

'EAT WHAT IS SET BEFORE YOU': A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR SCOTT HAGLEY.

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In this video Scott Hagley is in conversation with Alan Roxburgh and Martin Robinson to discuss his recent book 'Eat What is Set Before You'. [1] Scott teaches missiology at Pittsburg Theological Seminary but prior to this he was a pastor at Southside Community Church in Vancouver and a researcher at a church which, for the purposes of publication, he calls Midtown Community Church. Throughout his experience as pastor and researcher Scott has asked the question 'what kind of relationships do churches need to connect with what God is up to in their neighborhoods?' The book title 'Eat What is Set Before You' references Jesus' instruction to the seventy as he sends them out two by two to be dependent on the hospitality of those to whom they are sent (Luke 10). It's an instruction which underlines the risk, even the crisis, of this vulnerability.

*Video to 8 min.*



Alan Roxburgh picks up on Scott's use of the language of crisis in the conversation. Scott explains that our normal tendency in our ministries is to evade awkward questions. A crisis will force us to confront challenge. If we allow the questions and stay with the discomfort, then a new imagination may be born. He tells the story of a woman who approached his church seeking support for a new initiative for the inclusion of refugees and other outsiders. The project took off in a way which was initially alarming for the church, which lost its sense of control, but which eventually bore fruit in new relationships and partnerships. Scott explains that if mission is about discerning the action of God in the world, if the Spirit of God has indeed been poured out on all flesh, then it is important to attend to the interruptions and provocations within 'business as usual'.

*Video 8 min to 14 min.*

Alan, Martin and Scott continue to discuss crisis as a moment to discern God's action in the world. For Peter the crisis was a vision and then an encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10-11). For some students at Midtown Baptist Church it was the apparent failure of their community garden project when none of the local families were interested in their fine crop of vegetables. In this crisis the students had a choice either to conclude that 'these people don't know what's good for them' or to try to engage and understand. The students asked questions and the community garden project became a more collaborative venture. The relational encounter transitioned to 'being with' rather than 'doing for'.

*Video 14 min to 21 min.*

In this segment Alan, Scott and Martin explore the 'being with' theme further by considering some contrasting postures which have become deeply embedded in the evangelical social imaginary, for the example the heroic, the activist, the instrumental. Scott explains that these approaches can carry connotations of colonialism and patriarchy, of a benefactor-client relationship. Certainly they will no longer engage the communities which surround us. The church which Scott had been studying had taken up something of a heroic missionary stance in its established practice of funding community development work. When the funding for this dried up it experienced an identity crisis. However it was

already beginning to invest in good relational work. It needed a theological framework to better understand this.

*Video 21 min to 28 min*

Seeking for a theological framework Scott explains that in his writing he drew on the language of Samuel Wells who suggests that the primary message of scripture speaks to our loneliness not to our mortality.<sup>[2]</sup> The good news is that 'God is with us'. "Being with' is mission in the way of Jesus but the theology in Midtown Baptist Church struggled to find a way, an imagination, to value this dimension of its life. Clear outcomes like conversion and heroic stances like 'taking back our city' continued to dominate the language of the church.

*Video 28 min to 39 min.*

How can churches be helped to transition away from these narratives? Here the conversation moves on to issues of leadership. How can leaders invite people into a changed imagination towards what God is doing? Scott finds the concept of 'practices' helpful, actions and behaviors which connect body, mind and spirit. However he does not feel that these can be simply fashioned by leaders. He names a book by Lauren Winner, 'The Danger of Christian Practice' which shows how practices can become deformed and lead to negative outcomes.<sup>[3]</sup> Instead he suggests three directions for leaders. The first is towards leadership as improvising meaning making with a congregation in the events which occur, weaving these events, with the people, into their unfolding story. Secondly he points towards practices which reinforce for people that God is speaking and present in their everyday lives. In this context he names practices like Examen and Dwelling in the Word. Finally he names the practice of hospitality, which both performs or models the gospel and shapes us to be receptive in community, where we may be challenged 'To Eat What is Set Before us', to simply be with our communities.

*Video 39 min to 53 min.*

[1] Scott Hagley, *Eat What is Set Before You: A Missiology of the Congregation in Context* (Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishers, 2019).

[2] See for example Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being With God* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

[3] Lauren F. Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage and Sin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).