

John Finkelde: Hey, hub members. Great to be with you today. I'm here with pastor Mark Edwards. Mark is the pastor of Inglewood Church. He's a father of a couple of children, married to Melinda, he loves drinking coffee and he is a Freo Dockers fanatic, a bit like me, and he really loves seeing the Lord work in his own life but also in the lives of people in this church, and in the broader community.

He's been at Inglewood Church for 25 years, which is a lengthy time in any pastorate, let alone the same church, and led a successful merger between a Baptist Church and a Church of Christ church, here in suburbs of Perth. And he survived that merger 13 years ago, which is a remarkable event in itself.

Surviving a merger of churches from two different movements indicates a pretty good pastor and leader we're talking to today. He's seen the church grow in the last 10 years, from 70 people in the church, and we're talking active database numbers here to around 300 today. Mark, great to have you in the hub.

Mark Edwards: Thank you, John. Thanks for the opportunity. Great to talk to you mate.

John Finkelde: Yeah. Look, I'm looking forward to this conversation because you've done some remarkable things in your pastoral life in terms of merging two churches, and also seeing really good growth over the last decade so I think we'll unpack some good things here.

But let's do the 62nd lightning round! What's your favourite food?

Mark Edwards: Scallops.

John Finkelde: Oh, nice. What's the best book you've read in recent times?

Mark Edwards: Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes, by Richards and O'Brien.

John Finkelde: Sounds like a good one actually. I like the sound of that, might have to get one. Your dream holiday destination?

Mark Edwards: Chicago.

John Finkelde: Okay. Cause you've been there a couple of times for leadership stuff, but do you like it as a holiday destination?

Mark Edwards: I'd love to take my family over there, John.

John Finkelde: Yeah. I often get that vibe when you go somewhere without them and you think I'd love to bring my family here.

Besides Jesus, we always leave him out of this one so people don't feel the pressure. Who's your favourite person in the Bible?

Mark Edwards: I have to say Gideon.

John Finkelde: *Wow. Yup. Good one. What's your favourite downtime activity?*

Mark Edwards: Doing nothing, John. Talking to no one and doing nothing.

John Finkelde: *Sounds like a pastor. I can relate to that.*

Coffee or tea?

Mark Edwards: Coffee.

John Finkelde: Book or podcast?

Mark Edwards: Old school, John, Book.

John Finkelde: *Okay. Beach or mountains?*

Mark Edwards: Definitely the beach.

John Finkelde: *Jog or bike?*

Mark Edwards: I'm going to have to take the third and say walking.

John Finkelde: *I'm with you on that one, occasionally I'll do an old man jog, but it looks terrible, it feels terrible, so I give it up. Just go the walk.*

Mark, *you've had a remarkable 25 years at Inglewood Church, not only just with the merger, I mean, it's surviving that, leading that and leading it successfully. It's amazing. But you've also seen significant growth over the last 10 years in your church.*

What's been your most difficult decision that you've had to make while leading a growing church?

Mark Edwards: Yeah, great question, John. For me the most difficult decision has always been letting staff go. So when you have to have those really honest, frank and difficult conversations, when the church and the journey that the church is on takes precedence over individual staff.

Having those difficult conversations when it's time for a staff member to move on to whatever's next for them, in the Kingdom of God. That's the most difficult decisions for me.

I'm very much a person that likes people, relationships are very important to me. So yeah, letting staff go, that's really difficult.

John Finkelde: *How do you, how have you kind of, assist the point where you feel like a staff member needs to move on to another, if another role in the church or what's often more likely, is another role outside the church. How do you assist, if that point has arrived?*

Mark Edwards: One of the interesting things about Inglewood Church is, we've trained up a lot of young pastors, who've gone out and are now pastoring in other contexts, similar positions or more senior roles. So we've done that, I've done that about five times.

John Finkelde: *Wow.*

Mark Edwards: There are guys out there in ministry and other places. Part of the answer to that question is that, they have grown to the point where it's time for them to move on to the next challenge.

So either they've outgrown me or they've outgrown the church, or just that there needs to be a change in their particular area of ministry, and that's probably more difficult. When it's their time, for them and for the church, it's best that they move on, for them and for the church.

John Finkelde: *Yeah. And do you see that in the ministry that they're leading, that there was some things that are highlighting the need for change? Is that one of the ways that you'd assist them?*

Mark Edwards: Yeah. That's definitely happened where the church has grown to a certain point changed, culturally, and we're ready for the next aspect of change, and perhaps they're not the person to take us to that next level.

Sometimes we need to bring someone new in. I believe that if you bring someone in from another place, you are changing culture, you're bringing in a different culture into your own church, and there's been times when we've needed to do that.

John Finkelde: *How do you prepare for those awkward conversations that, you know, in your own processing, in your own heart? How do you prepare? Are you a fly by the seat of pants guy, or do you write stuff down or how do you get yourself ready to have that, what is a very sensitive conversation?*

Mark Edwards: The answer now is very different to what it was at the start. Thankfully those conversations have got better because I've learned how to deal with them better. You've got to get to a common purpose, helping both parties understand what is best for them, and what is best for you, and what is best for the church.

Just understanding common purpose, and that's not always easy to get to, but that's where I want to start. What's best for us, what's best for you, what's best for the church, and if we can agree on that, then the conversation is not always as difficult as what perhaps it needs to be.

And I've tried to also paint a future for them, which is a good future, help them to see how this can actually be really helpful for them in their ministry walk, in their life, what this is actually going to mean

for them going forward. It doesn't need to be the end of their ministry story, it needs to be the start of a new ministry story for them.

John Finkelde: *Do you do a lot of time just thinking that through, or do tend to write things down to help your process, before you go into the conversation?*

Mark Edwards: The methods, I write it down on my phone. I've got the notes and notes application on my phone, and I'll pray through quite intently, and then I'll have three or four key points on my phone that I want the conversation to end up around. I will intentionally lead that conversation.

John Finkelde: *That's great. I like getting into the nitty gritty of how you do stuff, cause this will help leaders when they have to have these conversations.*

Another real pragmatic question on this, do you have the phone in front of you when you're having the conversation or any notes? Or do you just go from a bullet point thing in your head?

Mark Edwards: No, I totally save that. The total pragmatic is, I've literally got the notes application on my phone. I'll have three or four points on that, and before the conversation starts, I'll want to have where we are going to land written down and I'll literally have that open on my phone.

John Finkelde: *Great. That's great. That's helpful because some guys think they have to fly by the seat of their pants to have these conversations, which generally I think preparation is far better, and if you've got notes in front of you, whether on the phone or paper, it kind of helps you keep on track as well.*

Mark Edwards: For me, John, I want to be able to reflect after the conversation, that we have got to that place. And so for me, it's important to quantify what that place is, and more we have felt that we've actually got there.

John Finkelde: *Oh, this is gold Mark. I love this. This is really helpful. Wise leadership from an experienced pastor, that I think hub members you could take a hold of some of those real practical stuff.*

Now in the last 10 years, Mark, your church has grown from 70, we're talking active database numbers to 300, that's significant growth in the decade. What changes, and I imagine it's quite a bundle, what are the key changes you've made in the church, as you've grown through those sort of numbers?

You'll probably say everything.

Mark Edwards: Yeah. Everything has changed, there's so much that has changed. The staff has absolutely changed, and so it must demand that past conversation, the people that get you to a certain point aren't necessarily going to be the ones that get you to the next point.

So staff has changed.

John Finkelde: *Could I ask you on that, has it been different staff roles as well that have changed through that process?*

Mark Edwards: Yeah, there has been, some stuff have moved to different areas, but mostly I have brought in a passionate staff. For me that's the number one requirement, I just want someone that's passionate. Because I'm thinking of passion to take you through that next level cause it's hard, the mission and challenge is really hard, and so you need passion to keep going.

John Finkelde: *Other changes?*

Mark Edwards: Structure. The way that we do church, the way that the church is structured, how we organise departments, that's changed a lot. There's been a lot more diversification, a lot less centrality about the church. Things are, it's more, I don't want to say silo, but there is more of a silo mentality.

Having said that, one of the key things for me in church is that, we have to all win, otherwise none of us win.

John Finkelde: *Great, I love that.*

Mark Edwards: Yeah. That's a value we have as staff, is that we want each area to have a win, as alone, none of the areas are winning.

Constitution, John, we had to change our constitution because it didn't reflect. It wasn't helpful for us as a church. It was a small church constitution, and it was quite restrictive in how you make decisions, and we needed to match up responsibility and accountability with authority. The constitution had to change to reflect that.

But the biggest change has been culture. The culture of the church has to change as it grows.

John Finkelde: *If someone walked into your church 10 years ago compared to walking into it now, if someone did that kind of, measuring the church as it were, the feel of the culture 10 years ago to now, what would be the one big thing that would hit them, that would be different in the culture?*

Beyond just the size of the thing, but actually in the culture of the church? What would be the one big thing that would knock them back?

Mark Edwards: This might surprise you, but I'm going to say the biggest change has been our sense of humour.

John Finkelde: *Have you got less of it, or more of it?*

Mark Edwards: No, we've got more of it. When people come into our church, I hope, I believe they feel that this is a place where they can laugh, where they can be themselves, where there's a sense of warmth, a sense of openness, and where there's just a positive cool climate, and that's shown.

If there's laughter in a church, that's a really good sign.

John Finkelde: *Yeah. Do you think, this could sound wrong, but do you think you've become less serious in, as a group, a corporate, not a corporate wide, but as a gathering, you think you're being a bit less serious? I'm not saying you don't count things as being serious, what you're doing is very serious. Do you think in gatherings you've become a bubble of light?*

Mark Edwards: I think that, I want to put a disclaimer also. I want to say that we're very passionate about our faith, very passionate about what we do, but I do want to say that, I don't think we're letting the smaller things bother us as much as what we used to.

John Finkelde: *Yeah. I like that. I agree with you when there's laughter and a sense of lightness around the church, it's like you walk into a church that's having a monstrous, fractious split, the atmosphere is dark. It doesn't matter how many lights you've got on, the atmosphere was dark and heavy.*

You walk into a church that's got some health and life and there is a sense of lightness and laughter and strength in that. And obviously, dealing with serious issues in people's lives, serious issues of the gospel. But I like the fact that you've increased your sense of humour in the culture. Well done.

I know you do like your sense of humour. You and I banter with each other regularly over messenger, and most of it is absolutely hilarious, for you and I anyway!

Mark Edwards: Yes. I wouldn't like to comment any further on that!

John Finkelde: *No, no, no. That's private parcels business. We are not releasing that to the public at this stage.*

Mark Edwards: No.

John Finkelde: *What changes have you made personally to your pastoral life during the 10 years of this growth?*

Mark Edwards: It's such an interesting question. I have, what I want to say just practically, that I spend a lot more time in the office, and I want to also say that I spend a lot more time on staff.

Just some plain mentoring, listening and training staff.

And I want to say that I spend a lot more time on strategy, in terms of, why are we actually doing this? What is it we're actually trying to achieve? How we want to actually achieve that? What's the outcome?

And the other thing I didn't write down is that we measure a lot more. I know you asked about my personal change, but I think I'm much more concerned about those things than what I was before.

John Finkelde: *I think you've nailed some key issues. If you're a pastor or church leader out there, and your church is sitting around about, say a hundred in attendance, Mark has just nailed some of the*

things that you have to shift to get to that, where your church is now Mark's, 200 in attendance, 300 active databases.

It's the focus on key leaders, mentoring, discipling key leaders, strategy, setting aside time to think and to look at the bigger picture, and direction of where you're going. And some of those shifts that you, if you don't make them, your church does get stuck at a level. And I know there's all sorts of x factors around that, we won't go down that rabbit trail today, but if you don't make some of the key changes Mark has just outlined, you just, I think you are absolutely committed to stay to a hundred people.

Mark Edwards: I think staff grow churches don't they John. If you have great staff that are doing really good things, you're multiplying yourself. And so, you've actually got to help them to be more effective, which is such a better strategy then doing that yourself, all yourself.

You still need to be there, being an evangelist, being a carer, being a pastor, you're still going to be doing those things, but that can't be your primary focus because you are gathering the 12 around you, aren't you? And you are multiplying, you're multiplying yourself.

John Finkelde: And, I always find that the churches around a hundred in attendance, their biggest barrier, I would say one of their biggest barriers is empowering and releasing others. Letting go of staff, so other people can rise. I find that as a constant mental, emotional, spiritual barrier, that pastors face and you've worked your way through that. So well done sir, well done. It makes a difference I think. I think it's a key factor to be honest with you, in churches growing beyond that a hundred.

We've kind of touched on this topic already, but I'm really interested in what pastors do to develop leaders, to raise leaders, to bring people into a place where they're far more fruitful in doing ministry, and not talking pastoral ministry, just doing ministry and church or doing leadership.

What are a couple of things that you've done that you think, yeah, look, these are the things that I've done that have worked for me, that you think would help other pastors and leaders listening today.

Mark Edwards: In terms of raising up leaders?

John Finkelde: Yeah.

Mark Edwards: I think you have to identify, I mean, I'm a generation out now, so one of the things I do is I asked my young leaders to help me identify other young leaders. Because they're amongst that generation and I want them to say to me, "You know, what Mark, this person's a good person to have a look at."

So I think identifying is really important, bringing them in and trusting them.

My first protocol, because our church has been through such a cultural change of mistrust to trust, I want to trust first. And I want to bring them in and just allow them the grace to fail, and to understand,

and to grow. So in terms of that, identification is important, trust is important. Giving them room to make mistakes.

It's important, to not micromanaging people.

John Finkelde: How do you cope emotionally, at a personal level, with that trust, with the risk related to that, where you're going to release people, empower them, not micromanage, let them go. How do you cope emotionally with that?

Mark Edwards: There's two parts to that. The first implication of your question is that sometimes people break that trust, and that's the pain, for me that's the pain of ministry. There's an injustice there, which sometimes you need to be silent about. We're not in the business where everyone will treat us well all the time. And to be honest, John, I think you just have to find ways to deal with the pain of someone, even a strong word like betrayal, because that's ministry, that's our field.

The alternative is not to trust people, and the alternative is to try to control everything, and I don't actually think you get good results from that.

The second pain is the pain of sending someone out, and them flourishing somewhere else, which is wonderful but also painful too. Wonderful because you've been a part of their story, but for me being a kingdom minded pastor, I do see them flourishing in other places and there's a little twinge of, all that flourishing there, they could have flourished here. But you know that in God's economy you're planting something which you might not ever benefit yourself from personally, but I think God is pleased when he sees that happen.

John Finkelde: I love the heart of what you're talking about is that, freedom and releasing of people, releasing them to have a go. And if it goes belly up, it's better than trying to control everything, which you can't anyway, but it's better than trying to control.

But also releasing yourself from your own insecurity when other people flourish in other places, you go, all right. One of the ways I've handled that, when they've flourished, when they've left and gone, been planted there and it has gone well, is I guess they're actually making me look better.

Mark Edwards: Yeah. I don't know if that's possible, John. I don't know if you could look better!

John Finkelde: Mark, that's the sense of humour, it's coming through again, well done!

Mark Edwards: Quite right, John, and in our best moments we celebrate that.

John Finkelde: Oh, totally, totally. We kill that insecurity beast and go, "You know what, that's what the Lord wants anyway." And also one of the ways I've handled is going, "Okay, this doesn't make me look bad, so get over yourself, John." That's over.

Mark Edwards: Yeah, it's true.

John Finkelde: Whenever a church grows in a city, however the growth comes, it invariably becomes a bit of a honeypot that attracts the bees. So you have inevitables, much as possible we don't want it, that you have an inevitable transfer growth from other churches.

Whether the people are needing a fresh start, or whether a church down the road collapses, implodes and people are looking for a home to go to. Have you handled that inevitable transfer growth of people coming into your church, when your church starts to grow?

Mark Edwards: This is a really great question. At our teen nights, we have teen nights at church where anyone that's on a roster comes along and brings a friend. One of the things, I actually shared on this with the whole church for about five minutes, now I share with them what we say.

We never speak badly about another church in our city. I've been in ministry for too long, I know too many people. So when someone comes to your church from another church, inevitably they will talk about their previous pastor, their previous experience. I'll listen to that, I'll hear it. But what's actually most important to me is their response, and how they dealt with it. I can't deal with the previous pastor and nor will I speak ill of them or their church either. I just won't do that. And we won't do that as a church.

If they come to us from another church, then what we've been called to do is to help them with them, and with what's been going on with them. So to our whole church, anyone that leads in any capacity, I basically say to them, we do not speak ill of other churches.

We talk well of them, we listen. And you know what, John, you never know the situation, and you never know what the truth is. The truth is always somewhere in the middle.

John Finkelde: That's great. I think it's a great way to handle it, is receive people and listen to the grievance, and then go, "All right, time to create a new future".

Mark Edwards: Exactly, that's correct.

John Finkelde: Not time for remembering what happened to you previously.

Last couple of questions. I'm interested in this because your church is growing, grown significantly in the last decade. What would you define as a healthy church?

Mark Edwards: John, there are two things here. One that's overall, and that's helping people say yes to Jesus.

A healthy church is one way people are saying yes to Jesus for the first time, the second time, for the third time. Saying yes to Jesus, whatever it is Jesus is calling them to.

And in terms of leadership and strategy and everything else, I'd say a Church that is healthy is one where you have robust feedback. Feedback that's not taken personally, but where we say we have a common

purpose, we're all trying to get to the same place. If I'm giving you feedback, it's because we all want to get there together.

So I think a healthy church is one where there isn't that level of insecurity, where I cannot give good robust feedback, we can give truth in love. But I think that's the definition of a healthy church, it's where you can see people caring enough about what they're on about, to help each other get there.

John Finkelde: I love those two points, and neither one of them, I want you to notice folks, mentioned growth. The first one was about Jesus, it's about connecting to Jesus, I love that Mark. That's really good, saying yes to Jesus.

And the second one is about heavy relationships that are strong enough, that if someone gives you a bit of, hey look, that's not really how we want to do it around here. Okay. I'm not enjoying hearing that, but I can work with it. And so I'm going to take it away and reshape some things around that. I'd agree with that. I think if you've got robust relationships that can take a bit of back and forth, and people get a bit defensive and upset but then work through it, come out the other side and say, "Okay, I'm good, let's get moving in the right direction around that common purpose."

I love that. I love that. Healthy churches. Okay, Mark, last question.

I ask all interviewees, you get to invite four guests from any time in history, and we leave Jesus out of this, you are bound to a dinner party at your place and you would cook for them, cause I know you love cooking. I've seen your Instagram posts, you're really cool on the cooking thing.

Who would be your four guests?

Mark Edwards: I'm going to say, Jamie Oliver.

John Finkelde: You're going to get him to cook, aren't you?

Mark Edwards: Nigella Lawson.

John Finkelde: Oh come on!

Mark Edwards: I'd like to meet Paul the Apostle, because I suspect that he was quite an abrasive person and I actually would like to make him to say that it's true.

And the fourth person, John, I don't know if you're the generation to even know who this is. I'd like to meet-

John Finkelde: Hey Mark, Mark, hang on, hang on. Is it true that you turned 50 yesterday?

Mark Edwards: No. 49, John.

John Finkelde: That's 49 plus GST, you really think?!?!

Mark Edwards: No, No. GST.

John Finkelde: *You're on the cusp!*

Mark Edwards: What's it like on the other side?

John Finkelde: *It's Wonderful, wonderful, brilliant.*

Mark Edwards: Then the fourth, the response is Avicii. Do you know who Avicii is?

John Finkelde: *Avicii. It is little flavour of ice cream?*

Mark Edwards: No. Avicii is a DJ musician who took his own life. Love his music and his style. Just last year, he committed suicide, and he produced great music for young people, and I'd love to talk to him about what had caused him to make those choices so successful.

He was so incredibly creative and good at what he did. What was leading him down that path? I would have liked to talk to him, just to understand.

John Finkelde: *I can see your dinner party, you'd have Jamie and Nigella, doing the cooking and if Paul was abrasive, send him out there to help them immediately and then you can have your pastoral conversation with Avicii is it?*

You don't want Paul probably in that pastoral conversation, if he turns out to be that abrasive apostle. He's going to get in stuck into this young guy.

Love that. That's very left field. Avicii. The most left field person anyone has ever said, and asked that question is Adolf Hitler.

Mark Edwards: Oh my goodness. Okay. No comment on that one, John!

John Finkelde: *I'll tell you later who it was, but, won't go live with that one. But I think Avicii, that's fairly left field, a DJ, creative guy who has recently taken his life. That's very left field. You're out there with that Adolf Hitler one Mark. Well done.*

Thanks so much for joining us in the hub. This has been so helpful and I know will help a lot of the pastors and leaders who are tuned in to this interview. Thanks, Mark.

Mark Edwards: Yeah, thank you, John. You're very welcome.