



THE LIVING SENT PODCAST: SHOW NOTES

EPISODE: **O12**

TITLE: **Interview with Hugh Halter, The Righteous Brood**

Transcript:

Justin

Hugh, thank you so much for joining us on the Living SENT Podcast. Um, wanted to just say this, you know, I've, I've read a number of your books, uh, over the years, uh, tangible Kingdom and the Gathered and Scattered Church, and then obviously most recently your latest book, righteous Brood. Uh, and I'd also say that I'm kind of somewhat familiar with you and your family's journeys over the years. You know, I've listened to, uh, some podcasts that you've been a part of, watched some videos online, uh, of where you've shared some of your story. Uh, but just to begin, maybe for those who aren't as familiar with your family's story, could you just kind of give us a brief overview of what brought you to Alton and, uh, what you and your family are up to now?

Hugh

Totally. Uh, good to be here, Justin. Good to be with your listeners. Yeah. We, uh, I, I hail from Portland, Oregon home, uh, hometown there. Um, planted our first church there back in the kind of mid nineties, uh, early nineties, somewhere there, uh, pretty inner city context. And, uh, what was unique was that it was really based out of our house. Uh, our son Ryan had really severe epilepsy and was having about 10 to 20 grand mal seizures every day. And so we just, we literally couldn't leave the house together as a family. It was, uh, one of those kind of, I guess, um, times my life where I was questioning what the Lord was doing, but he was teaching us how to live as a missionary, and so we just started opening up our front door and, uh, and then we took that story over to Denver.

So most people kind of picked up our story through a book called The Tangible Kingdom that you mentioned. And that was really the story of an intentional network of neighborhood communities where we were just, we were teaching everybody to open up their houses. And, um, you know, Ryan was still, he was, you know, late teens, uh, still struggling a lot, and I was a house painter, but, um, you know, got to several hundred people and, uh, communities all over the Denver metroplex. And so we started to share sort of missionary, um, sort of skills, if you will, in the books that we were writing. And, and, you know, everything was, from my perspective running up in Portland, I never really met a Christian. I know it's different in the South, um, but I think it, at some point in the future, it's gonna feel like Portland mm-hmm.

With the stats that are going the way they're going. So the assumption that you're always gonna be surrounded by Christians, I think we're starting to realize that's, that's unraveling right now. But I grew up in that context. Uh, so I never expected to meet a Christian, but we just saw a lot of people, adults



that came to faith in our home, and we just started to realize there were some, I guess, uh, things that we were doing that were like a secret sauce. I didn't see it like that at the beginning, but, um, so we started to eventually write a lot of that stuff down. And then we moved to Alton here after about a 15 year story in Denver. And that was what was unique. I started writing the Righteous Brood, uh, seven, eight, maybe nine years ago. I, I released an ebook for a large church planting conference where I just gave like three to four chapters of it.

Um, and then when we moved here, I just remember walking down the road one day and I thought, holy cow, my adult children came with us to this town on a intentional mission. Like we all had a big talk together, and we said, yeah, let's, let's go do this one together. And, uh, my two daughters have become amazing missionaries here. And so I thought, wow, I think I want to tell the story really kind of a full circle story of what it means to do the mission of God as a family and, um, and that that doesn't necessarily mean nuclear family that we'll talk about. But, um, yeah, so that's kind of our journey here. We're seven years into the story in Alton, uh, where we're building out essentially a kingdom ecosystem, is what we call it. Essentially it's a church plant, but it's really through business and enterprise in a fairly impoverished city.

And, uh, our daughters are right in the middle of that. Um, we've got a community of about 50, 60 people very intentionally trying to create business and do anything would help bring the town up. But, um, that's also the way that we connect with, you know, people around us. So, um, that's kind of the story. And then Righteous Brew just came out a few weeks ago, so this last year I've just been trying to put down all the nuances of, and especially related to the questions I've gotten all these years. You know, when I go teach on nationality, probably the most asked, you know, there's two that are always asked, one, how do you do money? Like, how do you sustain life, <laugh>? But, um, I think maybe the most asked is what do you do with kids? You know, like what, like if you're not dropping your kids off the local church every Sunday morning and your house is full of crazy people that don't believe what you believe and smoke different things and <laugh>, uh, you know, like, how do you do that as, uh, a parent? What's really the purpose of parenting in this missionary context that we're in? So that was really the backdrop of why we wrote The Righteous Brood, um, trying to help parents get past, you know, the, the normal consumerism and individuals materialism or, or just the idea of just, you know, like our, our main job is to protect our kids mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, that, that's almost not even in the Bible. It's a normal, uh, I guess, uh, instinct of any parent. Yeah. But, you know, when you look at why are we here, what are we doing with our kids? Ultimately we have to ask some larger questions about what's the purpose of our time with our kids.

Justin

So I, I thought this book, uh, was really unique. I mean, and you, you've mentioned it before, but you know, you're really focused on, uh, raising kingdom minded kids, you know, the subtitles, making the mission of God a family story. So maybe for a family that's never considered that before, maybe, you know, they're just focused on, uh, getting their kids to church, hoping that their kids would follow Jesus, you know, after they graduate high school and into, uh, college. Uh, how is, how is the



righteous brood going to challenge them? Because I, I do think it really is going to challenge them, but I'd love to hear you, uh, speak on that.

Hugh

The challenge is, is to teach, and we did this in the book, we took a little time, we taught about the Kingdom. Um, and that's why we wrote that original book, the Tangible Kingdom, because I learned, I was a pastor for 10 years before somebody actually taught me about the Kingdom of Heaven as the main message of Jesus. So growing up, the gospel was like a, a mental assertion or an agreement that Jesus had done something for us on the cross 2000 years ago. Um, but when Jesus taught about, so we'd say like, well, the gospel is that story of what Jesus is doing, the cross, if you were to ask Jesus what the gospel is, he would say, oh, it's the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven. And so it's almost like a completely different gospel. Um, that, you know, Dallas Willard, a theologian said what Jesus did on the cross was not, um, primary.

It was, um, it was like a prerequisite. Like what Jesus did on the cross was to set in motion that God would begin to remake the world before sin entered in. There was a, there was no loneliness, there was no poverty, there was no anger or rage. Uh, you know, you just name all of the ills of society. And that happened after sin entered in. So when Jesus took all that on the cross, he now was saying, the kingdom is now, the original design of the rule is now at hand. And so even tossed to pray, pray this way, our Father, art and Heaven Hall be thy name. Th kingdom come, thy will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So, you know, when I grew up, heaven was where you went after you died. And so when I started to learn it, that the gospel is about, uh, the kingdom now that changes everything and it changes your purpose.

You know, I guess if you still think that the, uh, the primary gospels to go to church, I think we've missed a huge, uh, story. The church was actually the people that went on mission. Uh, the church was the means by which God did his mission in the world. The church was never to be like a country club where we protect ourselves from the world and wait for God to come back. Uh, the church was the frontline of what God was doing in the world, which meant that your family was literally the frontline of mission. It was, um, you know, where Paul says you're the letter that's read by every, everyone, people would look into the families what was going on in the homes with the people, and they would start to, you know, it would bear witness to the story of Jesus. So, um, to me, that's the biggest thing I hope parents get, is that they're invited to live into a Kingdom story, not a, not just a church story.

Um, the Sunday experience is not a big enough story to hold our kids. It just isn't. And it doesn't hold in the Catholic way. It doesn't hold in the Southern Baptist way. The kids are still leaving at around 16 to 18 as fast as they can possibly get out, because they don't want to just go to church. They actually want to feel like God's using them in the world with real people, with real struggles. So, um, that's a long answer to that question, but I think it's probably making a parent realize that the kingdom has to be the focus instead of the church being the focus. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> church doesn't mean by which the kingdom happens.

Justin

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So there's gonna be like a rub that kind of happens when people wrestle with this, you know, it's gonna kind of grate a little bit. Um, and, and you talk a little bit about this idea of the, I loved how you phrased it, the lure of Metro Villa. And so Metro Villa, I'm just gonna explain it really quick. For those that maybe haven't seen the, the movie, the Incredibles, the main character Bob, he used to be a superhero. He settles into this boring insurance job, essentially trades in the life of adventure, uh, for something really plain, kind of predictable and super safe. And so you use that picture as kind of something that holds people back, maybe, uh, from embracing what you're, what you're talking about. Um, what did that look like for you and what kind of pushed you outside of that to begin exploring with this?

Hugh

Well, I mean, honestly, what changed it for me was the sense of a calling to God. I felt like as soon as I responded to the Call of God, it was to be a counterculture person in the world. So I never grew up with the sense of like, let's try to get as much out of this world and all, you know, the accoutrements of life in Metro Bill. But we do talk about the three pesky little problems of Metro Bill, which are essentially individualism, materialism, and consumerism. You know, materialism is just wanting things that the world has, right? Um, individualism is, is wanting to control my own social world. So I joke a lot about, you know, Hugh Halter. I'm an introvert. I don't, I don't even like human beings. Like I think people are crazy <laugh>. So if I could just do Hugh Halter, I would just rather never have anybody over.

Um, and yeah, Hugh Halter was Bob of the price. I've been crucified with Christ, so it's no longer Hugh that gets of his own life, you know, it's now Christ who lives in me. So Jesus, when you let Jesus actually reign and rule in your own family, he is not gonna let you just do your own life individualistically. Um, he's not gonna, you know, guide you to just amass as many things that the world, you know, has for you with cars and houses, whatever. He's gonna ask you to have a little free time and free money for other other things. And he's gonna challenge that consumer mindset, uh, which basically, you know, it's a classic church mindset of I go to a certain church because that's, that's, I like their style of music or their style of teaching. This is says, um, none of those things matter. Like your job <laugh> is to actually take your family and your kids into every nook and cranny of the world and teach them, uh, that those almost disciple that those things are not to be a part of their life anymore. So, for sure, it's a rub. It's a rub for me. Uh, you know, it's not a day that goes by that, you know, I'm not challenged at all three of those things. But, you know, I will say, looking back, I would never have changed anything based on who our kids have become. So, Hmm.

Justin

So when I read, uh, chapter four, that was kind of like the gut check for me. Uh, and you mentioned that parents kind of have, uh, oftentimes like an ownership mentality of their kids. Yeah. So micromanaging their every move. Uh, but you suggest that God really calls us to take a posture of being stewards instead. So parents who are challenging their kids, yet they're, they're trusting God to grow their kids in his timing. So let's say there's, uh, some parents and families listening right now



that maybe struggle with that. They're like, yeah, I could see how I might be more of an owner right now. Like, how would you coach them out of that?

Hugh

Well, the word coach is a great analogy to bring up, because where you see the over control is generally at our kids' soccer game or ice hockey or whatever it is, when you see parents that are trying to manipulate a, a coach per se mm-hmm. <affirmative> to let their kid play more, or they might move their kid to another team cuz they're losing all the time or something. So their kids are cranky at night, they just want to, to win at all costs. And yet here you have all these amazing opportunities to disciple the way of Jesus and your kids humility, hard work, not complaining, respecting authority, you name it. Um, so I feel like those are you. It's almost like a mindset. You actually, in fact, we talk later in the book that one of the great pathways of a powerful family is suffering that, um, as you suffer, you grow.

And so as you're raising kids, you don't wanna, you don't wanna protect them from screwing up. Um, you don't wanna try to like, make sure they never screw up. Right. You actually need to at some point, let them screw up mm-hmm. <affirmative> and let them learn. It's just kind of a, it's almost like, you know, you're not taking your hands off your kids, but you, you don't constantly have your hand pulling them to wherever you think they need to go. At some point you have to let go and let them, um, grow. And so we use the story of Abraham, you know, I mean, mean Isaac up, you know, sort of, uh, or Abraham sacrificing Isaac, you know, that idea, I'm gonna give my kid back to the Lord. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, they're not mine anymore. So if the Lord asks me to like, you know, give them up, then I'm willing to give them back. So there's some good questions in there about that, I think help parents see if they've actually truly given their kids back to the Lord.

Justin

You know, it, it reminded me, honestly of this story. Do you know, are you familiar with the book The Insanity of God? Yeah. So Nick Ripkin wrote the book and he tells his story. One of his children actually, uh, died on the mission field. Um, and I remember listening to him speak, I was in Orlando and he was just being really open with the, the crowd there. And he said, you know, when his son died, he just remembers like basically screaming his head off at God and saying something like, um, you know, you can do whatever the heck you want with me. He said, but you keep your hands off my kids. Yeah. He was just wrestling with that. But he, he talks a lot about what you mentioned in that chapter about kind of becoming less owner, more steward and, and handing his kids over to God. And I know that's, that's, that's huge for parents.

Hugh

And generally that wont preach, right? Like, that's not, we wanna do it on Sunday, but if you wanna boil it right now, like the, the Bible as it was written and the time it was written, it was written to moms and dads that were watching everybody get taken out, right? So mm-hmm. It was part and parcel. That's why their's scripture in there said, Hey, don't worry about those. That will take your body from you. Right. And they must have applied that to their own children. So at the end of the day, we really are, and



hopefully it never happens to anybody listening to this, but the attitude should be, I'm trying to raise a grown adult someday that would be willing to give their lives for the story of Jesus, right? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And if, if that's, you know, how we approach that, then it's gonna change everything in regards to, to how we walk them through difficulty and anything like that. So,

Justin

Yeah. Well, you mentioned, uh, in your chapter called Finding Your Groove. If you talk about these four rhythms that help families live on mission, um, I wonder if you could just describe some of those for us and, and maybe how that looks in the, in the Halter household.

Hugh

Yeah, we were just trying to go, okay, what have we done? Cuz we didn't really feel like we were doing anything special for sure. And oftentimes we thought we were failing, not dropping our kids off the local, you know, age related ministry or whatever. But, um, we asked our kids, Hey, what did mom and dad do that you think actually imparted to you a desire for the Jesus story and the life? And, um, they always talked about the open table that, um, our table was open, they can invite friends over anytime, and they saw us constantly having people over for meals. So to us, you know, that's, that's why in the, the line of books that we're doing, it's called Life as Mission Series. So the first one was the Happy Hour book. Where we're, we realized Christians have grown up with this idea that we're not supposed to have the crazy people at our tables, but Acts 10 is the story of when the church really opened up.

It's when Peter and a Roman Centurion invite each other into their, you know, their literal dinner tables, and then all of a sudden the church changes. So we, we talk about having an open table, an open home that you actually arrange your house in a way that it's conducive to social connection and or even letting people live with you. So Cheryl and I always had our, uh, our daughters sort of homeless friends living with them. They always were going, Hey, do we got room to put Matar up? You know, and it would be some kid that, you know, was bouncing around on couches and didn't have a functional mom and dad. So, um, when we moved to Alton, we put up a family of, uh, five children and a, a gay, uh, girlfriend of a mom that was killed in a car accident. And she was the only in the one that wanted to keep all the kids together.

And so we took all, we took all of 'em in, and that, you know, that was just sort of, it was a miserable six months, but it's what you do. Like your house has to be open, your table's open. Talked about having an open book that we don't just read scripture to our kids over the years, we actually, we talk about like, everything's an open conversation. Hmm. Um, so we're not just doing devotions. We actually talk about what they're going through and, and then we, we line it up with what we see in scripture. Um, so just a couple little things there. We threw one in that we realized had been important, uh, we call open road, that we got our kids out of their little bubble and we let them travel the world, uh, to dangerous places and to see different, uh, worldviews and perspectives and might have been the best thing we did. You know? So I think at the beginning of that chapter, we, we referenced that families that have a lot of fun together and have great experiences together, generally do better than families that just pray before



the meal together. And so we're trying to give parents, you know, some actual things to go. We, we need to add that to the palette of what we do as a family. Mm-hmm.

Justin

So I think a lot of listeners, of the podcast are parents with young kids, and particularly in northeast Tallahassee, it's more of the affluent area of Tallahassee. A lot of times parents will say, man, we're maxed out. Uh, we're, we're rushing from this to that. Um, we can't add another thing to our schedule. Um, how would they find their groove with some of these rhythms?

Hugh

Yeah. Well, couple things. We can't, we can't stop trying to find space, right? We at, at the very essence of what it means to be a disciple. As a parent, you can't really grow with the Lord unless you're available. That's just bottom line. So we all have to keep pushing the availability issues and like, what are, what are we sticking our time with? But I do know from experience, my two daughters played, uh, very high level ice hockey all the way from seven years of age all the way up through high school. And so we were 30 hours a week in the ice rink and traveling around North America while our son was still having seizures like crazy. So, um, but you know, instead of viewing that 30 hours as like being hockey parents, we saw that as the mission field. Hmm. So I always tell people living a missional life is not adding anything to your, your life.

It's just seeing everywhere you're at as a possible mission field. And so once we did that, it was, it was those families that were a part of our missional community in our house. Hmm. And it was the girls that we were with 30 hours a week, parents that we were with 30 hours a week. So, um, I do think that, um, having a lot going doesn't keep you from mission, but if you try to add missionally on top of all that as some other thing that you add on, you got no shot. Um, for sure.

Justin

Yeah. Well, you know, as I read the book, um, Ryan's fingerprints are everywhere, chapter one all the way through the end. Uh, and you write this in the chapter on broken trees. You said that, uh, looking back, it's Ryan who launched our family into everything we've done and are now doing. Um, just wanted to ask you, could you talk a little bit more about how Ryan's life really changed the way that you see how God uses struggles and hurts to, uh, further his mission?

Hugh

Did I mention in the book that he had finally passed away? I think I did. He passed two years ago at the age of 33. Um, but his, his constant struggle taught me that I don't, um, that sort of living on mission isn't just going out and doing cool things with people outside the church. It's actually sharing your actual life with people. So, you know, when Cheryl and I started invite people under our house and Ryan would have a seizure on the couch, we wouldn't hide that anymore. We would just tell people about his disability. And we found that people were drawn to helping us, and pretty soon we've got 40 people



jammed in the house and they're all just a part of the family, so there's nothing to hide or be ashamed of anymore. So it taught us a little bit more about just letting you know people enter our lives. Um, and then obviously we got really connected with the disability community.

We saw people that had much worse, uh, struggle than we did, and we had a lot of people that didn't struggle as much as we did. So it just kind of gave us a sense of, um, that this is nor normal life. I think one in three families deals with severe disability of some child or themselves physically. So, you know, when we think about going on a mission, it is not like, you know, the Incredibles, it's not Bob Har and all the kids with their superpowers. It is that God gives us superpowers, but it is along the daily struggle and suffering is the thing that people look at when they're looking for who they're gonna respect. You know? So when Ryan died, a lot of people in our city that, in Alton referenced that, um, that they had watched our family suffer. Well, a lot of people that aren't Christians would say, you know, just like watching your guys' Facebook posts and how you guys are processing, um, really inspired us.

And then, you know, you and I were talking, my youngest daughter almost died a couple weeks ago at the age of 27. It was the same deal. It was the whole town. Saw the Hal alters, they heard, um, McKenna's McKenna's very well known. Her husband, Jesse's the only, uh, black teacher in a 50% black high school. So very, there's sort of a famous little couple in town. And, uh, the whole town was watching McKenna whether or not she was gonna live or die. So even after Ryan's disability, um, you know, I, I've just learned that's why it says take joy in your <laugh> in your suffering. I never understood it, but I think it's because suffering is what causes people to lean in and go, I wonder how they're gonna handle that. Hmm. And, uh, so with whatever your struggle is always, you know, even when we think about family, don't think about a nuclear mom and dad and three kids.

Uh, most people have a broken family. And so I don't want them to think they can't go on mission. If you're a single mom and you're taking care of your three kids and or you're single, the the family of God actually is to trump our nuclear family. Um, it's more important. So God is, God is right now, even if you're single, he's, he can build you into a family of friends and brothers and sisters. And if you're in a missional community, you're a part of a family. If you're a part of a localized church, hopefully it's a network of families, some nuclear, but some that are because they live as a family in a particular part of town. So, um, but I, I do think it, it'll be what you suffer through. Um, and if you're not specifically having to suffer because of something that's inherent in your family, the way of Jesus causes or asks us to go and find suffering, and then jump into that. So if you're a Christian, you should always be suffering, carrying some weight for somebody or yourself. And, uh, that's, I think that's the secret sauce of how God builds his church.

Justin

Well, I I loved your book q um, it's called The Righteous Brood, making the Mission of God a Family Story. Uh, you have any kind of parting words for, uh, maybe families who are seeking to raise their own righteous brood?

Hugh

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Well, yeah, if you're hearing this and you're going, well, crap, I already screwed that up. Um, the, the great thing about the family of God is that it starts at whatever moment you decide to be a good brother or sister or mom or dad and you, you know, um, I've had parents that will have heard our story and go, well, my kids, my girls are already teenagers that can't stand me and I know they're gonna leave the church as soon as we don't make 'em go. And I'll just coach 'em, like walk upstairs and, uh, sit on their bed and ask their forgiveness for being kind of a dweeb <laugh> and go, Hey, I know that you know that we're Christians, but I don't know if we've done that good a job showing you the mission of Jesus. And I'm sorry, we're trying to re-up and kind of restart our own walk with God.

So sorry if we gave you a bad look, but pray for us. We're trying to make it much more real. Usually when you do that, your kids will, it's like the best way to make up or lost time is just to expose to your kids the times where you failed and just say, pray for us. We're gonna try a little, a little bit more <laugh> this time, and if you want to join us, we'd love to have you. But, um, hopefully that will be an encouragement. If people need to find the book, they can just go to hughhalter.com or find it on Amazon. You'll also see that happy hour book. Um, they can sort of be tools that you use to, with maybe a, a smaller community of people, do a read together and maybe think about things that you could do together.

Justin

Awesome. If anybody wanted to come, uh, check out what you're doing there in Alton, where would they, where would they go?

Hugh

Uh, well, they can check out postcommas.com. Um, they can saunter in and maybe if I'm around, can pop in and do a cup of coffee with you. But, uh, if people, you know, need anything, they can always just contact me at [hughhalter](http://hughhalter.com), uh, at [gmail.com](mailto:hughhalter@gmail.com). So I'd love to coach this, so, uh, you're not bugging me, so.

Justin

Awesome. Well, thank you so much, Hugh.

I'd love to hear from you this week. Reach out to me at justinwester.com/connect. Remember, you don't *have* to Live SENT, you get to. See you next episode.

Justin