So even while, you know, we can talk these broad strokes about the things that are changing and how humans, and we'll even just say Americans, like in particular view, reality, and view the world around them. How those things are changing. We did need to remember that there are a huge amount of unchanging truths that we can plant our feet on as followers of Christ.

And so those things that change around us don't need to scare us or intimidate us. But they just need to inform, uh, how we live and how we communicate. The, the truth is that will withstand the test of time and the truth about the gospel, about the life and death and resurrection of Jesus about scripture and the inerrancy of scripture and the foundation that it is us.

And just the nature of man, like what is the true nature of man, no matter what the cultural values are around them. The nature of man has not changed. So just having that biblical anthropology too, of, of, you know, like who are we as people who is God, what is his word? Who is Jesus? And how does that make a difference?

So there's so much that is changing and yet the most important truths, it's almost like we just need to Uh, w we need to be knowledgeable of both of what is changing and yet of what has stayed exactly the same. And how do we bring those things? Yeah.

Josh Yates: I think that's really good. I think really good thing is we're we're idea of Traverse. We're trying to build this bridge and spanning across this generational gap. And so the idea that a bridge is still a bridge, you had to span that gap, but maybe we're not building with rocks anymore. Maybe we're building with a new type of metal that stronger and more resilient and stand the test of time. And so, as we look at disciple-making and traversing this gap, it has to start on both sides of it.

And so understanding that that people who've gone before us, we kind to stand on their shoulders. We have to they're rich and resource of, of time energy things that they can teach us. But as well as helping , the younger generation, what did they have to offer?

And so what are you learning in terms of the generational sides of, of traverse.

Val O'Brien: Josh, no, that's a really good question. And you know, I think. We need to start by not pointing fingers at each other. I'm a millennial I'm in , that generation gap right

there. So it's really easy for me to be frustrated at both like gen Z, that's coming behind me and just be irritated because they won't look up from their phone, you know?

And it can be easy for me to be aggravated with the generation in front of me and just kind of feel like I'm stuck in the middle and trying to translate between the two. And it's just hard to say. Yeah, no, we acknowledge that these, these differences. Exists, what in the world are we supposed to do about them?

And just there's some great just wise wise, people writing, talking about that as well. But I think the, the most compelling thing for me is to start with compassion that, you know, when we look at each other and realize that, a gen Z or didn't ask to be born, you know, with a cell phone in their hands.

They didn't. You know, and, and the generations above us, they have had a really rich and hard and unique experiences, that have shaped them as, as a generation also. And so when we lead with compassion and really try to understand that, that starts us down that road of building bridges, like exactly, you said, you know, that's.

That's the beginning, that's the mindset of compassion and reaching them as opposed to just like doubling down and being frustrated. And I think that a lot of that starts by. Leading by listening to just really ask questions and listen to what the answers are, and not assume that we know what they're going to say already to really, really listen and to think small and to focus on a few, say, Hey, these are the people that I really want to pour into and get to know, you know, like, you know, just that typical, just idea of multiplication.

If we're all doing that. We can actually make a change here, but to focus small focus on real relationships. And then one of just a cool thing that I've seen in a number of different places, but I think is really profound. Is this like idea of two way mentoring of approaching relationships with people that are in different generations and different cultures, even, it can definitely sense of cultures.

Is both coming at it as learners and saying, Hey, will you explain this to me? You know, I don't know at all, how this works to humble ourselves and say like, Hey, I don't know what that's like. Can you tell me about it? Or I don't. Can you explain such and such to me or. I, I guess that there's been a lot of this going on in different organizations during, COVID, which is super interesting to me, but a lot of companies that have actually linked up younger employees with older employees, even across, you know, different departments and stuff like that and said, okay, this is your, this is your a two-way mentoring buddy.

During lockdown, when you have a tech question, call them when you're frustrated by new policy, you call them and talk it through with them. And that, that's just been a really great kind of like a bonding thing in a lot of organizations. And I'm like, man, we can take a huge lesson from that.

Josh Yates: Heard a high school sending their high school students out to helping the elderly, be able to figure out how to schedule to getting their COVID shots. So the elder, the gap that we discovered is that the elder couldn't get online because they had to get online to schedule.

They couldn't figure out how to actually fill out the forms to get their appointment, to get their vaccinations. And so the school through discover that there was this gap. So they said, Hey, we can send these high school students out. And isn't that so cool. So being creative with how, how we, how we bridge those gaps, even just, even in light of like yak that two-way mentoring

Val O'Brien: Yeah. I love that.

Josh Yates: When I, when I see this, sorry to interrupt, but I just can't help, but see Jesus thralls full entire thing. And you know, Jesus is leading with compassion. Jesus actually listening, Jesus, focusing and investing in a few. So when you, you brought this to me, I was like, Jesus has all throughout this research.

We see this, this isn't anything new. The strategy remains the same to connect with people and see them for who they are. You are. Human. And I want to treat you as a human and I want to, I'm willing to actually listen and, and engage in a wonder. Maybe we don't lead with compassionate listening. And because we don't understand it because it's foreign to us.

And so what is foreign to us sometimes is a threat rather than opportunity. So yeah. What are some of the other things that stood out to you as, as, as maybe ways we can bridge this gap, walk across this bridge to Traverse the generational divide.

Val O'Brien: Yeah, I think another huge thing is to just understand, you know, maybe in that two-way mentoring or whatever the process is, but to understand the values of the different generations, the values that are just, you know, amoral values, just things that are important to members of the other generations, you know I think about this, even in terms of the church like for the older generation, they have a huge emphasis on things being done well and, you know, and excellence and.

You know, look like you're prepared and have things put together and no when we're going to end the service and start on time and you know, know where your parking spot

is gonna be. All those things are, are really important. And that speaks value to, to the older generation, Hey, the people preparing this, you know, the service this day at church or whatever it is, they thought about me.

They plan where everything is going to be. They have it all mapped out for us. And it's done well, and that speaks value to them. Younger generations, they typically, again, this is all broad strokes, but they have a huge value of authenticity. They're a generation that's been marketed to their entire life.

They can sniff it out in a second and they, they don't want that. There, you know, the Instagram filters, everything being perfect, you know, is actually, they, they don't, they don't like that. They're valuing authenticity. So those things even say on a Sunday morning experience, aren't that important to them.

They don't necessarily speak. Value to them. They want an experience that's a little bit more real, you know, and talk about pointing fingers. Oh my goodness. Like you, you have a planning meeting then for a Sunday morning and you have the young people looking down their finger at the older generation and saying like, does you like, does this really mean anything to you though?

You don't like, this is just a game. He says, this a show you put on. And then the older generation saying like, You're not just going to show up on Sunday morning and give it your best shot. You know, like you're lazy, you're this you're that, you know, like those are some real conversations that can happen.

But the, the heart of it is a misunderstanding of values. It's not a character judgment towards each other, you know? And, and those are the bridges that it's like, wait, stop. Okay. Lead with compassion. Let's listen, let's talk about what you value and can we get to both places, you know, can there first be understanding, and then is there a way that we can minister to the hearts of all of God's people right now in this place.

And I think that there are, I don't think that's an impossible task if we would take the time to do it. So,

Josh Yates: Yeah. It's very interesting even just to looking at how a church budgets and how they communicate their budget, uh, based upon what audience they're trying to communicate it too. And so just even working with younger leaders I remember our church, I'm a interim youth pastor at our church, you know, put together a budget meeting and they're talking through some of my younger staff and they're like, They're asking all the authenticity type questions. I was like, well, go to the budget meeting, talk to talk to the elders, talk to the people, ask those questions. I remember another church when they, when they present, Hey, you know, we just let you know, 50% of our the

giving goes towards, towards missions, goes out the door now that's great. But then the question is, well, who are those people?

The young people want to go, well, where does that money going? Who are the, where are the ministries where the organizations, and let me, let me be involved. The, the value, the authenticity, the rawness, not just a budget line item here is the total amount that goes to missions.

They want to go, well, how can I be involved in those, those things? , and so, and that's a, that's a tricky thing because finances and budgets as a huge thing, the younger generation actually wants full disclosure and. Older generations feeling a little threatened by that. Like, well then you'll see Payscale or you'll see, you know, where, how much money is going towards towards this.

And then the inequity actually takes place. And so here's the other thing that I see with the younger particular millennials are saying, Hey, where are the women in leadership? And there's there is that. Is it where is the value in terms of being even PayScale opportunity? And we see one of the growing things I'm, I'm observing.

When it comes to even singles and ministry, I see a growing demographic in the church is actually the singles. And I think the other things we looking towards down the road is as ethnic diversity and, and knowing that you are single in ministry Tell me just, what was that like?

What was some of the things, just some of the challenges feeling of like, Hey, does the church understand who I am? I'm sitting in this church, I'm sitting in this, in this message I'm sitting in this community and, and how am I being received? How am I being seen? And I think that's also kind of this idea of understanding the generational and these, some of the gaps of the needs of our, of our church.

Val O'Brien: Yeah. Yeah, no, that is that's. That's a huge question. That is a question for a whole, that's a whole nother conversation. I'll try to answer it briefly. It's kind of, you know, as a single person, both just in the church as a follower of Jesus and then a single person in ministry. And it's a little, they're slightly different answers, but of course they overlap. you know, there's a huge rise though. The marriage age is getting later and later. And so we already see that in the church. And I think that for a long time, that. That is a generational thing that we're going to need to kind of adjust to as a church has a lot of times things move right from youth ministry, maybe a college ministry, if you're in a college town to you know, women's Bible studies and marriage, small groups and family stuff, you know?

So there's kind of been this. Gap or it's just like all the singles of every age belong in a group together. And it's like, wait a second. What's going on here? So I think the church is definitely gonna need to have those conversations as a whole is they look at, you know making sure that the single people in their family and their family of God, like aren't left behind or don't know where their places But particularly as a single person in ministry there's just so many, there's so many like little things I've just worked for great people who have just been so considerate of that through the year.

So my experience may not even be, you know, normal to a lot of people, but there's definitely been things along the way that have really impacted me or I just feel like, man, I just wish that people understood this. I just wish that people understood that. Like you don't get stuck in your early twenties. Just because you didn't get married, you don't like marry out of your twenties. You everybody's still matures, you know? So like, just because I'm single doesn't mean that, you know, like I still live my life like a college kid, you know? A lot of people as they get married later in life, you know, they are into their careers.

They do own houses. They do have a lot of responsibilities, you know, it's not just this like total free and easy life. Where they get to do whatever they want. And I think sometimes, you know, the church doesn't let single people grow up and, and do that in a meaningful way. And I think that a lot of that, again, it just comes with really understanding and getting to know people you know, like Paul talks about like each person should live the life to which they were called, or they're called to currently And so I think a lot of it just comes with like compassion and understanding.

So there can be a lot of this, you know, like polarizing and putting things in extremes like, Oh, your life must be so easy. You don't have kids to worry about at home. You know, like, Oh, you're like, let's be so easy or, or your life must be so hard, you know? It can be at these extremes. And I just always think I'm like, no, there are certain aspects of my life that are easier.

There are certain aspects that are hard just like as a married person. Like there are certain aspects of your life that are easier. And there are certain aspects that are really hard and , we just need to to grow in our understanding of what those things are and acknowledge those things. And, you know, if I had a dollar for every time in church that I heard, you know, a pastor say, like, I never understood this until I got married or until I had kids or, you know, something like that.

I think that sometimes we inadvertently have, have created this. This idea that when you get married and you start having kids, you like enter into this new level, you like unlock this new level of maturity as a follower of Jesus. But one of the things that like the Lord has just been showing me, and as I've kind of like talked to other people that are in my

same stage of life, you know, there are just some really deep, rich truths about God that I feel like I just understand in a different way than maybe a married person does about how God is truly my provider, how God is truly my protector. You know, those things aren't unique to a single person. They're true for all of us, but I, I feel, and I understand those truths in a different way than maybe a married person would that Christ is a friend, a companion, you know, all of those things. And so I feel like we just need to do a better job of listening to each other. You know, there is no stage of life that unlocks a different understanding of who God is. But if we actually live together as the family of God, as he's called us to we together, like get a richer picture of what that is.

And, and I do, I just wish that there was more conversation and acknowledgement of that, but, you know, maybe that'll come, maybe that'll come as there are more single people in the church and in leadership and stuff like that. But. I mean, just like anything else. I think if you bring single people into the conversation and you actually let them speak into stuff that's going on in the church.

I think a lot of people might be surprised by what they hear. You know, like I I've definitely sat in church before, or man said in weddings before where I was like, I know the person speaking, I know their heart. I know what they believe. Man, I wish they knew how, what they just said hit me as a single person.

And I can, I know what God's word is. I know what's true, but I'm like rewriting and reminding myself of that, sitting there listening and just thinking like, but if I was just a single person who came in for the first day today, man, I'd be out of here. And I think that we just need to be. I'm willing to have those conversations.

You know, I, I think about it in terms of one of my close friends is same-sex attracted and he would hear me talk to students and stuff like that, sometimes about sexuality and stuff like that. But I remember having a, just a frank conversation with him once and being like, listen, I know I have blind spots in this area. My heart is never to say something that would be offensive or, or stir something up inside of you, you know, know that that's my heart, but I might make a mistake with that sometimes. And when I do, I need you to tell me, like, for the sake of other people, And, you know, sometimes, you know, I would ask him, Hey, how did that go?

How did that hit you? And then sometimes he would come to me and say, Ooh, Val, I know, I know you're trying to say you should've said it like this. Okay, great. Now, now I can move forward with that. You know, I think that like when we invite those conversations with just people that are different than us, whether it is stage of life, Life or gender or cultural differences.

But when we acknowledge those differences and we start inviting people into them and having those conversations rooted in scripture, rooted in our relationships with each other and with Christ, then we actually have a fighting chance to move forward from them. So learn from each other.

Josh Yates: Wow. That's profound many, so many light bulbs are going on in my head. And one is kind of almost the pastoral piece coming out on my heart. Kind of going Val. I don't think I've heard you articulate kind of your singleness and the divide in the church. And isn't it interesting that you've been tasked with this project to traverse this interesting gap in the church that you're now have a voice because you're feeling it and you're seeing it, you're observing it, that God has stirring this for such a time as this Val, I think you have a lot to bring the table in terms of just the things that you've hear, things you observe, things you've experienced just as a single female and what that means for the church.

And how do we. How do we traverse the disciple-making gap and some of these issues that we don't even know when a pastor gets up, I'm thinking I'm, I could've been that pastor doing that officiating in that, that, that, that wedding, I could have been the one giving that message and just completely just unaware because I don't know what, I don't know. And sometimes not aware what's in the community and the things we need to shepherd with compassion. Having a posture of understanding, a posture of asking the hard questions, Hey, how did this really land? And having the conversations with people that maybe are not like ourselves to be able to have a a disciple-making lens like Jesus. Cause I don't think we realize how much we think of our own worldview. And so I think this isn't been enriching for me. Just hearing a little, your heart on our standing, where Sonlife is, is wrestling with some of these same questions is how can we better serve? equip emerging leaders with the task of disciple-making what are some of the tools that Sonlife can provide to assist . Churches to be more effective in multi-generation and multiethnic, the disciple makers?

How can we rise them up? And so we're wrestling with some of these questions and, and thinking through a little bit of a kind of listening to her. So why don't we just wrap up and share a little bit of kind of where's traverse kinda going this next this next year and beyond what are some things that are on your heart for us to really kind of start wrestling and putting together kind of this bridge, so to speak.

Val O'Brien: You know, as far as just the scope of Sonlife in this traverse project, you know, when we, we met a couple of weeks ago, Josh and I did, and kind of had a long kind of retreat meeting days talking about this. And one of the things Josh that we talked

about on that weekend that I loved, and I know that you know, you, you guided us through, was talking about Nehemiah.

And talking about the 12 spies and how both of them with this huge task in front of them took time to evaluate and to look at the land and look at the wreckage, walk through it observe it. And that's kind of. The focus of our next year. You know, I come with my experiences and those are the biases that I bring, you know just my life experience and what I've seen.

And again, even the part of the country that I live in and, you know, Josh, you come with yours and the member of our team, they all come with different perspectives. But kind of the idea of this first year in this listening tour is to say like, okay, can we, you know, expand the view of the information that we have, you know, like, can we talk to people to young leaders at different parts of the country and different ministry backgrounds and experiences and stuff like that and see are the things that we're feeling the same things that they are, what are they saying?

Some of these issues that need to be addressed are so really it's just kind of like widening our view and surveying the land before we get ahead of ourselves and try to. Put pen to paper and, and how we can, you know, make progress in these areas. So that first year is really just that, that listening, laying the ground.

So I think right now, the plan, you know, with COVID, who knows what's going to happen with plans to just go to a handful of different cities and North America and meet with young leaders and to really have some of these, to have questions ready for them for discussion. To do some basic training stuff with them and just see how it lands and just hopefully have a time that's really deeply encouraging to them, but also really helpful for us . As we try to figure out where we need to go from there,

Josh Yates: Yeah. W we are, we bring cautious to try to all make, if you will, a, a resource or make a, a project and say, Hey, we've made this for you. We actually want to listen and say, Hey, no, this came from. Well, this listening tour it came from within we, we have a plan, I think other than the blueprint, we asked my ideas, but we want to test those ideas.

And just like when the spies were sent out, Joshua and Caleb came back and said, Hey, this is an opportunity where the other tens were were, were scared. And when Nehemiah, which is fascinating, so Nehemiah's on the third way of going back to rebuild and, you know, things where, you know, the. We're starting the process, the temple was being rebuilt and they had, you know, the, the spiritual of reform was being we'd done under Ezra, but yet the walls were still broken down in that.

And he grieved over that because of the glory of God. He wanted to restore God's name. And so for us, we want to listen. We want to restore God's name it back to the disciple-making heart. Of Jesus and falling in love with him, helping younger leaders and helping the church who are maybe leaders.

Now, whoever may be gen Xers, like myself or boomers who are going, I just don't get it. We want to help, you know, what are the tools you need to be well to bridge that decision-making gaps so that the church can be effective and flourish restoring it back to the heart of Jesus about thank you so much for.

Your heart, your passion being a part of our team is taking the step of faith raising support and what you bring is invaluable. So thank you, Val. For today.

Val O'Brien: It's it's, it's daunting, but it's yeah, it's really a pleasure. So I'm excited about it. Yeah, thanks for having me today

Josh Yates: Val, so good having you on today's podcast. Man insights were incredible. So how does someone get connected to Traverse may even join one of our listening tour events?

What were they, how did they find us?

Val O'Brien: Yeah, they can go to our website at www.sonlife.com/traverse. Or you can shoot us an email if you're interested or have a great idea, or, you know, you thought of something listening to this. We would love to hear it as we again, are just listening and building right now. So you can email us at traverse@sonlife.com

Disciple Making Moment

Jay Fast: Hey, I'm Jay with Sonlife. I'm the international ministries coordinator for Sonlife North America. And I live in Illinois and one of the things that I've been learning for a number of years now, and just continue to grow in is a key aspect of Jesus' ministry strategy that I see all over the place.

Now that I have become aware of it and and I've started looking for it actively. And so today's disciple-making tip really, really just revolves around the idea of taking our disciples, the people that we're investing in outside of their own culture and context to help them grow as disciples and disciple makers.

This is something that you see in the life of Jesus in a number of ways, in a number of places that we just recognize, man, Jesus went to places that weren't necessarily the

most comfortable for the, the first century Jewish person, right. That he would regularly get out of the Jewish context, the Jewish culture.

So he, he went through Samaria we've got a number of times recorded in the gospels where he's going through or passing through Samaria interacting with people in and around that region, which would have been incredibly uncomfortable, incredibly different from the norm. And especially for, for him to take his disciples through that region that just would have been weird for them.

We see him going over to the Decapolis on the other side of the sea of Galilee, a number of times we see them going up to tire insight, and he, he goes up to Cesarea Philippi, which is a known crazy demonic area pagan god worship all this kind of crazy nonsense that's going on. Just places that you know, the, the normal Jewish first century person would not go.

And so as I've, as I've kind of interacted with that and thought a lot about that over the last several years you know the big disciple-making tip for me is, man, I have to figure out a way to get the people that I'm investing in out of their, out of their home culture, out of their home context, because there are things that they can learn in their home culture and context, but there are also things they can't .

There, there are some things that they can only learn when they get outside of what they're used to and they get out of their comfort zone. And so whether that be you know, going across the street, Whether, that'd be going across the town whether that be going into a different neighborhood or whether that be going on a, on a longer distance trip overseas or something like that. I've got to figure out ways to do that with, with the people that I'm investing in.

Another aspect of this is that Jesus traveled within the confines of Israel as well. And, and there was some out of the box thinking there also that he wasn't just accomplishing this, get out of your comfort zone idea by by going into a Gentile region, like the Decapolis or, or, you know, Cesarea Phillip or something like that. He also did that within the confines of Israel as well.

So taking his disciples who the majority of the 12 apostles for instance, were from the Galilee region and He went to Jerusalem and and the region of Judea with them on a regular basis.

Right. We know he went there at least three times a year. For festivals for feasts. Right. And so seeing him do that on a regular basis and, and exposing his disciples to things that they weren't always accustomed to and used to gave them opportunities to grow as disciples, to, to grow in dependence on the Holy spirit, to grow as, as followers of Jesus

to take on his character and his priorities to see him engaging with people from other, other regions, from other areas that they weren't used to was just a, a great teachable moment, a teaching opportunity for them.

And so my tip, the simple thing that I would encourage you and challenge you with today is just to think about, and how can I move with my disciples? How can I get on the move? Like Jesus was on the move with his disciples.