

# AGWM Seminar with Melvyn Ming

July 1, 2003

Tape 4

**Ming:** I think you have to intentionally work at how do we move it from here to here. I think that is a proactive strategy. I think that I am not sure this is something we need to revisit. You do need to make sure that what you say is, is. You know, some churches need to set a course of action. That's just PR and that's where you have out of alignment. But assuming they are the reality, and I would say reading them. John and Joy brought them for me this morning. By the way, I looked for six months in the Evangel and couldn't find them. But looking at them, I actually thought they were quite good. I actually thought there needed to be a few more steps to move them from here to here. And in terms of leadership, it needs to become a working part of the agenda and not just something in the manual. I am not sure you are not well on the journey. You can always tweak them. But if they are reality, which it seems to me they were. And again, I am not enough of an insider to know; I could be wrong. I think it is more a matter of, How are we going to make this who we are and live it? I think there are some very definite ways. I mentioned a couple to you. Right now, I think it is the eight-statement business. Right now they are basically in sentence format, and there is no parallelism to them, which is okay. But I think if you are going to do that, you have to establish a key word, because people aren't going to remember eight sentences that have no parallels. You probably need key words as a memory device. The other thing you probably need is amplification of them, because a lot of them use words with multiple meanings. I bet if we have six different people at your table, we could get five different explanations of what each one means. We use the same word, but we don't use it to mean the same thing. I think we need something to reveal the intent of the word. At different levels, probably in a committee meaning or a team meeting, you are using key words to keep focus. We want to make sure that our values are reflected in our vision statement. You might even have them on a poster or something. But then when you are orienting people, use the expanded version, not just the eight sentences and all that. Then you discipline yourself as a leader when you are making this transition that when someone puts something on the table, your answer is this question, "How does it relate to our values?" All of a sudden, it makes people think about it. People will soon learn that before they present something, they had better be able to answer that question, which cause people to start obsessing, evaluating, and filtering using those eight as filters. I think those are just... I am not sure we need to revalue them as much as you need to move them ahead in practice. Again, I would have to look at it more to know.

**Howard:** You've talked a lot about working with other people to change as a leader in change. I just spent the last week with candidate missionaries and MAs, and I have realized that I have to do a lot of adaptation over the next several years to adjust to this generation. I am not ready to wear an earring yet, but it does require a lot of moving ahead in my thinking. Otherwise, I will lose my ability to lead them. Can you comment on that? You have done a good job of presenting the American church to us, but those churches are where our recruits are going to come from if we are going to have any. It is not just related to these current candidates.

**Mel:** I think I'll go back to one thing I mentioned earlier. I think as a leadership body, you have to get more sophisticated to understand the generations. By the way, you are going to have to help your recruits get more sophisticated, because they are going to feel like pastors and church leaders of previous generations. They need to learn how to articulate the message to the audience. I mentioned last night to some people a book I would suggest if you are coming back from the field to itinerate. This is a great Christian book called, *Boomers, Xers, and Other Strangers*

produced by Focus on the Family. It is probably the best one related to this ministry out there. You see, it is not a matter of changing the substance, but a matter of communicating in ways that people can embrace. By the way, I have all our churches and cohorts read that, and this is what I get. I get all my senior pastors who are older tell me, "Well, now I understand my kid a little better." And all my youth pastors say, "Now I understand how my head pastor thinks." I get just the opposite depending on who reads the book. It is just being able to communicate. Paul adjusts the message to the audience when he travels. The message did not change, but the vehicle did. We have to help people do that. It is a pretty simple way.

I think another way is that they do respond to leadership organizations almost opposite. As a rule, an overgeneralization, Builders are positionals; Millennials are almost totally relational and resent position. Now, you can make them all work together if you understand the nuance. I think we have to help people get a little more sophisticated at that. We cannot afford to be any one generation. The Great Commission says that. We can't afford to be only Boomers, or in thirty years, we're gone. By the way, in the Assemblies of God, we do fairly well with youth, but then lose them until they are 35. Just count up the number of people in their thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, and twenties in your audience. We cannot keep doing that. I don't know if I answered your question adequately, Howard.

**Howard:** You did well. Now, if you would just add a little. I don't mean to sound as if I am critiquing your answer, but could you expand it to show how we can keep expanding ourselves? You've talked about how other people change, but how do we change?

**Ming:** That, honestly, is one of the fun things to do with these younger generations. Because they aren't positional and hierarchical, they respond very well to peer-coaching. So, I have the joy of working with a lot of these young people. I will say to them, "You know, I am in my fifties, and I am going to miss a lot of clues. So, if I miss a clue, tell me. Help me see it." Now, they love pointing out something to you. It actually bonds us together. One of the greatest clues one of these young guys gave me was when I was sitting in a church service with him. There were tons of people worshipping God. They are young people, passionate and with their hands raised. All of a sudden, he pokes me and says, "Watch." The guy leading all of a sudden said, "Everybody put your hands up." Now, they were almost all up. I watched about half of them come down. Then he kept goading and pushing them, telling them what to do. Within five minutes, a quarter of the audience was seated. They were all worshipping till then. When we got outside, I asked the man what happened. He said, "They were free to worship until he told them how. Then, he turned them off, and they reacted to him, not God." I have watched that since. When you start telling them how to worship, they sit down. When you tell them be free to worship, they are exuberant. There was a good example, Howard. If all of you have young people coming into your mission, tell them to coach you. Every so often, they'll tell me all the new words and gestures. You know, every generation has their own gestures. The Boomers are out here, and the Millennials are here. They all have them, and they show them to me. They have fun, and you have fun. That's a learning community, by the way. Learning from each other. By the way, you ought to tell them why you react sometimes. Then they can understand your generation. I think I've got about five more minutes. Yes.

**Questioner:** This is a question about relationship. A question related to one earlier. \_\_\_\_\_ How do we do this? How do we work this out?

**Mel Ming:** That is reality. The interesting thing is that over the next few years, it is going to become less of an issue than it is now, and here's why. If you look at Builders and Boomers, they talk about single and married. Xers don't. You call an Xer single, and they get mad. If you look at

the churches that way, singles and marrieds mix. They didn't with Boomers and Builders. Take for example, the word single's ministry. To young people are people who are divorced or who couldn't find somebody, they don't view it as a causative word. They see it as something offensive. It will become less of an issue because they tend to work with single and married mixes more. I do think that instead, if when you work with the young women (or women of any age, because age really doesn't matter here), if they will get two or three together, then there is propriety and everything is comfortable. If you will encourage them with their spouses, then all the better, because everyone relaxes. That is where they may want to network two or three pastors together. They should also leverage events at a neutral location, where there are already going to be people. I would say that most pastors do not have the expectations on single missionary women to take initiative that way. They do expect to see them at the event. I don't think it's right or wrong, but I think it is an accurate perception.

Another thing that faces us on that issue is that we are not one in our view of women in ministry in our Fellowship. I have a lot of fun because my wife is ordained. When she was ordained, our son-in-law started calling her the reverend mother. My mother was ordained before my father. I believe in women in ministry and am pretty zealous for this. But you have to know we have some schism, and those of us who view the contribution and values need to make sure we articulate that in circles of influence there, but I do think for neutral affiliates.

**Woman:** We recently received a six-side questionnaire that they requested we fill out with black ink. It was from a Gen-X missions pastor and contained the normal questions about our ministry and so on. Then it also contained questions like, "How would you lead a person to Christ?" The only thing we could figure out is that maybe they support people from many different backgrounds and groups and wanted to make sure we were doing what they thought was correct. Also they said they were going to evaluate whether or not our ministry lined up with their church, and that would determine if the support would be continued. I was just wondering if you could comment if you thought this was a trend that would continue or anything else on it.

**Ming:** It is a definite trend. By the way, I am not embracing it or negating it, but it is an example of the shift and the change in values. You see, at this point I am going to respond, but please give me a moment to get to the response, because there are several issues we have to unpack to get to it. The Builder generation and many of the Boomers like me thought of career missionaries, and once you made a commitment, you didn't stop. I have never stopped supporting a missionary once I started supporting them. I just never have, because my framework was that way. Gen-Xers and Millenials do not view a life-long commitment as a big value. They think you may be a missionary for a while and then not a missionary for a while. They much more think of seasons and this kind of thing. They think I might go give five years here and then do something else. All of the activities may be Christian, but they don't buy the traditional life-long call kind of thing. I am not defending their position, but that is where they come from. The other thing is that they see a lot of value in doing missions as opposed to supporting missions. That transfers their money in a real sense. To me those are huge issues.

The other thing that comes out of it is because of the generational thing. If the Builders, who were organizational, got a report from Headquarters that talked about what missions is doing around the world, they felt their money was well spent. They viewed the corporate as a reflection of their individuals. The Xers do not. They want to know what happened to the dollar they gave to you. They are very outcome focused. They don't want to know what your field did. This is true across denominational lines. We experience it like everybody else. They expect all kinds of things from, you know, Will you make this video? Will you do this? Because in a sense they want you on their relational team. They want to know what they got for the investment. They are playing the

alignment issue. "Here's what we are about. What are you about? That is how we want to invest our money."

The other thing is that many people from my generation divided our money because we wanted to support world missions. We made sure we had missionaries from all over the world. We supported every missionary from the Northwest, but we wanted our people to think globally. The Gen-Xers would rather pick one country and dump all their money there. They would rather think globally and invest locally. I think that is probably a reality that we are going to have to live with and adjust to. This comes back to what I said though. If you were from my school, you could skip a furlough and keep your support. The truth is now that you will find if you miss a furlough, the check stops. That is just the way it is. That is generational. In their mind, if they are making an investment in you, you should be making an investment back. They did not view asking you to fill out the form as an inconvenience. The other thing I can almost guarantee you (even though I have no idea what church that was) is that because they asked you to write in pen, they were going to photocopy it. They wanted it to be written because they wanted it to be retro, which is Gen-X. As I told someone at break, if you go to a Boomer church, you have your PowerPoint, and be slick. If you go to a Gen-X church, take a newsprint and write. They like retro.

**David:** Define "retro."

**Mel Ming:** The way you think life is. I'm sorry, David. You opened up man. I just couldn't pass that up. Think sixties or seventies.

**David:** That's me!

**Woman:** Have we not had success in communicating? For example, in the short-term trips, they think they are just as effective, but we know that's just not true. You know, the two-week missions trips once a year. We know that is a fact, but we know it isn't as effective as some of us who stay long term. Are we not communicating or does that not matter to them?

**Ming:** Both/and. 1) No, I guarantee that no one has ever talked to them about the return in investment of different kinds of missions. Nobody has talked that way. People have said this, this, and this, but I bet you well over 90 percent of these churches with younger missions teams have never seen any data that supports your conclusion. I believe it is true, by the way, but I bet you they have never seen it. I don't think we have articulated it to them. How we have given that data to are people who already believe it, like the general presbytery. We haven't given it to the grassroots. I think another thing is that the whole issue on postmodernism is that you want to experience your faith firsthand. That is why they are so open to Pentecost. You can lead them in worship. I saw a guy who is leading a congregation (I'm not endorsing this by any means) in what we might call Charismatic worship, and he just tells everyone, "Sing in a language you have never learned." They just all start doing it. Then after a little bit, they ask, "Hey! What are we doing?" That's Gen-X. Their personal experience is far higher than what is given through somebody else. One of the things we have to recognize that we may not be comfortable with from them is that many of them have a lot of wealth. We are probably going to have to learn how to do both to keep them in the camp, or the para-churches are going to siphon them off.

**L. John Bueno:** The key is how we react to those two-week visits. If the two-week visit is a meaningful visit then we have an opportunity to get them coming back as long-term missionaries. We are seeing that, but it depends on what kind of reaction we get on the field. Particularly in some areas of the world, if you get a lot of these people, the missionary can get weary of it all. They pick up on that. So the experience is not necessarily positive. If it is a

positive experience, then there is a chance for some mentorship in the process, and we will probably get them long term.

**Ming:** We need to keep the both/and philosophy. We need to be committed to the long-term missionary, but if we see that we can make one part of the other, we can bring them along. If you make it you're in or you're out, then you have lost them. I'm sorry; I've gone over on my time. I enjoyed spending a day-and-a-half with you. God bless you.