

Multiethnic or Homogenous? A Discussion on Church Planting
Alex Kocman, Scott Dunford, BJ

Alex Kocman: There are two conflicting schools of thought in missions today: the multiethnic church model and another model that emphasizes sameness. Which one is the answer?

BJ: The heartbeat would be to see healthy churches that are both multiethnic and monoethnic within network to each other so that that hopefully the second and third generation shift would be able to a healthier transition that we've seen sometimes in other language specific diasporic churches.

Alex Kocman: We dive deep today with a missionary working with Muslim expats this week. Stay tuned. Welcome to The Missions Podcast, the show that explores your hard questions on missions, theology, and practice to help goers think and thinkers go. I'm Alex Kocman, Director of Advancement and Communications with ABWE, joined by Scott, Dunford, Pastor of Redeemer Church in Fremont, California and West Coast Coordinator with ABWE. Scott, we're gonna go easy on you today, I'm gonna have you do any more talking than you wanna do since your voice is a little bit hoarse, little bit scratchy. How are you feeling? Are you ready for this show? Can you do this?

Scott Dunford: I am, my voice is, my voice is a little scratchy, I think it makes it sound extra cool. But yes, I feel fine, it's just my voice so let's get, I'm excited about this conversation for sure.

Alex Kocman: It sounds kinda cool but probably not as cool as it sounds, you know, with the acoustics inside your own head, so you know don't get too big a head. It's fine, it's whatever.

Scott Dunford: Oh.

Alex Kocman: Well, we're excited to talk to our friend BJ here today and as we get ready to talk to BJ, Scott, maybe give you a chance to sort of set this up. I know we talk about issues relating to Islam, relating to missional living in the US often in the show. It's a shared area of passion and concern for you and me, and for many of our listeners. Scott, a lot of that is what you're doing right now in the States too, and in your very diverse context on the west coast. And so I'm excited for this conversation with BJ. What are some of your thoughts just on this in general, the need for it, Scott?

Scott Dunford: Well, we recognize, I mean I see it every single day with the people that I'm interacting with. You, a lot of times in very diverse settings you don't even know who you're talking to and where they're from and their people group. But you realize there's people that are coming from all over the world that are here in the States, especially near major universities and in areas that have high tech sectors and medical sectors. And you know I just realize that as I talk to them, that their experiences in the world are very different than mine growing up in rural Wisconsin and later as a young adult in Michigan. And that if we're going to be effective in reaching them for the gospel, that we need to be able to engage them where they're at and be able to communicate the gospel very clearly in a context that makes, that gives them the best opportunity to listen, to hear that.

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It's also, I have a young man living with me right now who's from China and he's got very good English, but I forget often even how often just being a second language speaker, like how many things I think he's understanding that I realize later by his responses that he just doesn't understand. And how he can function so well in society and yet some deeper truths are not getting through because of the communication barrier. So all those things go into discipleship and evangelism and certainly church planting.

Alex Kocman: Right.

Scott Dunford: So it's really good to have our friend joining us today. We're not gonna give his full name just for security reasons, even though he's here in the States, and to protect some of the people he's working with. But it's really great to have BJ joining with us from –

Alex Kocman: Somewhere.

Scott Dunford: I'll let him tell his story and how much of that he wants to share. Here in the United States, working amongst diaspora peoples in a major city. And love to just introduce, so BJ, tell us a little more about yourself and how you came to do what you're currently doing.

BJ: Yeah, thanks, guys, it's really fun to be here with you today, long-time listener. And I really appreciate the thoughts you put out on a weekly basis for us in the missions community. Yeah, so I'm a diaspora church planter here in the Midwest and get to work everyday with unreached people groups that God has brought here to the States, the majority of which are Muslims. And we are working with a local organization that was started by four churches in our city, and the goal of which is to plant churches among some of the unreached communities that have come here to our city. And so we've been at that about five years now. So we've learned a lot, have a lot of stories of God's faithfulness in the midst of the challenges of church planting, and yeah, just excited to talk around this subject today with you guys.

Scott Dunford: Yeah, I would like you to talk a little bit about how you started out working particularly in one ethnic language and then how you switched to another ethnic language, or to English in your work as just kind of setting some of our discussion up.

BJ: Yeah, so when we got started about five years ago, we were introduced to several people from one people group that had already come to faith in Christ. It's a central Asian people group and they were fairly eager to start a church for their own community. And so since they were already pretty excited about that work, we felt like we could join them in that and provide some additional just spiritual encouragement and support and direction. So that's kind of how we got started in a specific people group in a specific language.

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But over time we found that believers coming out of Islam and out of that unreached people group, that were just some real challenges in terms of church health, and not really being exposed to a healthy church before and then, and going to try and start their own in a diaspora context had a lot of unique hurdles to it. And so we ended up kind of seeing that church disperse, but still rethinking through it, and we wanna see leaders emerging out of unreached people groups who are mature and also have church experience that is healthy. And that they know when they go back to their people groups, that not just for themselves but the type of church that they're helping to start is one that can flourish and last for a long time.

Alex Kocman:

Right. So we're all Baptists, we happen to be Baptists, listeners, we don't know if you are or not, but we are. So full disclosure. One of the upsides of being Baptists is that we're fiercely independent. One of the cons, one of the downsides of being Baptists is that we are fiercely independent. So Scott and I are both firm believers in cooperating together and associating together, even though we also believe that the local church should be more or less autonomous. There should always be checks and balances, but each local church is its own local expression of the body of Christ and is autonomous. And so we always find ourselves within our ecclesiology trying to figure out okay, so how do we build those partnerships, those connections between churches. Especially, you know it's one thing if you're a part of something like the Southern Baptist Convention. But many churches aren't, and many churches are looking for their own ways to network and partner together.

BJ, what's interesting about your story is the way in which four churches, and you already mentioned this part of founding your organization that you're working with, four churches banded together to send, to commission you as a missionary. That's cool. We work a lot with –

Scott Dunford:

That is cool.

Alex Kocman:

missionaries that are raising their support, and honestly it's hard to get facetime with churches 'cause a lot of churches feel like hey, we know what we're doing in missions, we're kind of locked in and the idea of, kind of, missionaries just freely being able to go from one church to the next and get invited to speak and being able to present their ministry, it's becoming less and less common. It's not that it never happens, but it's less and less common. So what's the story behind those four churches coming together to partner with you? And are there lessons for other churches like ours in how to replicate that?

BJ:

Yeah, it's a great blessing and a cool story. I think really the story started with prayer, that a few of us as individuals were starting to pray for more church collaboration in our city, both specifically for mission as well as for other outreach and other church planting opportunities. I think another big part of it was just pastors getting to know each other, being intentional to have friendships that are not just work relationships, business relationships with other pastors, but really friendships of guys that had

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coffee together, had lunch together on a regular basis, attended conferences together, shared their lives. And so the four churches that sort of spawned our nonprofits and our church planting endeavor were doing all of that prior to starting this specific work.

Another part of it I think is training people locally. And so one of the great benefits of me getting to stay and work here in the Midwest city that I was raised in is that these churches were intentional to disciple me, to allow me to partner with them on some of their short-term mission work, and then eventually taking care of a lot of my theological and ecclesiological training right here at home. And so that allowed me to be known and continue to be known by the community and by these churches. So yeah, the result of which is a strong partnership between the pastors, between the churches, and between me specifically and our work and those churches.

Scott Dunford: So I have a lot of questions, and this is all very encouraging to me. I should preface it so you don't think my questions are meant to be negative, but I have, I'm developing some theories, right, working in a place like the Silicon, like the Bay Area, Silicon Valley. And –

Alex Kocman: I'm worried, I'm worried.

Scott Dunford: Just don't say you're curious.

Alex Kocman: Right.

Scott Dunford: Alex is always worried, but that's okay 'cause I'm worried about him too. In that you see, we have a lot of, we have so many different racial groups. Some of them have been here for a very long time. You know obviously the Hispanics predated the Caucasians coming here. And then you had an early, a huge early settlement of Chinese that came in the 1800s, and then you have a large Punjabi group that came in not too long after that. And then in more recent times, huge influxes of Europeans, and then of course the mainland Chinese, and then southern Indians. So around the Bay area some of the largest churches are Korean churches or Chinese churches or Indian churches that are really only focused or more, maybe primarily focused, I shouldn't say only focused 'cause I know that's a heartbeat of theirs to reach beyond their communities. But you know when you're preaching every Sunday and only in Mandarin or only in **Telegu**, you're gonna have a, you're gonna probably draw those kind of, those peoples. And so what did you learn in church planting going from speaking a minority language to ministering into English? Has that, how has that changed who comes, how has it changed the depth of the work? I'm just, I'd love to hear you talk a little bit about what you've learned in church planting and kind of navigating that unique space of diaspora peoples in the United States.

BJ: Yeah, well definitely one of the challenges with diaspora church planting in the US is language proficiency. And so we were working with, as I mentioned, Central Asians who had already come to faith in Christ. And a

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couple of them were bilingual but some of them were not, and it's hard to gain fluency in another language when you're staying here. And so working through that translation and only being able to talk to some and not as much to others was definitely one of the larger challenges that we faced, especially when it came down to really deep conversations, church discipline issues, deep theological stuff. For the most part, everyday conversation was not an issue but those things that are really central to healthy church did become a challenge at times when someone was bilingual was not in the same place as us and maybe someone who was monolingual in the Central Asian language, we shared an agreement, but we couldn't communicate.

So that was definitely a big hurdle, which is part of why now I think we see the need for yeah, just having a contextualized, healthy church that does meet in English that people coming out of unreached people groups can fellowship in so that they can see and hear and understand what healthy church is like to the greatest extent of their language ability before they're launched out into planting in their own communities. And so I'm not as familiar with churches from other diaspora groups where there's already a decent church presence in the homeland as well, like China or Korea for example. So that might be a little bit different. Most of the groups we work with are groups that typically don't have churches in their homelands.

Alex Kocman:

So what are some of the stories that you can tell of how God is working in your ministry 'cause I think it's cool to talk about like how do you do this, what should a church do to reach the nations in its backyard. I think in practicality when we get out there to try a lot of this stuff, it's difficult. These are relationships that are hard to build and if we're talking cross-culturally, it's hard for the average pastor or church planter to work on like you're saying, becoming proficient in a language not their own here on US soil, just for us in the US, for instance. So how is God working, what are you seeing him do that excites among some of these diaspora groups? And I think it's super relevant because we're coming on the heels of everything that's happened in Afghanistan, the idea of refugees is a hot button topic right now, but what we can't deny is that God is bringing peoples to our nation that would not normally be here. And there's opportunity to bring the gospel to them. So how's God at work?

BJ:

Yeah, well I'll share a couple of stories. One of the cool things that we get to see happen is when someone comes to faith here in the diaspora, we get to be a part of seeing that trickle back into their homeland through their social media and through their communications with their families. And so there's a couple guys that we know and have walked with that have had the privilege to start sharing back home, whether it's a trip back home or just over Skype or Zoom or whatever. So just getting to see that gospel flow from here to there. And being intentional I think as a church community to encourage that, and to really want to know what's going on with their family, that this is not just you here by yourself, or your nuclear

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family, but this is a message worth sharing. And you can begin to do that even when you're not geographically in the same place. And so that's been a true joy.

Another one is getting to see kind of a vision develop for their own people groups. And so oftentimes we see a Muslim come to faith in Christ but they kind of feel in the diaspora context that they're options are either fellowship and join a large established American church and kind of leave their culture and family behind because their family's gonna see that as foreign, or not be a part of a church and just kind of walk in isolation, which is obviously not ideal. The Christian faith is meant to be lived out in community. And so kind of getting to open the eyes to a third possibility of contextualized church that they can be a part of, and that they could see their family one day coming to if their family's here in the US. So that yeah, they can sort of remain as much as possible in their people group community but still love and serve Jesus and their family doesn't see it as much of like, "Oh, you just wanna be an American," that it's like, "Hey, this looks like something you might find in the Middle East or Central Asia, too." So that's been a joy as well.

Scott Dunford:

Yeah, that's so complicated, right? I mean, all my kids' friends, or I shouldn't say all of them, but ninety percent of my kids' friends in high school are in a situation where like they have a really hard time even communicating with their parents just because culturally they're so incredibly different, you know? They were born in the States, but their parents were born somewhere else, and finding that ability to still remain connected to your home culture, the culture of your ancestors, but also the need and desire, and their parents actually want them to be Americans, I mean they came here for a reason. But they also don't want to lose their kid.

BJ:

Right.

Scott Dunford:

I've talked to some parents, you know, it's like well, you want your kid to, you wanna be able to communicate with your child's spouse one day. And we don't even think about that, we don't even think about how hard that would be if one of our kids married someone that I couldn't even talk to. You know or maybe wouldn't have, would want to have nothing to do with me and our traditions in our family and yet that's kind of the reality that people are living with. So those are all factors that have to be thought of as we think through ministering to these peoples.

You know it's kind of our last question for us to think through together, and maybe you, maybe you've got thoughts about it already, maybe we can talk about it together if you are still formulating some of those things. But as someone is thinking maybe about –

Alex Kocman:

Well, if I could hop in real quick, I just wanna ask a follow-up question as it relates to that last, some of those last things that BJ was saying, Scott.

Scott Dunford:

Sure, yeah.

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Alex Kocman:

‘Cause, Scott, you did a good job of kind of walking out that tension and why it might make sense for someone who comes from a diaspora background to become part of a more contextualized church here in a place like the US and like the Midwest, in his case. But BJ, kind of my question for you is like there are two sides to that, right? Like there’s the other side of not assimilating and becoming American, it’s not about that, but rather, you know, what if there’s not even believers coming from out of this people group to form a contextualized church? Or what if by becoming a contextualized church here, they’re more of a target for people that might have some hostility towards them leaving whatever their native, ancestral religious tradition might be. Is there more of a target on their back? Or is there just more of a risk of them kind of ending up in a silo, cut off from the rest of Christian community, and cut off from the richness of other churches in their area because they’re just doing their thing as an ethnic church?

And you know some of the ethnic churches that I know in my area, for instance there’s a larger Coptic community of believers, you know and they’re doing what they’re doing and they have some connections, but in other ways they’re not always as connected to some of the other churches in my region as we would hope. We’d love to see more networking and relationship happen. So there might be some pitfalls there. We don’t want context and contextualization to be in the driver seat, we want biblical faithfulness to be in the driver seat. So how do you deal with those tensions?

BJ:

Yeah, well I think this is one area where the micro network or the church coalition, as we would call it here, is really helpful, that we have different kinds of churches that are partnering together in this work. And so we have a larger church, at least what in the Midwest would be defined as a larger church, we have some mid-sized churches, some churches in the city, some churches that are rural. So you get a good flavor of partnership and different perspectives that help us really think through these ecclesiological and contextual questions from a lot of different angles. And as well as just the relationships that these believers could potentially have. You know we have tapped into the broader network of churches on occasion for needs within these people groups, and specifically the believers coming out of the people groups. So that’s been a huge benefit to doing this work in the diaspora and a great blessing that these churches can be involved. But in addition to that I think the goal, the most important thing is just that these believers coming out of different people groups are in a healthy church. And so if they’re willing and if they feel like it’s not prohibitive to their family life to join a larger, more established American church then we support that, we totally encourage them.

But honestly and about ninety percent of the time, it’s just not a, not a good fit for them. Either they feel big cultural misunderstandings or the language used at an established church is too difficult for them. You know maybe they speak English fairly well but they’re not familiar with some of

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the more jargon used in Christianity. And so a lot of times what ends up happening is either they go and they're not well disciplined, or they kind of lose connection all together and end up in isolation. And so we're trying to prevent that by creating churches for them that are healthy but contextualized as well.

Alex Kocman: Yeah.

BJ: And some of them will be in English, and some, Lord willing, will be in the heart languages for those who don't speak English as well. But yeah, that, the network of churches and the planting of multiple churches, not just one, I think is probably our biggest attempt to answer that question, at least for now.

Alex Kocman: Yeah, that's helpful. Go ahead, Scott. I, I think that's helpful to look at that from both sides because there's two principles that I think are both helpful, but both have limits in missiology. One is the homogenic unit principle, which is kind of what you're doing, right, Donald McGavran. And then there's the multiethnic church model, and both of them have blessings and also potential pitfalls. With the homogenic unit principle, the downside potentially is that you're monocultural, right, and exclusive. And then multiethnic model can be great but what if it's, what if it's too much, what if it can't be orderly, what if, or what if you're pursuing diversity for its own sake, and not allowing God to just draw who he draws, right? And so we're always I think balancing some of these tensions and also recognizing, like, God has to build his church because the model isn't as important as it is just lovingly shepherding people and lovingly shepherding people through some of these questions that you guys are both raising. Like but what if I don't speak English, where do I worship? Or I can't communicate to the family the fact that I've decided to follow Jesus because there's this language barrier. Like is there a way that I can better communicate that? And I think it's just lovingly shepherding people through some of those questions rather than applying so much of a blanket strategy.

Scott Dunford: It'll probably not surprise you, Alex, to hear me say it's complicated.

Alex Kocman: Yeah, yeah.

Scott Dunford: But there's nuance needed and sometimes the settings have to be, we have to be flexible to kind of read the room. And I do think one thing that, that church planting in a specific ethnic group or a specific language group has to take into account and so far I don't, I haven't seen a lot of good answers for this yet, and I'm not criticizing it 'cause it's hard. And I don't necessarily know what the answer is for sure, is what about the next generation. And you know this is, I already kind of mentioned it a little bit and that's just –

Alex Kocman: The one that speaks English, the one that assimilates a little bit more, the second, that second generation.

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Scott Dunford: Or they're, they're multiethnic too so I mean, or they're biracial, or multiracial. And you know I can think of several people that I know right here that are in that situation. You know their parents are both from unreached people groups, and they're, but their parents are different countries, and you know it's just a unique, here is this unique setting in that it makes me wonder you know as a church planter even how do we think through even exit strategies. What's the plan of, there's a huge population of, for example, like Koreans are wrestling with this right now. It's a huge problem in the Korean context, right, because you have all these Koreans that came over after the Korean War and then you have a trickle of Koreans coming over for education, but less and less. And then so now you have a generation that have grown up in American, their kids are fully an American, there's not a lot of new Koreans coming over, the churches are slowing becoming more English speaking and less Korean speaking. And there's this tension of like, you know, do they stay in the Korean church and all the Korean cultural dynamics that go that work really well for Koreans but work less well for second generation. Those are, I'm not expecting BJ, you to have the answers for those things, more just to help our listeners think through –

Alex Kocman: Yeah, BJ, go ahead and enlighten us.

Scott Dunford: through the trial of that, the difficulty of that, especially twenty years from now. Do you want to add anything, BJ? 'Cause I didn't mean to kind of hijack it.

BJ: No, no, yeah, I just wanted to clarify that right now our contextualized church is multiethnic so there are different ethnic groups and different people from a couple of different unreached people groups that are fellowshipping with us. And so –

Alex Kocman: Yeah.

BJ: yeah, the heartbeat would be to see healthy churches that are both multiethnic and monoethnic within network –

Scott Dunford: Yeah.

BJ: to each other so that that hopefully this second and third generation shift would be able to be a healthier transition than we've seen sometimes in other language specific diaspora churches.

Alex Kocman: You raise a good point about church networks because that is a point where you know maybe the problem is because we don't associate enough together as churches. And again that goes to that fierce independent spirit that we as baptistic, evangelicals tend to have. But maybe if we had stronger ties within our networks, within our denominational structures, where it wasn't so much about the, "Oh no, I lost them, I lost them because of a language barrier. And our church is only English speaking, and their parents are speaking Korean," or whatever that example of that is. But if you're part of a denomination and a structure where it's like,

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“Hey, we can recommend other churches in the appropriate language within our denominational, within our confessional bounds,” that’s huge and that can be important. I think that’s a part of the solution there.

And I think another part of the solution is recognizing that it’s confusing and it’s subjective and it’s complicated but if we can say anything I think we have to say language is really the key. Because I don’t hear it being a viable missionary strategy to say, “We’re just gonna segregate along the lines of something like culture or skin color,” right? That would be absurd to segregate along those lines. But it’s where language comes in where it’s like if you don’t speak Korean, you might need to find an English-speaking church, or vice versa, right? And that’s where those generational come into play. And this is where I think we can sort of tape the brakes on contextualization just as a means in itself and say like, “Well, yeah it’s culture, those things matter.” But at the end of the day, you know, churches with multiple cultures with multiple ethnicities with multiple people groups present, should be able to worship together, that’s the beauty of the gospel, it brings together a diversity of a cast of characters. And there’s got to be enough language continuity to be able to do worship together.

BJ: Mm-hmm.

Alex Kocman: Within a language group there’s plenty of growth that can happen and bringing other people in. So that’s exciting. So Scott, I know you wanna land this plane, but I think that was a useful rabbit trail, it was for me anyway.

Scott Dunford: Well, I wanna, I just wanna come back at that a little bit and that is, not at you really, but at, there’s a, there is a tendency I think in the dominant culture I think, right? So wherever that is, it’s gonna look a little bit differently. But in Pennsylvania for instance, in New York, you’d find, there’s a culture that we expect to church kind of look like. And the hard thing about some of that is that the people in the dominant culture don’t want to give up any of those things because they’ve identified them as, as like, as normative and necessary, right? And that is a little bit of a tension, there is that if we’re going to have effective multiethnic churches we have to have people who are really leaning into this question of saying, “Okay, what is essential, what is nonessential, how do we at least accommodate for people who are trying to learn this?” And I feel this tension almost every single Sunday as I’m trying to think through even my preaching and going, “Is this illustration landing well?” You know, what does hospitality look like cross-culturally? Am I sending mixed signals that I’m not meaning to send ‘cause I’m just not as familiar with that particular people group as I ought to be? You know? And if we’re going to have these very effective, very effective multicultural, or not multicultural, multiethnic churches, we have to really encourage our dominant culture people to really think through and really listen well, and really learn how to be servant leaders in that area.

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BJ: Yeah, yeah, I totally agree. Also I think we get the privilege of seeing different strengths and giftings of the churches coming out of different backgrounds. Like I remember one of our first gatherings with some Central Asian believers and they spent over two hours in prayer and then like twenty minutes on the scripture section. And my, I guess, strong fundamentalist roots just wanted to react and say, like, “You gotta spend at least forty-five minutes in the Bible, and like prayer, you know that’s usually like five to ten minutes, max.” And so you just kind of see how God has gifted and strengthened the body of Christ in different ways coming out of different parts of the world. And yeah, we do have to be good listeners and sensitive to that and also learn from it.

Alex Kocman: Yeah, and there’s love that can be exercised, you know, on both sides, majority cultures, the way that they shape churches and orders of worship have to listen, have to be sensitive to others coming into their midst. Just as those coming into their midst also have to have an attitude of recognizing, you know, I am joining something that already exists, and I want to have an attitude of serving and embracing those that are here already and not requiring people to serve me. There’s love for neighbor that has to happen on all sides around here.

And what I love and appreciate, this is where we kind of have to go back to almost our conversation on liturgy that we’ve had, Scott, because it’s variations on a theme. Like ultimately the gospel and the word of God are transcultural.

BJ: Amen.

Alex Kocman: They are, and so we’re talking about things like you know, your example, BJ, like how much time do we spend in prayer versus how much time on the sermon. And like those can be issues and have to be thought through, especially in a really unique context like Scott’s context. Yet at the same time, especially if we’re joining the stream of tradition that has carried the church through the ages and if we’re not just singing the top forty, but we’re also singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, things that the saints have sung for centuries. And if we’re just staying close to the text of the Bible and we’re making the Bible itself the center of our worship, I’m not saying that resolves every problem, again there’s language, there’s cultures, there’s unique things that have to be negotiated from one local church to another. But it does solve a lot of those problems ‘cause we don’t have to start from scratch, we don’t have to reinvent the wheel, the wheel, rather the gospel is a transcultural thing. Anyway, Scott, I, again, like you had another question you were saving for a while, too. I don’t wanna, I don’t wanna not let you answer, or ask that one.

Scott Dunford: Just lastly and maybe you have a short answer for this, but what would you say, you know, just in your experience there, what would be some of the big differences that you would say is between doing church planting in your own language, in your own city amongst diaspora peoples versus if

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you had gotten on an airplane and traveled halfway across the world, what do you see as some of those big key differences?

BJ: So differences between diaspora work and work overseas, or differences between diaspora work and work here amongst majority people group?

Scott Dunford: Yeah, maybe just in general.

BJ: Okay, I think one of the things that has been a big difference is when you travel overseas, and I don't have a lot of overseas time, two mid-term trips is what I've served, but I think there's a greater understanding that, or at least hopefully a greater understanding that your time there will come to an end and you will have to pass on the baton. And so giving over more of the leadership to the local church, and raising up pastors and elders in that context. I think in diaspora work sometimes it's easier to forge that because here in the States we're more used to sending out a church planter, and that church planter kind of becomes the long-time pastor, or at least one of the long-time pastor elders of the church that is planted. And so I'm kind of learning I guess that apostolic, little a, role, or Titus type role of seeing churches birthed and strengthened, but also learning to hand off the baton is a little bit more challenging, I think, in the diaspora context just because it's new and it's also here in the West, and yet it's not at all a Western context.

Like I mentioned already, language proficiency is another big challenge of, you know, what language to use, what language to disciple in even with the workers, not really having a lot of access to gaining fluency in a specific language while they're still in the States. And then people coming to faith in Christ out of different people groups. Some of them speak English pretty well but it's still not their heart language, and so can they be disciplined in it? You just kind of use, yeah, whatever tools are available, and that's something that's different from the overseas context.

And then finally, I would just say the relationships with churches here in the states both come with a lot of great opportunities and blessings, being able to partner together and kind of leverage a larger community of disciplers and resources to support people coming out of unreached groups to Christ, that you wouldn't have overseas. But at the same time, some new challenges too, of contextualization stuff, more false gospels perhaps present here in the States. We know believers that have come to faith in Christ and then been contacted by Jehovah's Witnesses, or Mormons, or different groups. That probably wouldn't happen as much in difficult to reach, hard access places. And so yeah, different challenges like that.

Alex Kocman: Well, BJ, how can people support your ministry, find out more, and maybe get their hands on anything that's been helpful to you in terms of resources?

BJ: Yeah, I would say probably contact through you guys would be best and we can work out how to connect with me. We don't really have a large online presence for discipleship and security reasons. So yeah, if you guys

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Alex Kocman, Scott Dunford, BJ

wanted to find out more, I would contact Scott or Alex and they could put you in touch with us. And yeah, we really hope to see more people engaged in the harvest that God's bringing here to the US. Obviously, headlines would be Afghans coming to the United States soon, but there are already so many other people groups as well that God's brought here and given the church a great opportunity to reach. As Thad says, crossing cultures without crossing borders, so let's do that well.

Alex Kocman: Yeah.

BJ: For Jesus' name.

Alex Kocman: Amen. If you do want to get a hold of BJ, you can reach out to us. You can email alex@missionspodcast.com. Actually, we've been having some problems with that, I haven't gotten any new emails since June. Our IT guys are looking at that. So maybe email alex@abwe.org just in case, I'll give that email in this episode, alex@abwe.org. You can also go to missionspodcast.com for more content and as you listen, and hopefully this is a blessing to you, and some of the back and forth is helpful. Go ahead and rate, review, subscribe, and share, that helps us get this content in front of others. Until next time, thanks for listening.

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