

The Turtle Wins – Panel Discussion

Anabaptist Identity Conference 2015, Nappanee, Indiana

John D Martin: Nathan and I were talking on the telephone, and we got to talking about the hare and the tortoise in relation to spiritual experience. And I related the little incident I'm going to give to you, and then I said, "You know Nathan, the turtle always wins." I told my wife when I got off the phone, "I'm sure that'll be on the program for the Anabaptist Identity Conference," and I was sort of curious where he was going to put it; I was rather horrified that he put it here for this panel discussion, because I'm not sure what that's all about.

But what I wanted to share, and what I was sharing on the telephone (and I asked my good friend Edsel Burge to actually get me the documentation), but back in 1893 when the Old Order division occurred, there were seven bishops in Lancaster Conference who told Jonas Martin (who left with the Old Order division; he was the one that led the group out of the conference) that he would lose his children, because they believed that the changes that were taking place in the church were going to save their young people. And now the history is sort of in. Somebody has actually counted the descendents of Jonas Martin, and he has more descendents in the Mennonite church than those other seven bishops, I think all put together, I'm not sure about that, but certainly more than any of them individually. He kept more of his descendents in the church than they did. And that was the story I was giving to Nathan. I said, "You know, we have all of these high-powered spiritual movements in our churches, and things sort of go up in the air, and when they finally come down, the Old Orders are there just plugging away, actually keeping more of their young people than we do with all of our methods." So that's where the title for this panel came from.

Nathan Overholt: Thank you, John, for starting us off there with the story of the turtle, as we think about that, the rabbit racing along, we think about all the innovations as it has to do with community. Remember, we try to keep this thing in perspective in a whole picture, not just how we do our Sunday morning meetings, but it's our lifestyle, it's our everyday walk of life, how we relate to our neighbors, what we do for a living, how we work with our children, or don't we work with our children. So if we think about this that the turtle wins, I'm just wondering... Does anybody have another thought on that?

Chester Weaver: I'm a son of the Lancaster Conference, and when I was a boy we looked at the poor Old Orders, "Just let them alone, they'll dry up and blow away. It's kind of embarrassing what they're doing, but just let them alone, they'll just die away quietly. The rest of us are all enlightened and we know where we're going, and praise God we're not like them." I never thought in my life that I would hear what I heard since I'm in northern Indiana. There was a history meeting just a few years ago, where somebody, I suppose from my background, a liberal Mennonite of some kind, asked the question, "What can we learn from our Old Order Amish friends on how to keep our children in the church?" The whole thing has been reversed, and now my people are dying, and the Old Orders are multiplying.

Nathan Overholt: Thank you, Chester. Brother Dean, I was with you some years ago at Dave Esh's house, and we were trying to rope you into a conference there that we were going to have in Pennsylvania, and you weren't too very willing, and we were, especially Dave, trying to put the pressure on you. And I listened in as I heard you recount your story, and you were in earnest. And I saw your son sitting there. How old is your oldest now? 21. He was probably 15 then. And you said, "I can't afford to go wrong, I can't do this over. My son is sitting here... I've come from the military, I've come through all this, I've spent this many years here in this group, and I can't afford to go wrong here. I don't have any room here for error." And you are trying to make a decision as to what you were going to do.

Dean Taylor: Wow, that's quite an open personal meeting. But it's good to be transparent. Yeah, you're hitting a very personal thing in front of a bunch of people, but that's good. It's very dear to me, it's very hard... The journey coming out of the world and the Army and coming into the Anabaptist world has been rich, and I've been very blessed. A lot of the journey has been difficult. And it's that burden for my children that does keep me going. I've watched sometimes a bird will go through the trouble of inflicting near death to be able to protect its little ones in its nest, and I think that there's something in us that is willing to do that for our children. So we try to walk in wisdom and go through those different things like that, and it's sometimes very difficult.

One of the things that I looked at when I was in Lancaster County, speaking on this theme that you have here, and I pondered it, looking at it from both a spiritual perspective and a sociological perspective, just what are the facts? And the churches we were with, I still have not been with more sincere, passionate, crying out to God men than I was in those days when we came to Lancaster County, no doubt in my mind. But I did notice, I would look over to the Joe Wengers, and then look over to the different groups, and I was perplexed by the way that they were keeping their young people more than us, especially with the emphasis that we had our families.

And so as I pondered that sense of "peopleness" that seems to be lacking a lot of times coming from the outside (I don't know if "peopleness" is a word). It's something that I've paid attention to. Now as I ponder that further, and now that I'm in a group that has a very clear distinction, I've noticed that if you look through the history of the Mennonite church, and even the churches that I've been a part of, there's a lot of emphasis on what defines the edges of the community. In some of the churches it's very clear; for the Amish it's the buggy, in the Hutterites communities it's the community of goods. Without those very distinct ones it sometimes becomes somewhat odd in the things that are chosen to define the edges of that community.

Now that I'm in a very distinct group, I do think that there is a serious caution that we have, and I'll give an example of my brother. In high school my brother went through a very difficult time, alcohol, a little bit of drugs, lived a very simple life. But later he got married and settled down. Now he's a good dad, he's a good husband, and there he is at home. But he is not a believer, he does not even pretend to be a believer, he is just a heathen. I think that one of the biggest risks that we have in communities that are very defined is that there is a potential for us to just exist with a heathen, "settle-down" morality, that our young people aren't converted, our young people don't have a desire to follow Christ, but it works for their best just to settle down and get married and joined the church. So that's the other side. I want to appreciate what I have with the defined community, but on the other hand, I also want to be very aware of the dangers that are there. People from my background have a very clear understanding of what they do from A to B, and it's heathen. So it doesn't assure us anything. But nevertheless, there is something there when we're talking about keeping our children and things like that, that you just have to admit that it's there. To sanctify that and use it for Christ is the burden and the journey. Just a few thoughts, right off the cuff.

Nathan Overholt: I appreciate, in talking with you, brother Dean... You spoke at a Roxbury hymn sing conference years back, and you were talking about that you had just come home from Europe with Benuel, and you were really, can I say in the vernacular, "pumped", you were very excited. And you said that it's necessary in every generation that we speak about the things that are important. And he said that they that fear the Lord spake often one with another, and so we need to speak often. And if you travel and move in concerned circles you're going to hear fathers talking about the direction and where they're going. And that's good, right?

Dean Taylor: Yes.

Nathan Overholt: David [Kline], you've seen enough of us Amish-Mennonites trying to reinvent the wheel, and trying to get all excited about all these extra features. It seems, like we heard today from David Bercot, that we sure do rely on you folks to populate our ranks, and I don't know if I should be sad or glad. Do you have any comment on that? You made a comment to me one time that we keep doing things over, the next generation, we feel we're a little more spiritual than those who couldn't make it back there, we have a little more enlightenment, and we don't really learn from history. I know this may be a touchy subject, but see what you can do with that.

David Kline, Jr.: I think Albert Einstein said that to do the same thing over and over and expect different results is insanity. And it seems that's what's happening; we do it over and over, we get the idea that we are the generation that now understands it, that we can handle it, we're more spiritual, we're more mature, and I sometimes wonder if it isn't just [?] in a mutza, or maybe it's John Calvin in a mutza, I don't know. This is the mutza, the plain coat.

Nathan Overholt: Thank you. David [Bercot], any thoughts as far as "the turtle wins," what we've been talking about?

David Bercot: I guess I can't say no. It must seem a little bit interesting to the group here. The point of the meeting isn't to encourage everyone to become Old Order; you might get that impression. One of my first contacts with the Anabaptists was the Old Order Amish, and I appreciate a lot of what was there. Now there was one problem; I attended their service, assuming that since I live here in America, the service would be in English. I had quite a surprise in store for me as I sat there and didn't understand a word that was said. And so when the service was over... this was in Texas... I asked the brother there that was sort of taking the lead, "If my family and I decide to start coming here regularly, would you hold your services in English?" He said, "No, you're going to have to learn German." And we thought, "Well, we might start looking at some other options then."

So I would not feel like the Old Orders... They've done a very good job of keeping what they have, and one of the means they've used to do that is keeping the language, and I respect what they have done. But this is a problem in all areas, the very things that help us to keep our children, to keep ourselves, are also walls that keep us outsiders... it makes it very hard to come in. And I don't know where the balance is laid. I try to speak very favorably about the Old Orders because when I became acquainted in other Anabaptist circles, all I ever heard was how totally dead they were, that none of them were Christians, this and that, and that really bothered me a lot, because I had known some that certainly did not meet that description, and I felt it was probably a much larger section than what I was led to believe. I saw how proud people were, now they were Christians finally and all of that, next thing I know, five years later, they were totally off in the world, after seeing how much Christ had changed them. I appreciate the Old Orders, and yet I know that's not the answer for all of us. And I don't think the answer is that we keep stealing their children either, but we'll keep doing it, I guess, if we need to. I'm saying that tongue-in-cheek, David [Kline]. But I think it is wonderful that we are all together at a conference like this; I didn't expect to see so many Old Order people here, I'm sure it's because of David [Kline]. I think that is such a big step, that we can come together and acknowledge each other as brothers and sisters, and see what we can learn from one another.

Ernest Strubhar: I confess that I didn't know I was supposed to participate, I didn't know what the title was about, until I got here.

Nathan Overholt: Everybody is in the same boat as you are, except for John.

Ernest Strubhar: Oh really! Well I suppose I am as far away from any Old Order roots or knowledge as anyone here. A little bit closer in my family history; my great grandfather Daniel Lee Mast was an Amish preacher and writer in Kansas that was well-known in his generation. But that was so far back in my history and so far away from Oregon where I grew up that I didn't know much about it. And I didn't ever live in Pennsylvania like Dean did, close to Old Order people, so it's a world that I haven't really know much about. But I have always been uncomfortable with my contemporaries in our spiritual churches who have looked down on the lower groups. I've heard it all my life, and it troubled me. I concluded long ago that I don't want to participate in that kind of talk. My great-grandfather was a spiritual man, he was a witnessing Amish, he even preached one time to D.L. Moody on the train, I'm told. And he had a tremendous impact on the Hutchinson Kansas Amish community. And now in the last 15 years we've learned to know those folks, many of whom are distant relatives of mine, but it's the Beachy Amish people mostly that we've learned to know.

But I'm distant; I just know that we can learn from others if we will humble our hearts, whether it's Old Order people, I've learned a lot from Church of Christ people, I've learned a little bit for many people, but we just have to have the heart and the humility to listen to one another, to appreciate what's good, to not be enamored by every new movement and thing we see because most of them don't turn out well. Very few restoration, or revival movements maybe is a better term, very few revival movements turn out well, because most of the proponents are too enamored with their wisdom to walk in humility. And all of them have been built on a combination of reaction and vision, and as soon as the reaction gets in the driver seat it runs them into the ditch. May God give us vision for His Kingdom, to keep us going toward Christ.

Nathan Overholt: Thank you, very well said. A spirit of humility, that we can learn from each other. I think that's true, as we think about that if one group fails, we all fail. Tonight, if one of these groups that is here, these kingdom representations, would suddenly be gone, we would all feel a loss, we would all lose. So we need each other. Does anybody else have a comment? Okay, let's field a question from you as the audience.

James Landis, Waynesboro, GA: I've done a good bit of research and study of the Moravian missions, and I think that the Acts of the Apostles and the Anabaptists and the Moravians were out evangelizing adults, and converting the heathen to the kingdom, and changing men and enlisting them in the Army of the Lord. And that's where we lose our life to save it. And I'm concerned about focusing too much on saving our children. And I have to confess, as I've looked at our own family, they don't all turn out like I wished they would. How do we save them? How do we get them to walk in that way and follow the Lord? That's really my burden.

Nathan Overholt: Thank you. Anybody have a comment?

Dean Taylor: Brother James, I think that's an excellent point, and I ponder that idea. There is something, I think it is Luke 19, where Jesus gave the parable of the talents, or in that one he gave everybody a pound, and it says that you shall occupy till I come. I love that military sound to it, but it actually means to take this pound, and buy and sell and trade till I come back, and you have a greater response. And you know the story.

But the one that said that he feared God, and he had this fear of God and wanted to make sure everything was perfect, so he took that coin and put it in a napkin and put it in the ground, because God was a fearful God, and he wanted to make sure that he was able to give this his King when he showed up. So I can imagine in his mind when he had that coin wrapped in the napkin and buried in the ground, and the king came back, and he was going to say, "Here it is!" But the response to him was, "You wicked servant." We have to keep that perspective in mind, that if our protectionism becomes so great that we no longer have faith to go do the things that Jesus told us to do, the response from Jesus is quite severe. So, yes, I think it's a good point.

Pat Kenney, Goshen IN: I just was thinking about the title, the turtle wins, and trying to apply it to what's been discussed for the last two days, and some of the emphasis of the conversation here tonight. My mind went to the phrase that I'm sure we've all heard, that there are no second generation Christians, and just kind of evaluating the turtle, the slow, the determined, the pace, and trying to balance it in the fact that each person individually has to come to a place of recognizing their unworthiness and undoneness before God, and needing to reconcile their life before a holy and just God. I appreciated the thought of romancing the idea of farming to our young people and taking that principle or idea and making the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the church, the community of believers, beautiful, I think is very important for us fathers, for the elderly people of our churches, to uphold that banner of Christianity in a beautiful way, and to uphold the younger generation in prayer and commit them to the Lord. And yet, I think that we need to be very careful to rely upon culture and our methodology to have a trailing group of young people following based on pattern of life in such. I want to be careful how I say that, I do have a great degree of respect for some of the ways that I do see, and yet I also want to recognize in honesty that each person has to come to the Lord of truth.

Willie Bach, New Paris, IN: I hear a lot of people you're talking about how a lot of the conservative groups have a lower retention rate of their young people, and I'm thinking of all the people my family has known very well over the last 15 years, and it seems like among those people it's more 80 or maybe even 90% retention rate of the young people. And that's more half Charity type people, I guess would be the best way to describe it. And I was wondering what do all our friends do differently than everyone else? I don't really know why a lot of other people aren't having it carry on to the next generation.

Pat, Goshen, IN: I would like to know what you think a successful retention rate is.

Nathan Overholt: Okay, I'll take responsibility for that question, because I was throwing out some numbers there. If you don't want to answer that, you don't have to. Chester, you've talked about, you gave us numbers some years ago down in Florida, how the Mennonites and Amish and Anabaptist peoples...

Chester Weaver: If there had been one couple who came to these shores in, let's say 1700, and that couple would've had four children, and each of those four children would have had four children. At a factor of four, in ten generations there would be one million. If you take the same couple, and they have four children, and one of the four is unfaithful, so you factor that. Each child has three faithful and one unfaithful. The one unfaithful will probably have four unfaithful. In three generations you would actually have more unfaithful than you have faithful. Do the math, check it out. It works that way. In three generations. It reminds me of the tremendous losses that we've experienced.

And while I'm on the subject, the first generation fights for what they believe, they pay a price, they labor, they sweat, they pray, they're desperate. They pass on something that is right to the second-generation, who does not have to fight. And the third generation is flight; they don't want anything to do with it. So the only answer is that every generation has to fight!

Anthony Hertzler, Oaks, OK: There's a statement I've heard, variations of it at different times, from young people who want to see our communities be effective in the world. I heard a statement it while back on the subject of community of goods, but you could put anything in there, any radical lifestyle change. And the question was, "We already have so many hurdles to people joining us. We have, you know, the strange head coverings and the unusual dress and whatever other standards there are. Why would we want to add another one?" And you can put anything you want into that slot, because there's a lot of us here today that I think are probably feeling a conviction that there's something we lost in the past that maybe we ought to go back for.

So what would you say to that, to the heart behind that question? Can you address the thinking that would motivate that question, to answer the young people that are afraid that will become ineffective by becoming radical? I'm concerned about the mentality that would lead us to think that radical lifestyle is a hurdle or that it's going to reduce the attraction of the Gospel or make us less effective in our missions.

David Bercot: I guess I was picked to comment on this, just being somebody that was not raised Anabaptist. I personally do not find the legitimate expressions of biblical lifestyle, radical Christianity, to be hurdles or barriers. It's the ones that are Mennonite custom and tradition, those are what make it hard, because other things you can explain to your children and your spouse and say, "Well, hey, it's right here in the Bible. It may seem strange just because everybody else has dropped it, but it's in the Bible." But when you try to explain, you know, why you have to wear a plain coat rather than something else... and some of those are little things that, sure, we can conform to, but they can add up and become quite a hurdle.

Sometimes it's forgotten that we have families too, we have relatives. You all have a blessing that your aunts, your uncles, your grandparents, are all Anabaptists; you have family reunions. Well you know, we have family too, and the more things that are added to us that are not biblical requirements, that are just to fit into the Mennonite culture, make us look that much stranger and more different to our families, and we care about them as well. I don't know where the perfect answer is. I think there needs to be a sensitivity that everything cuts both ways. If it's a commandment of Jesus I think we seekers are often as ready or more ready, "Just bring it on, we want to follow Christ wherever that leads us." But if it's purely culture... I don't scoff at that, because I realize that the Mennonites have developed a wonderful culture, and it's nice to plug into someone else's culture, and not have to reinvent the wheel.

On the other hand, like I say, it does present barriers. I think it would be something that would be nice to, in our circles, to just recognize that these are some hard hurdles for seekers, and what can we do to at least show that we're sensitive and that we appreciate what they're facing, instead of, "Well, your proud; that's the problem why you won't, you know, wear a coat with hooks and collars, because your proud," and it has nothing to do with pride. So I'll just say that. I don't know if that's what Chester thought I was going to say. You can say what I was supposed to say.

Chester Weaver: Many years ago in Texas, when we first moved to Texas, there was a newspaper article run on our community. And I understood this as an opportunity to give my faith testimony to millions of people, and was I ever in for a surprise. My faith community was up in arms; they thought I had betrayed them, I exposed everybody, it was an awful thing! David shows up at our church and says, "I read that, and I thought I'd like to be part of that community." Okay, so the newspaper, when they came out... my wife was doing some quilts, and they wanted to come see the quilts, but when they found that there were real Mennonites there, they decided that they have a much bigger story. So that's how we got hooked into this whole thing.

People are looking for something authentic out there. I don't claim that we are all perfectly authentic; we have our weaknesses. If you talk to the Old Order Amish, the first thing they'll say is, "We are people and we have problems just like anybody else." Well, that increases authenticity. But when we pretend that we have all of it together, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to find the holes in that, and so many people have turned away from us when they have discovered our hypocrisy and our shallowness and our weaknesses that we've hid behind good-looking images. And I'm so sorry that we have hurt and disappointed so many people.

David Bercot: Yes, that was interesting situation. If it wasn't for Chester, for a number of reasons, there's a good chance I wouldn't be here tonight. And if I wasn't here tonight, then Dean might not be here tonight. And it started with the newspaper article. He had a bakery in Texas called Pennsylvania Dutch Bakery, if I remember correctly. A newspaper reporter heard about it and wanted to do an article on the bakery. He said, "Why don't you do an article on our Christian school?" And so that's what they did. This was in Dallas, in the Dallas morning news, which I didn't read; I lived in another town. But my wife's sister saw it, and she called us up and said, "Hey, did you know there's a Mennonite community here in Texas?"

So we look at the article, and it had some of the girls playing baseball or something, they just looked happy, it looked so wonderful, and I thought, "Wow, let's get over there!" So we show up there on Sunday and we enjoyed ourselves. We got invited over to the host family, and I was looking at one of the girls, and I said, "Were you one of the ones in that photo?", thinking I was complementing her. She just hung her head in shame, and I was like, "What's happening?" Then the father explained, "Well, we didn't approve of that article." I said, "You didn't? I mean, that's what got me here!" He said, "Well, you see, that came out in the Sunday paper. That means someone was working on Sunday." Of course his wife who cooked the meal was working on Sunday too, but I didn't point that out. He said that in that newspaper there were advertisements for movies, and it was like, wow, here you had some wonderful free publicity, and instead it's... Chester I guess had been invited over too, and I could see that he was getting raked over. I was just shocked; such a wonderful thing that had brought us in contact, and that was the response of the church. You know, it didn't matter if it helped somebody find God, it was, "Well, we don't approve of newspapers," or whatever. I remember telling Chester... I think, if I remember, he drove us home, it was on that occasion or another, and I said, and apparently a lot of others have said this to him, I said, "You know Chester, if all of the Mennonites were like you, I'd join the Mennonites right now." That was what, 25 years ago. I have finally joined them; but it didn't happen 25 years ago because they weren't all like Chester.

Gary Wurtz, Elmendorf, MN: That was like an ox in a well, brother David, you should overlook that church. If there's an ox in a well you can work on Sundays, that's not a problem.

On the question, or concern, that Anthony shared, just one little testimony. If you consider Elmendorf a radical group, some of you may, some may not, but if we are a radical group, just this last Christmas program we had the usual program with the children with little skits and that, and the Christmas message, and it happened that a local Romanian doctor and his wife attended (I believe he's a radiologist from the local clinic). I had never met that man but I saw in his countenance that he was a special man, and I went over to visit with him. I believe that what it takes is a radical group that reaches out to local people around you, that there is a sense of care, they know you are there. And we do have a mini barn business that attracts lots of people, and the deliveries are very special to attend to, and we try to leave the heartbeat of the church there when we leave. I don't do the deliveries, but I was with two of them.

Anyhow, I started visiting with this man, and he was a believer, a strong believer, a very deeply godly man for that matter, and he said to me, "Brother, I want to tell you something: our doctors staff and our nurses staff notice you very much. You are a very special beacon in this area here, and it's like a lighthouse, and Satan would love nothing more than to tear you down the first chance he gets. Be careful; we will keep you in prayer." I believe that's what it takes, a radical lifestyle, what the world would consider radical, where the brethren sense the love of God and enjoy each other in the Lord; people notice that.

Aaron Stoll, Caneyville, KY: David and Dean, I have a question for you. I have a lot of interest in Anthony's question because it strikes at the very heart of who we are, and what we are trying to accomplish in Caneyville. We are a horse and buggy, nonelectric community, and we share our property, but we are not common purse. We're a hybrid of sorts. Now, a big part of our mission and our identity is to bring in non-Anabaptist background people into brotherhood and community. And many of them leave again. They come, they're there for a few years, and then they go, and always they take a part of our heart with them when they leave.

I have been asked questions like Anthony asked, and my response is that it's not the lifestyle, it's not the outhouse, it's not the crosscut saw, but it is the accountability of living in a close community and brotherhood that the people coming in... they're okay with coming to woodcutting and pulling a crosscut saw with me, but when I want to tell him what to do with his hobby, and with his free time, and with his money, and when we begin getting into each other's lives on that level, is when they become uncomfortable and, sadly, turn away. But that is not what I hear you saying, and I have respect for your perspective. Should we be asking ourselves whether there's more to the story, and whether our attempts to shepherd and speak into to others' lives is becoming confused with culture and extra-biblical expectations?

Dean Taylor: First of all, what a blessing for you, brother Aaron, to even ask a question like that. Let me just say this: Jesus told us that we are going to have a 75% fail rate in our evangelism, because he said that we would cast seed, and the seed would fall on four different types of ground, and only one of those types of ground would succeed. But that one that makes it brings forth thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. And so I want to encourage you to keep going forward in these things.

There is a balance; when a person comes from our background, there needs to be an understanding, "You came to this community for a reason, you liked what you saw. Now why is it, a year later, you're not happy?" So there does need to be something on our part, as we come into your communities, that is able to bend to that. On the other hand, when we go through all this, we're looking for something with purpose, something that makes sense. And as brother David said, we're willing usually to do some pretty radical things if it makes sense and we feel were part of something that's going forward and having a purpose. What it seems to just be... when it doesn't make sense, and it becomes a bickering of the different things, and it seems odd, and it doesn't seem to be going anywhere, and it becomes a frustration, then we have to make a choice. But it is difficult.

I remember, in my journey, when I first heard the word Mennonite, I'd never heard the word before, when I started reading it in the Army. I thought it was a tribe of Israel, like Midianites and Mennonites you know, I'd never heard of it before. And I remember I got this Mennonite book, a little picture book that I found in a bookstore, and it was the first time I saw the words plain and fancy, and I legitimately thought it was a misprint, because here they were showing the family with the three-piece suit and nice dress, and they're calling that plain, and I turned the page and over here they had this jeans and T-shirt, and they're calling that fancy, and I thought there must be a mistake. Going forward in my journey I've learned to appreciate a lot of those things, but nevertheless, this is a hard thing, but I want to encourage you to keep... if we're not planting kingdom, we're in that hiding our coin in the ground line and we've got the chance of being called a wicked servant.

But please don't get discouraged; keep doing it. This 75% will come through us and they'll go again. Keep doing it, and let your light shine, because there is a world out there that needs to hear what you have to say. And even sometimes the most radical looking person you see on the street that has all the things attached is the very guy that is looking for something that has meaning and that has association, and you have something to offer to them. Take what you have. Your rebuke that you give to us in our plainness, brother Aaron, amen for that, we need to hear some of that. Now do it with purpose and take it out and fulfill the kingdom message. And I want to receive the rebukes that you give to us in our modernistic world. But let's all keep taking the kingdom message forward. But it's, it's hard.

David Bercot: We found just trying to build a church with seekers (we weren't doing any of the things you are), we found it next to impossible, which is why Dean and I both ended up moving to Pennsylvania and joining established groups. I will say, what you're running into, maybe what would save a lot of heartache, if there was a way to communicate this up front, those of us who come from non-plain backgrounds are not used to that sort of accountability. It took me a long time to learn and understand that, because that is a very, very foreign to those of us who did not grow up plain. It probably helped me that I grew up Jehovah's Witness; they do have a good bit of accountability and input into your life, but still, nothing to the degree that I've experienced in the Anabaptist circles. And I've come to understand it now, how the Anabaptist system works, but it has taken me a long time.

That is a huge bridge to cross, even when it's explained to you upfront, you know, until you experience it in the how it works. And I thought probably Dean's army background has probably helped him a lot in working in with that. But the individualism that most people know as Evangelical Protestants, they just are not prepared for the kind of accountability that is going to exist in a conservative Anabaptist church. I don't know the answer, other than try to explain to people upfront, so at least they aren't caught unawares, so you don't invest years of your life only to have them leave, and maybe leave on bad terms. I think I would try to communicate what it's going to be like upfront. But even then, since it's something so new to them, I know they're not going to fully appreciate it until they are experiencing it. You know, I've come to the point where, yes, I can thrive in it, I can understand it, and be part of it.

It helps me that I'm part of the mission outreach of a larger church, so I got to get started on the ground floor, where I feel like I've been able to have some of the input on our standards and things like that. It's really hard when you come into a very established community, and you feel as a non-plain person that you have no input period, and everything is conforming to someone else's culture, and you may have convictions in your own mind that some of the things they are doing are actually scripturally wrong, and very rarely are those given any weight. You know, you're viewed as oddball, radical, whatever.

One of the most common complaints I hear is that it's always a one-way street, we have to listen to everything they say, but nothing we say is given any weight. Now I'm not making that statement now as an accusation, I'm saying, that is the response I hear from a lot of seekers, and I would say, let's make sure that that's not true, that that's just maybe a perception. But there is probably some truth to it, and understandably so. You've got something that has worked, and you hardly can be expected to say, "Alright, let's just throw it all down and start over and do it your way," no, you've already got something that's working, and obviously you're going to want to stick with that.

Again, what I said before, I think it's just a feeling of some sensitivity that, "Well, we can kind of see it your way." And particularly if there is something wrong, that's unscriptural, that our churches are doing, that we show we're responsive to that and not that it is just a one-way street, you know, "We'll give you all the input, we'll tell you what's wrong with your life, but that's as far as it goes, we don't want to hear you might have to say on the other end." Now again, I don't think it's that terrible, but that is the perception. So did I say that too harsh to you guys? Aaron, did we even answer your question?

Aaron Stoll: You got a good start.

David Bercot: To fit into a community, I think those people are taking on a whole lot. I think it would be good if they could show they can work in a regular church setting before they try the community like yours; if someone was coming to me for advice, that's what I'd tell them.

Nathan Overholt: Well, I see hands moving there; I'm sorry, but we're going to have to shut this down, it's past time. God bless each one of you for sharing tonight, and getting us some conversation here, and I hope that you've been blessed in a small way.