



### **Episode 005: Relationship Building in Your Neighbourhood Show Notes**

Thich Truong was born in Hong Kong to a Vietnamese family. He moved to Canada as a child. Thich studied Commerce at the University of Calgary before attending Ambrose Seminary. Thich lives with his wife, Alyssa, in Ottawa where he is the English Pastor at Emmanuel Alliance Church, a trilingual, tri-cultural church. Together they focus on living intentionally where God has planted them, building relationships with their neighbours in creative ways.

#### ***Tell us about yourself and how you came to be passionate about missions?***

- Missions has been a circular experience for me. My family were boat people living as refugees in Hong Kong. During this time, it was missionaries from Canada and the United States who served those of us living in the refugee camps.
- This came full circle when God called me to seminary. During this time, God put missions in the forefront of my life. My first class on missions in January 2009 wrecked me. It brought me back to the reality of who God is, reminding me of His grace and His love.
- For me, missions has been a life journey – it has been a part of my family and my history.
- Now we enjoy learning how to be missionaries wherever God takes us.

***When most Canadian believers hear about missions they think about faraway places. Not all of us think about doing missions here in Canada. What is your purpose and vision in engaging in mission activities in your Canadian neighbourhood?***

- Missions for me has always been about reaching out to those around you whether it's the people across the street or across the world.
- Jesus gave us the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations. In Canada we have the opportunity and privilege of welcoming the nations to our doorsteps.
- We want to be light houses and sources of hope in our neighbourhoods. We want to be recapturing the lost concept of parish – we want people will know that if anything, they can go to the Christians because they know we will care and that we have the answers to the questions they have.

***What is a gift economy? Why is it important and how is it used in building relationships?***

- When we moved to Ottawa we realized how much we needed to build relationships, for our own sanity and to root ourselves as a family in our new home.

- We are millennials and so technology is a huge part of our lives. Through social media we very quickly we discovered a gift economy in our neighbourhood.
- The idea of the gift economy came out of London, England. Whether it's a city block or a neighbourhood, people come together to give things to one another. The premise is that we give what we don't need to others. Instead of selling something on Kijiji or Craig's List, you seek out people in your neighbourhood to find out if anyone needs your unused or unneeded item.
- We started by becoming active participants in the gift economy in our neighbourhood.

*I'm passionate about finding out what God is doing in a neighbourhood or place, and joining in.*

*If people are already gathering, we need to be there.*

- You can discover these gift economies through Facebook. The vast majority of people are using Facebook – it the first place to look. If you can't find anything there, google the name of your neighbourhood along with gift economy and see what you find.
- If nothing is out there, there's always the opportunity to start a gift economy in your neighbourhood.

***Most people think of a pastor's work taking place primarily within the walls of the church. But you do a lot of work outside of the church, particularly out of your home. What are the activities you engage in to reach your neighbourhood?***

- We have been involved in developing a meal swap network – it started in our neighbourhood but has become almost city-wide.
- We have also started giving Vietnamese cooking lessons out of our home
- We also participate in play dates with other families – this is an easy way to meet your neighbourhoods.
- We use social media to connect with our neighbourhoods.

*Although we hear about the evils of social media, I think God has allowed it to thrive for a reason and I think we need to lean into it, and hear the heart beats of what is going on.*

- Food is very spiritual. Souls meet together over food – to share physical meals as well as what is on their hearts.

***How did you come to decide to have meal swaps and cooking lessons?***

- Meal swaps came out of a felt need in our own home – we were so busy between work and connecting with neighbours, when we got home we didn't want to cook but we didn't want to go out to eat. We started asking other family's if this would benefit them as well. When the answer was a resounding, "Yes!" we start creating freezer meals for one another. It has blossomed into something we do very consistently – almost every two weeks.

### Steps to starting a Meal Swap:

- 1.) Logistically, you need a means of communication – we use Facebook Groups. We do limit it to nine families at any given time, even though there are over 100 families in the group.
  - 2.) Each family puts out \$80-100.
  - 3.) We have a sign-up sheet to find out what people want to contribute to each swap.
  - 4.) Each family has to make portions that would serve about 4 people (or 4 cups).
  - 5.) Recipes are included with the food.
  - 6.) You make the food ahead of time and freeze your meals.
  - 7.) We set a date and time to swap the meals.
- While it only needs to take 10 minutes, these swaps often last much longer as people connect and chat and talk about what is going on with their lives.
  - This has allowed us to develop deep, life-giving relationships within our neighbourhood.
  - This started with connections made through the gift economy. However, a lot of the families involved are inviting friends and people are meeting new neighbours.

### *Tips:*

- You will always have 1 or 2 people who won't show up even though they've signed up. There is a need to gently remind each other to respect one another by following through with the commitment.
- Be conscious of how large and geographically diverse the network is getting.
- Be financially conscious of what you're making – what your ingredients cost. It's an exercise in learning to make the most of what you have.
- The cooking lessons started when someone on the gift economy board said "Is there anyone out there who knows how to cook pho?" We talked about it and the logistics and we decided that if everyone chipped in \$5-10 each, we could do this. We could teach them to cook and then share a meal together.

### ***How have you seen your activities bearing fruit?***

- Having authentic and deep conversations with our neighbours around our dinner table.
- We would love for people to journey towards getting to knowing Jesus Christ – that is our ultimate goal.

- Right now, it is meeting their heart needs and spiritual needs.
- We've had people just be raw and honest about broken marriages, raising children, and their desire for community.
- There are very few safe places for people to interact, but when we invite people around our dinner tables, that is an incredibly safe space. All animosities, prejudices, and fears can be set aside and we can share a meal and share from our hearts together.
- People know I'm a pastor and that's the beautiful part of it – people are giving of their lives and receiving of our lives.

***How have the play dates played a role in this?***

- Play dates are so easy.
- We find our son to be a central point of conversation. He is a child of the nations – part Vietnamese, part Polish that lead to people asking a lot of questions about him.
- Play dates have been a natural experience for us. If you know anything about Ottawa, it is a relationally starved city. People are hungry for relationships. We have many immigrants, we have a large IT economy and government economy as well as a military presence – these are families that move around a lot.
- Play dates are safe – they aren't aggressive or fear inducing. Just a place where families come together, watch their kids play and just talk.
- This is a huge area for young moms – they crave the knowledge and community that could teach them how to raise their kids in good and healthy ways. We have that old adage that says, "It takes a village to raise a child." Back in the day the church was the village, but a lot of millennials are not in the church and do not have this village. Many of them are searching for such a village.
- This is an area where Christians can be engaged in without an agenda. We need to walk into all these relational and community opportunities without an agenda. We just need to come and engage and love the people we meet where they are at in their journeys.

***Are people from your congregation engaging in this as well?***

- This is primarily our own initiative, separate from the church.
- We are trying our best to develop a culture of intentional involvement and engagement within our church.
- We do invite some of our young people to participate but so far it is mostly our own initiative.
- It has been a way for me to say to my congregation that "Look, this missions stuff isn't hard."
- People are looking for God, they just don't know it yet. We have all the answers that people are looking for-for what it means to be human, to be spiritual beings, and to live.

***If people wanted to learn more, how might they do this:***

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