

Lance: Welcome to the Real Life Discipleship Podcast – where the conversation about discipleship is always real, for real people, in real life.

I am Lance Wigton I am the Communications Director here at Real Life and today we've got a special treat – we have Patrick Annotti who is our Online Pastor at Real Life Ministries and coincidentally enough we are going to be talking about discipleship, online, electronics, digital – however you want to describe it – and some of the potential pitfalls and – essentially it's a bigger topic – it is talking about discipleship in 2019 – because that is a form of communication. So, Patrick, welcome and the first question out of the chute would be tell us a little bit about what our online campus is moving to and why.

Patrick: Yeah – that's good – so when we think about online campus it's kind of a – well I'll say it this way, when I first heard the term – the words online – and campus – didn't jive in my mind – because campuses, church plants, churches in general – my mind immediately goes to the physical – location – were stuff physically happens – and so – it has been fun to rethink and shift in my thinking, my focus on what a campus can actually be. 01:28 So, what we are essentially doing is creating a place where people who either, can't or won't – come to a church service – can connect. It's really that simple – so when you think about the "can't's" the people who – you know North Idaho – we get a lot of snow in the winter – and there are places in our community where people are physically snowed in at times – and they can't get to – they can't get to church they can't have community. I had a conversation with a gal the other day who – whose father was in hospice and she wanted to be with him and so they were able to engage in a church service online – and she couldn't physically be here – but she still – her and her dad were able to have that community here at Real Life.

The "won't's" are – you know a lot of times the people who – because of fear, anxiety, past hurts, relationships, broken perspectives – the list goes on and on – they won't come to church – but they will engage digitally. And so what we have done is essentially – if you can picture this – we have tried to take as many of the physical components of a campus – think through things like the lobby, for example – is there a way to create a digital space that would be a "digital lobby" – where people can connect, shake hands, high five, check in, ask for prayer – things like that –

Lance: Just like I would in a virtual campus – [\[physical campus - the on-line campus IS the virtual campus\]](#)

Patrick: That's exactly right – yep – yep, and so digitally trying to mirror as much of a

physical location as, as we can – and then the obvious things are – you know we want people to be able to experience the worship service – we want people to be able to experience the message, to the best of our abilities. and so...

Lance: So, I hear right off the bat one of the advantages of the online campus would be that there are reasons – you know life gets in the way – and so I would think that's potential for people – this is a very churchy term – but, less of a chance that they would potentially "back slide" – because they stay in the habit of going to church.

Patrick: Yes – so one of the things we talk a lot about as we are developing this – is, how can we remove any excuse for people to not be a part of something. This really simply – if you know – if it is "well I couldn't get there because I was sick –" well you know hey we got this online campus – we understand that – you know that people get sick – you get the flu, you get a cold, or your kids are sick, or whatever you're thing is that would seem like an easy out – we want to remove that. To the best of our abilities – so that we are providing a place – you know if my wife is stuck at home with a couple of sick kids, I still want her to have a place where she can engage in relationship. And so our hope is to cut out a lot of those excuses that people might use – or even justifications for why I can't be in church this weekend.

Lance: Do you think that church leaders – because I have heard this conversation a lot about the pluses and minuses of doing an online campus – do you think that church leadership maybe is stuck – maybe a generation later – when it comes to thinking about the potential of online campus.

Patrick: Yeah – I do – I think that's a great question – I think there is a lot of fear involved with this conversation – you know there is a lot of "what ifs" – and I have even had some of those that I have experienced it myself – like – man what if people stopped physically coming and everybody just started showing up to this online campus –

Lance: Because it's easier.

Patrick: Because it's easier – I mean I can wake up – I can go downstairs, make a cup of coffee – I can go get back in bed – and you are telling me that I can get all of the things that I can get any physical location – will yeah I'm going to buy into that – I don't have to leave my house and – and I would say there is some truth to that – that could potentially be there – if we are not doing a good job of continually reminding people that they are supposed to be in face-to-face relationship where you can actually – you can reach out and wrap your arms around somebody who is struggling. That is ideal – where

you can shake somebody's hand – where you can have a face to face conversation over coffee. We are always going to push people towards that kind of relationship. But then there are realities, that are just realities, where people can't do that – or people don't want to do that – or they are not ready for that yet – and so how do we target them? But at the same time – in – whatever the message is that we are communicating through online campus is – we want that to be – you need to be in relationship and if it is possible to do that in proximity with one another – do that – join a Life Group – check out our Recovery Group – get your kids involved in Children's Ministry – whatever that might look like.

Lance: So, it is a platform [06:18](#) that is - not necessarily the end destination.

Patrick: Right –

Lance: But, because of life – or whatever – or sometimes you are talking about a new person – you know I see in other environments like, retail and things like that – people are – people were more likely to check out the store where there are going to go, before they go to the store. So this is a whole other avenue of people that are – I don't want to say shy – but are – you know – maybe fearful of coming to the church for the first time. They can literally experience a very similar scenario online. So that would be another group that would be positive for.

Patrick: Yeah it's like 90% – I think – 90% of people will check out a restaurant on something like Yelp – before they will physically show up – so I want to know, do they have the kids menu – I have two kids – do they have a kid's menu? Tell me about the cost – what is the environment – is a casual? to I need wear a suit? And that is – that is a reality that is in our culture – is that people want to experience something as close to the real thing as they can – without actually having to show up. That's just the truth. And – I would say there are dangers in that, but that is not an inherently bad thing. So for us as a church – why not be people there – if that is where they're at – why not meet them there.

Lance: Absolutely – so, we're talking about church and this is the Discipleship Podcast so moving to the topic of discipleship – I have heard it said that, if the Internet, or the electronics online – however you want to describe it – was the best way to disciple people – then Jesus would have shown up in 2010 not when He did. What would your response be to that statement?

[08:08](#)

Patrick: Is an interesting statement. I think that at the core – we have talked a little bit about this – at the core of discipleship – here at Real Life we would say is this thing called relationship. If you spend more than 10 minutes at Real Life Ministries you are going to hear somebody talk about relationship. And we talk a lot about how real relationship is central to everything that we do. It is central to the Great Commission. It is the Great Commandment that Jesus... You know... He tells us that relationship is key with God and with others – and so I think where the breakdown can start to happen – or where things get confusing – is how this relationship take place. A good example is – I have some of my strongest relationships with some people who don't live in the same city that I do but through technology we are able to know each other – I am able to know them and be known by them – and I would say that is a really strong relationship. And so why email wasn't around when Jesus was making disciples – why Facebook wasn't around – I have some opinions on that – I don't know that anybody can really answer that to be honest. I don't know. But I would say – you know we were talking a few minutes ago this – if Paul would've had the opportunity to send an email I think he would have. If he is sitting in prison and he would've had Internet access and he could have FaceTimed with Titus I think he absolutely would have. So for us to say just because this wasn't available at that time means we shouldn't take advantage of it – I think it is a dangerous mindset to have.

Lance: What about – what about human connection? Because I am not going to move as a person towards – closer to Christ, or becoming more like Christ without a human connection where people are saying you might be thinking you're doing something but you are really not doing that. You know accountability. Obviously a better way to say that. How can that even happen electronically? The human connection.

Patrick: The human connection – you mean like in terms of accountability – like something like that? –[10:28](#)

Lance: Accountability – just the – just the fact that I know that I have been known and I also know who you are – I mean that it is a unique – it doesn't happen all the time, when I am around people – but when it does, when humans connect with each other, I think that is where growth can happen.

Patrick: Yeah – I think – I think it's a great, you know – when I think about online campus, a constant red thread drumbeat that you will hear through online campus is – if you have the opportunity to physically connect to a local church – whether you are here again Post Falls Idaho or you are in Atlanta Georgia wherever you are – we want you to physically connect, if you are able to do that – if you are willing to do that – that is – that

is ideal. And so that will be a regular drumbeat. Something that I think is really important is this – I get this picture in my mind of the grandparents who had a new grand baby that doesn't live in the same city that they do – but they are able to regularly connect with a son or daughter and their new baby via Skype, FaceTime, Zoom – I would say that there is a real relational connection that takes place there. And if it can take place in that environment, I think that it can take place in other environments. So I believe with intentionality we can still experience some of that face to face as close to that physical – I can reach out and touch this person – as possible, even though they might be thousands of miles away. If that makes sense.

Lance: Well, I am excited to see what the online campus – when the launch happens – what it actually looks like and since the people listening aren't necessarily here in the Kootenai County area of North Idaho – which – lucky for them because the weather is not great – but they can tune in – when Patrick?

Patrick: So, April 14th we will be officially launching the Online Campus Platform. That is when the live chat will take place – live services – people will be able to actually – actually ask for live prayer– take next steps – get connected to a local church – things like that – that will be April 14th that will be up and running [reallifeministries.com](http://reallifeministries.com) and then there'll be a very clear and obvious link to the online campus from there.

Lance: OK, looking forward to it, and thanks for your time today.

Thank you for joining us on the Real Life Discipleship Podcast where we want you to remember discipleship is simple it's just not easy.