

Dr. Rick: [00:00:00] All right. Welcome again to the Think Orphan Podcast. This is Rick Morton, along with Phil Darke.

Phil, how in the world are you today?

Phil: [00:00:10] I'm doing real well. we're just coming off of Thanksgiving break, which is always just a great time for me. I mean, I absolutely love Thanksgiving, not just because of the food which I do love.

I've been known to love food. I think you've been known to love food we've enjoyed

Dr. Rick: [00:00:26] over the years,

Jared: [00:00:28] but

Phil: [00:00:28] I also love just the gratitude, the reminder to be grateful, the, it just seems like a time where families are, are reminded to get around the table and just say, Hey, what are we thankful for?

And what are the things that God has given us? What are the things that we have been able to do for each other and with each other, and especially in a year like this man, I think it's good to remind ourselves, what do we have? Not, what are the things we couldn't do? I was talking with somebody about this the other day.

Not what are the things we couldn't do this year because of COVID, but what were the things we got to do because of COVID and the lockdowns and the family time we were able to have for my son to talk with him. He lost, he basically is losing his senior year, which bums me out more than anything. I'm not going to lie, but to say.

What could you do? You were able to learn golf? You're able to spend more time with your dad, which was like the best thing for him. Right. and, but in all seriousness though, like we're,

we're, he's going to go off to college next year. And we have time with him that we probably never would have had if he was in school.

So those are the things that like right now, I am, I'm stoked on, today as we're recording, this is Giving Tuesday and I really do hope folks that you're able to. to have the joy of giving to ministries that you're a part of and, and to, really get excited about being a cheerful giver.

And yeah, so, so that's, that's kinda where I'm at right now. Man,

Dr. Rick: [00:01:54] well, man, we're good. really great holidays. love, this time of the year and time with family. And we've had that in, in abundance. And I think we're walking through a lot of the same thing. one of our's has his senior year this year.

And so we're. Grieving the loss of some things, but there's a lot to be thankful for. And, just really encouraged about, about the things that we can, be thankful for in including the fact that, we're watching. Ministries, continue to minister. We're watching, we're watching the,

the, the things that we care about and the things that God has placed on our heart, we were like, we're watching those things continue even in the, even despite COVID.

And, and I think, it's on like this, especially on giving Tuesday, there's a lot of. One of the encouraging things today has just been, following and seeing all the emails and things that have come from people. I'm talking about a lot of what continues to go on, even in spite of the difficulty of the pandemic and, and, and so, lots to, lots to celebrate.

and excited tonight for, for this interview and really looking forward to the conversation we're about to have yeah,

Phil: [00:03:07] me too. And so we're going to get to it because we are folks, you have no idea how the sausage is made on this show. I'm just going to tell you what right now, it's late when we're recording, especially for Rick, but we are so excited to get to this interview and we are going to get to it right now.

It's with Jared Scheppmann of Ekisa, he's over in Jinja, Uganda. And, right now he's actually back in the U S on a little furlough, but, most of the time he spends his time over in Uganda doing some amazing work that we get to talk with him about tonight. So without more from, from Rick and I, we're going to get right to it with Jared Scheppmann.

Jared. Welcome to Think Orphan Podcast,

Jared: [00:03:56] buddy. Yeah. Happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

Phil: [00:04:00] Absolutely. Well, we were able to just give a little introduction. I mean you to our, to our audience and I'm sure some of them know you already, but as with most of our guests, I'm sure a lot of our audience does not know who you are. And, so one of the things is, Rick and I both, I think we love this part of the podcast as much as anything that is hearing stories, hearing your story of really how God captured your heart with a love for orphaned and vulnerable children and how you started working with Ekisa and Uganda.

Jared: [00:04:32] Yeah, well, yeah, I think you kinda nailed it. you just used the phrase, like how God captured your heart. And I think that's such a key part of my story. I actually, kind of started my, my career in youth ministry as a youth pastor went to a Bible college in Southern California and did youth ministry for, for a number of years. And in the midst of that ended up in Uganda on a missions trip and kind of just fell in love with the place, like, like a lot of people do, for, for no real reason just kinda took, took me and my future wife's heart. I actually went on that first mission strip with my fiance at the time.

And so, yeah, we kind of always had a place for Uganda in our hearts. And eventually I stepped away from, from the church world and was pursuing other opportunities. And by that time we'd actually been to, been to Uganda, I think three other times at that point. And we always had said like, Hey, if we ever had the opportunity to, to go for a couple months, to not just go for a couple of weeks trip or something, let's do it.

And so the time kind of presented itself. And so we were able to go for, for about three months, over to Uganda to serve, at a children's home. And. And it was one of those things

where it was definitely not planned. It wasn't, wasn't something I ever thought I would be doing. I remember, being in Bible college and taking a, taking a couple of classes on like missions and stuff like that.

And just thinking like, this is a waste of time, like I'm never going to be a missionary, I have no desire to live overseas. And, and so for me, it was just a really slow kind of progression. And so after that, that kind of longer, I say longer that, three months stint in Uganda, we came back to the States.

And we're still trying to figure out what was next. And we just felt really clear, like, I think we're gonna, we're gonna move long-term and then we love, working in ministry and in children's ministry in particular, in Uganda with, with the OVC kinda kind of sector. And so, yeah, so an opportunity presented itself to, to go back and we moved, we moved full time and, and yeah.

And then. What actually happened was, was that, that move ended up being a little shorter than anticipated. We moved back to the States after about a year and a half kind of thinking our time in Uganda was over and lo and behold, a few months after that. Ekisa where I currently work, had an opening for their executive director position.

and I had never, I mean, the Ekisa. If you don't know us, Ekisa works just with children with special needs and disability, I had no background in that. I had no experience, very, very little experience and working with children with disability. but in our, when we had moved to Uganda, the first time we had met a boy named Saul and saw was our introduction into the world of disability.

he had been brought to this, this children's home. he was, he kind of had more severe disabilities. He was non-verbal he was deaf, he had epilepsy and he had a lot of different things going on and. we just, we were just always around Saul and, and from, from Saul, who eventually came to live with us and we fostered him for a year.

We learned a lot about what exists for children with disabilities in Uganda. We learned a lot about what doesn't exist for children with disabilities in Uganda. we, I, I, myself learned a lot about special needs and disabilities. we, we had to, we were fostering this boy. We learned a lot. We, we devoted a lot of time.

and, and praise God, like we saw him make tremendous progress developmentally in the year that he was with us. And, but, but it was in that time that it was just God kind of growing my heart, growing my wife's heart, for Uganda, for this community, for, for people with disability. And, again, something I never thought I would be doing, but then when the, when the job for a Ekisa was posted and we saw it, online or on their Facebook or something, I read through the job description and everything that they like had listed as like, requirements and job duties, it was just, it was just tick every box. It was just the absolute perfect fit. and I remember. I actually, I got to preach a sermon in Uganda at our church that we go to now a few years ago and kind of looking back on that entire time period. And it was really, it was four years from when I decided to step away from the church.

So when I ended up at Ekisa. And, and as I look back over that four year journey, it was nothing but steps of preparation to get me to where I want to, where God was sending us. So, yeah, super cool. But you know, when, when you love your job, you never work a day in your life. the best jobs are when you're, when your skillset and your passions converge.

And, that's, that's exactly where I am. So

Dr. Rick: [00:09:40] that's, that's all I, I think you remind me of a, of a saying that a missionary buddy, Yvonne reminds me of all the time that God doesn't waste anything and, and, and all those kind of twists and turns along the way, the way that the Lord, prepared you. And, and you alluded to a little bit in your answer about, the children's home that you worked in before.

You were at Ekisa and I'd be curious, just to hear you talk a little bit about how that experience and being involved in a children's home, really kind of shaped some of the things that you believe about, about ministry and kind of helped to shape your ministry philosophy and the way that you approach, caring for orphaned vulnerable children.

Now.

Jared: [00:10:20] Yeah. Yeah, it was, it was definitely a lot of, a lot of learning. we have, we have a lot of great memories, from that organization, there was another children's home in Uganda. we have a lot of things that we learned, what, what, what I've come to find out about working in, in this sector, in the OVC sector is that there's a very, a very diverse understanding when it comes to orphan care and for, for, if you're in the church world and I, I come from the church world, I pastored I'd admission strips, what, what we see is very different than what actually takes place on the ground. I tell people a lot of time that that, or orphan care is is very messy and it's very dark and a lot of places. There's a lot of bad that happens in orphan care globally. And we never talk about that, and I'm happy to see that that more conversations are happening in the global church of like, yeah, we need to do something different. This isn't working, but I still think we're missing a point of of sharing the truth of what orphan care is like for most children around the world. Right. we hear some of this statistics, 80% of children, in orphanages have a living parent. but there's just, it it's, so there's so many things that go into it that make it not the glamorous thing that we see on social media, even the best orphanages, right.

Even the best children's homes. What was a huge blessing for me was we worked at what I'd consider kind of a large children's home. We had about 180 children at the time, and it was, it was one of those organizations, or it kind of had everything. We had a clinic onsite, we had a primary school and a secondary school and a church.

and it kind of creates this little compound, and that's where you live and that's where you grow up. And that's everything that you experience and, one huge drawback is for, for a child growing up in that is they have very little. Interaction and experience with the outside world, and even some of the most basic things.

I was just talking to, to another, a guy in Uganda is a big care reform advocate and he was talking that, that his organization they've been able to start kind of this life skills course for

people who come out of orphan care, who don't know how to get a national ID who don't know about citizenship, who don't know how to open up a bank account.

Right. and some of those basic things that your, your father or your mother or your uncle or your grandma, and naturally, show you a lot of children don't get to do that. So, but it being a big. a big children's home, allowed me my position. There was, was a little bit of everything.

And so I got to work in a lot of different departments doing a lot of different things. Like I came from the pastoral world, but I also have an MBA and leadership, so I've always been business and administratively mind. And, and so I did a lot of, kind of management projects. I got to do some child development work with some of their care staff.

I got to work with their social work department. I got to work with the clinic with cooperative insurance program and a lot of different things. And so the biggest blessing for me was I gained a lot of experience on how to work in that particular culture and setting, which was great preparation for my move to a Ekisa.

On the flip side, one, one learning that really sticks out, I think, is that it doesn't matter how much money an organization has a children's home had it doesn't matter how nice the buildings are. It doesn't matter how bad or how many staff they have. It doesn't matter if they're, group home focused.

Right. no matter how much you want it to be like family, it will never be family. And, and that's just, that's just the case. There's no way around it. another big learning and I would say this, this, my assumption is that this is true globally. Is that in, in orphan care, in institutional care that the majority of caretakers are not at all equipped to do the job that they're doing, that, they're not equipped to deal with with trauma and separation issues.

They're not equipped to do. We also attachment issues. They're not equipped to deal with developmental delays that naturally occur in institutional care. they don't know how to discipline children, that aren't their own and part of it that comes with like, it's, it's a particular job that requires a specific skill set.

but it's also one of the things like I found in Uganda, we actually, we have some Ugandan friends, who do pastoral work and they started years ago doing a parenting class moment. So they'd find, young couples in their church who were pregnant for the first time. And they'd say, we want you to come to this parenting class and, and go through this curriculum.

And, and even come stay at our house for a little while and see how we raise our kids and the response that they still get even to this day, years later, is that it's information that most young Ugandan couples had never considered. And, and kind of a, a strategic of a biblical way to parent. And because they're not brought up that way, it's, it's very different.

It's a different culture. And so. But some of those things Ekisa, we just did a, a foster care training for some foster carers and in a couple of people who went through it, they're like, I wish we would have had this training before we had our own children to deal with, with discipline issues, to deal with, child development things.

And, and how do you approach these? And it's, it's just something that we don't, we don't really talk about much, like in Uganda, in our call, in our setting, you kind of just go with the flow and there's a lot of pros, I, I love you got in culture. That's my home, but there's, there's a gap when it comes to institutionalized care that people are not equipped to deal with us things that take place. So,

Dr. Rick: [00:16:20] yeah, and I think, I think even, even as I'm listening to you say that it, it just occurs to me again that the, that idea of one of the ways that I think we need, we needed to think about partnership in and being able to partner with ministries

Jared: [00:16:36] is

Dr. Rick: [00:16:37] in, in how we're, how we're helping to, how are we helping to pour into caregivers?

How are we helping to build capacity for. Parent training and for family engagement and those kinds of things, because, because, because obviously the thing that, that fills up Instagram and, and that everybody kind of seems to want are those are those moments with kids, but truly if we're going to, the, where we have an opportunity to have impact is to come in and add value and come alongside caregivers.

And those folks that are there 52 weeks a year, that are there 365 days a year. And. And, and to, to build capacity, with them. And so, man, I love to hear that cause that that's, I think you're, you really struck a nerve just honestly, in that, in, in that part of. you know what you said about your conviction.

And I think if, until we begin to really make the pivot in the church here in the West to begin to think in terms of how, how we support those things, we're always going to be chasing behind something instead of yeah. getting out in front

Jared: [00:17:38] and as we think about how we equipped. staff at children's homes, obviously, reintegration transition, deinstitutionalization, that's what we're moving towards as a sector.

Right. But. You have to equip the staff in that capacity with that end in mind. Right? Right. I know one of the things like when we have, professional volunteer staff come to Ekisa in their onboarding, one of the things we talk about is like our goal here at Ekisa is for every kid to be reintegrated and family.

So what we do here has to be aimed at that, the way that we interact with children while you're here is aimed at the fact that they are going to not stay here. So we always want to be mindful of that. That it's the role of a parent. The role of any parent is not to raise children. It's to raise adults, right?

You are preparing your child to leave the house and go off and be an adult in institutionalized care. We have to think with that mindset of, I am preparing this kid to go and live in their culture in a family.

Phil: [00:18:42] Yeah. and there's so much, obviously we could talk for days and days about that answer and just mine that, unfortunately we don't have that time to do that with you tonight.

cause Rick will fall asleep if we go much longer than we're already going to go, but. some of the things you talked about there, I mean, it's funny the last guest we had on Lisa Qualls, she talked about that too, with this, a lot of the stuff, she learned, from TBRI training and from some of the other stuff out there, she wishes she had in her parenting, right?

Like of her biological children. I said the same thing, like, I don't have adopted or foster children, but I use these things in mine. But one of the other things you talked about there really was you, you alluded to some root causes. Some of these issues that we talk about, some of the family separation. Some of the, the poverty that's going on, the fatherlessness that we have in our, in Uganda and everywhere around the world here in the U S as well.

But one of the things I really want to talk to you about really right now is the, the difference between addressing, just addressing the root causes, which we talk about all the time on this show, the foundational issues versus addressing symptoms. I often talk about just putting a band-aid on a gaping head wound, right.

That, which we often will do. and so talk about that as well. As, as you're talking about that, really talk about what are the root causes, relating to orphaned and vulnerable children that Ekisa is addressing in, in your ministry.

Jared: [00:20:08] Yeah. Yeah, I can, I can definitely just focus on, on our kind of sector of children with disability.

it's, it's something that I I'm super passionate about, Cause if we're not working towards root causes then right. We're just spinning our wheels. Right. Like you said, we're putting a bandaid on it. And so, as an organization, it's something that. It has to be continuous evaluation. It has to be, continuous looking at, are our programs addressing this in the right way.

and it's, it's hard, especially like I'm a westerner. probably, I mean, not the majority, but as a percentage of our leadership team at Ekisa is as Western staff. And so. From a mindset. Like we might come in with our ideas of how to solve these problems. Right. And they may not be the right approach.

They may not work in that culture and setting. So they're there first has to be an open-mindedness in a, an attitude of continuous evaluation of, are we doing this? All right. Can we do it better? Can we do it quicker? Can we do it with better quality? is there something that we're missing? I think every organization as a whole, like, has to take in that mindset all the time, when it comes to children with disability, what we have found to be true when we look at the deeper level problems, the root causes is we would identify kind of two things.

So one would be the value of the child. children with disabilities are often undervalued or not valued within their families and communities. they are they're discriminated against

there's extensive stigma. There's lots of false assumption and belief that the child is cursed or the parents sinned against God or someone bewitched you, or, or whatever it is.

you get that you get, you get stigma and discrimination that can come externally. And from, from neighbors, from acquaintances, you get it. Internally as well within the own family, right? A parent might have four children and they might have another child with disability. And they just see that this child is, is a burden to my family.

Right. That costs more money. They're not going to help around the house. they can't do this, they can't do that. And so their outlook and their world view and the place that this child holds in the family is less than the rest. and so that in itself, the, the idea of value is a huge part of our work, right?

The other part is, is services. So you go anywhere in the world that child with disabilities or special needs will need extra help. They will need extra services. It doesn't matter where you are help with education, extra medical costs, therapies, all these different things. And in more developed countries, we see that there are government services and subsidies to help cover those costs or provide those things directly.

Right. And in developing countries, such as ours in Uganda, the government provides little to nothing in that, in that aim. And so as an organization, we exist to fill that gap. Right. Knowing that these services are needed. we have to fill that gap. And if, if you don't fill that gap, right, if the child's not going to get the services, then they're going to have diminishing quality of life.

They're going to, they will be a burden onto their family. And that leads to a family separation and that leads to abuse, neglect. it leads to all those surface level problems that we encounter. So we've got to. Address that deeper one. What's interesting though, is that they're very intertwined. And so when we look at value and we would look at it services as an organization, I, we can go to a family.

We can say, we don't, we don't do this, but let's say I went to a family, we said, listen, we're going to cover all your medical bills, a hundred percent. We're going to pay everything for your child to go to school or in the, provide all the therapies that they need. No costs to you. we're here to help you whenever you need.

Right. If the child is not valued within that family, then it doesn't matter what we provide those services. They'll never bear full fruit. The child will never reach a state of thriving. and so you've got, you've got to address that root cause of helping, a parent helping a family to see the inherent worth within a child, to understand where their value comes from to overcome the false assumptions and in the, and the lack of knowledge that they might have regarding their child's disability, so that they can hopefully become their child's biggest advocate, knowing them, valuing them, fighting for them to get what they need.

Phil: [00:24:58] Yeah. That's that's, that's so good. I love that. I absolutely love that. And that's, that's exactly, like Rick and I, we talk about this with our guests. We talk about it amongst ourselves. So often that it's those things that we could give all these kids so much,

but if they don't know their identity, if they don't know who they are, and if the parents aren't, aren't teaching that.

And if the parents don't know it, right, if the parents don't know that their child is a child of God, who's created four amazing unique gifts and talents that, that God created for them beforehand. Right? Like those are the things that, That are just, we have to, we have to get there. And so with, with that understanding, how is, Ekisa addressing those, those root causes?

what are the different programs you're addressing them with, but just you just as an, as a ministry, how are you addressing those root causes and the foundational issues to hopefully reverse,

Jared: [00:25:52] those issues? Yeah. Yeah. So for Ekisa, as much as, as we love family preservation and children being in families, and that's one of our core values.

We are still in children's home. and, and honestly, To get to the point where we have no children living at Ekisa like realistically, it's a very, very, very long ways away. and we know that, but the fact is we always say like, our goal is zero and we're going to continue working towards zero. we're a small children's home.

We have, we have 16 kids in care with moderate to severe disability. but we work and we do whatever we can to either reintegrate them with their own families, to find alternative families for them. And so with, with residential care in particular, when we look at, solving those root causes, when we talk about re-integration of a child with a family, it has to be extremely individualized. more so we talk about, best what's best for the individual child all the time. this, this is the extreme case of, it's not, it's not a set program, I think I heard Ellie Boswell being like, you can't just have a four-step system, for, for every child and yes, you want to have your social work processes and protocols, but,

but you have to address it. So individually when it comes to a child with special needs and disability and do so much preparation with a family to be able to care for them. When we, when we start a re-integration case, and we actually have one going on right now that that I'm hoping will happen in the next month, hopefully.

but the first question that we asked, the first question in our social work flow chart is, is the family willing. Not are they able not, are they capable? Not do they have I have a bed? Not that they have food security, no. Are they willing to care for the child? And that addresses that issue of value? and so we, we address that and we identify barriers and we, we come up with a plan for the social workers to help the family overcome those barriers and gain the understanding that they need to have primarily about the child's value and worth.

And in place, not only within, within God's eyes, but within their family. Right. and so that's, that's super, super important first step and tell you, if you don't overcome that first step properly, then it's going to lead to failed reintegrations. and we know that from experience we've had failed reintegration integrations have children, children who ended up back in the Ekisa, because they regressed in their homes because we had to do more work with the

family to make sure they were in the right mindset and view of this child. So, so our residential home, that's, that's one of our programs. Our second program is our community program, and this is really the aspect of family preservation and filling that gap in services is kind of the primary focus on that. one of the things that we're figuring out right now is we're kind of writing.

the framework for a pilot program to modify this a little bit, because we, again see that if we don't address that issue of value within a family, That again, right. We can provide services, but we're going to be frustrated. We're going to have families who aren't cooperative. We're going to have, who have families who are just in it for, what they can get out of a case that we're going to have families who aren't putting in the effort that their child needs.

And so what we're trying to do is write this new pilot program and begin to make those two root causes, tied together a little bit more of, we've got to start before, before. Someone is going to be enticed to join our program, or they'll want to join our program because they know we can provide things for their child.

but we know that like we want, the first thing that we do with you is to get to the heart of the issue. And so our community program serves about 75 children right now. providing social work services and medical support and therapy, assistive devices, access to special education. And so, we're, we're trying to fill that gap in services in a really holistic manner.

but at the same time, it has to be some sort of a. programmed and systemized approach of discipling a parent through the journey of finding value in their child and understanding their child's worth, understanding their disability, understanding how they can care and advocate for their child so that they become less dependent on us as an organization.

Right. Our third one is Ekisa Academy. So we run a small school, specific to children with special needs where we're trying to go with this and some things were obviously delayed this year, but we, we sat in our strategic planning meeting a couple of years ago and we said, okay, let's, let's go up to like the 30,000 foot view for a second.

Like we're doing special education. And I proposed the question to our team. I said, okay. How are we going to educate every child with disability in Uganda? Was like, okay. Let's, let's think outside the box a little bit, right? It's like, well, we can't just replicate our schools cause it's, it's too cost intensive and it'll be too hard and take too long.

And so we started talking about this idea of partnership and inclusive education. So we said, what if we went into existing schools and we came alongside them and said, Hey, we want to help you start a special needs classroom. And so that's what we're moving towards now. and so it's, it's a super exciting initiative.

We have two organizations we're working with right now in Uganda. and what's great is it can look different for every school that we partner with and what we were able to provide or not. But our goal is like, If we can start help other schools start special education classrooms, then it takes the burden off of us.

It expands the reach, it reaches way more children. It also solves it addresses the issue of stigma, right? When, when you grow up isolated, from children with disability and all you hear is talk about, those people over there, don't, don't touch that guy. you'll get what he has, don't get near that one.

you carry those assumptions on, into adulthood, right? If you grow up in school and there's a child in a wheelchair in your class, and you have to push him up the Hill every day, like you're going to have a very different outlook about persons with disabilities in your life. And so opportunities for inclusion and experience opportunities for, for buddy programs and education about disability within schools, within young people is gonna totally change, that, that culture of stigma that exists in Uganda and so many other cultures and so many other countries.

And so, so we're excited, we're, we're always thinking with our programs, like what's, what's next. What's the root cause. What do we need to be focusing on? And, and so it's an exciting time at Ekisa so

Phil: [00:32:58] yeah. Sounds like it. I, I. I. Rick's going to get jump in here in a minute, but I just want to say to that, that the, I love that idea of the bringing the kids into school because that's something that we talked about a long time ago.

In fact, I think we talked about it. I I've talked about it so many places. I'm pretty sure it's in In Pursuit of Orphan Excellence. Shows how much I know the book, but, that, that idea of. Being able to bring orphaned and vulnerable children. Really. I mean, a lot of the kids are vulnerable around the world, but the orphaned children into the schools, because like you said, that's a place to be able to integrate those schools.

So it's not that stigma of those are the other kids. Like there's the orphanage school. Right. It's no, it's a merged school. It's an integrated school. And so it's that same idea, that same concept, but I absolutely love what you're doing there. And it's, that's so encouraging to me. So just wanted to point that out there.

So Rick back to

Dr. Rick: [00:33:51] you, and I think it just, that again, just really underscores something we talk about a lot on, on this show is the idea of collaboration. And, and the fact that you're not just focused on those things that you're doing in your own ministry and, and kind of in, those things that, that are you're responsible for immediately, but thinking about how are we working with people on the outside, how are we equipping schools?

How are we, how are we transforming the community through collaborating with others? And, and, and I know that's something that's a big core value that you guys have and something that you're, you're diligently working on it. So Jared, I'd love for you to, just to kind of unpack a little bit about how, how you're collaborating outside of your ministry and how you're kind of building bridges with other ministries and other opportunities in the community

to,

to share resources and, and to, to widen your impact through collaboration.

Jared: [00:34:45] Yeah. Yeah. Collaboration. It's, it's something I'm very passionate about. It's something that, thankfully, Ekisa, I think has had, since it's, since its founding, the idea of being, open-handed, helping, helping other people, whether that be in our own city, our own community, our own country outside, ultimately, and I, I dunno if I carry this to more coming from the church world, but we're we're all part of the same team, right? We're all part of the same kingdom. We're all trying to accomplish the exact same mission. if you're a believer, if you're a believer and you're following after Jesus, no matter what, what small sector and sliver of that kingdom you're working in.

And, and so, we've got to keep that in mind. And obviously we talk about in the nonprofit world a lot, how we're often siloed and secluded and uncollaborative, And so I, I do my best, to, to actively, I guess, push against that. And it has to be, you have to prioritize it. Right. some things you have to just put on your calendar cause they're, they're important.

You want them to be important to you, and so as, because I've been in a case I've been into Ekisa for four years now, And as I've learned about not only the work of the Ekisa, but the OVC sector as a whole, I, I'm still kind of, I'm kind of a new fish, right. As I was the new fish thrown in the deep end of the pool is what I feel like.

Right. when it comes to children and disability, like in the sector, what I've found to be the biggest truth is that organizations are just not equipped to work with children with disability and special needs. We get, we get lots of calls from other organizations locally of, Hey, we have this kid, we're not sure what to do with them.

Can you guys help? we have this kid living in a children's home. Can we transfer him to you? we get inquiries from, from other countries, other organizations and stuff like that. And as I've, as I've come in and I've talked and I've, I've read reports and I've seen deinstitutionalization happen and I've seen how children with disability are, are really just set aside. When we look at, when we look at global efforts happening for care reform at this point, we're just starting to really talk about, Hey, what about children with disability? Right. And what's sad is it's a big percentage of OVC. in, in Uganda, when you look at children as a whole, children with disability represent 10% of the population.

When you look at institutionalized care, I don't, there's no exact the data from this, but we've tried to pull together some research and talk to a lot of other people. And probably somewhere around 40% of children living in institutions right now have 8 million children living in institutions have a disability 40%.

And it's because care reform happens in some of these countries and you see Eastern Europe and you see Rwanda and you see we're going to, we're going to reintegrate children, but w let's just wait on the children with disabilities. And so you're left with orphanages full of them. Right. and so in a lot of, in a lot of areas of this work, we're not equipped to deal with it.

Right. And as. as a, as a westerner, sometimes I have little grace for that, as, as I've, as I've grown, I guess in my grace and understanding work at Ekisa is this idea of you have to meet

people where they are. I can't I'm to the place now where when a child is abandoned, the first question I have to ask myself is, is what got the parent to that place where they felt this was their only option. Right. And I am not at all a naturally merciful person. Right? Like, my first reaction is like, somebody who's arrested that person. Like they need to go to jail. Right. But we have to meet people where they are. And so if, if, as a sector, if people working in OVC are not equipped to work with children with disability, Right.

Well then the systems have failed. Them were social workers who come out of university have little to no knowledge about working with children with disability nurses, in developing countries have little to no knowledge, even doctors. Right. and, and there's so many things that need to be addressed from all levels from the, on the ground particular practitioner level, up to the people writing policy and Terraform level.

That if, if we don't start talking about this, we're going to be left with only children with disability and often in orphanages. Right. And so what we, as, as that began to strike me, it's like, okay, well, there's not a lot of Ekisas. There's not a lot of organizations in working in developed countries who are only specific to children with disability.

Who've done re-integration who do, family preservation work, who do education work? And I was like, well, we're kind of uniquely positioned to offer some good insight from everything we've learned in the last 10 years. Right. And like I've said, we've made a lot of mistakes and, and we haven't had a ton of children, come, come through Ekisa, we're still relatively small, but in those things, we've, we've learned a lot and it's like, well, let's share whatever we can with everybody we can. Because again, we're all in the same team. And so one of the things that we kicked off this year is a training and equipping department. And so we're, we have, we have. A girl who has a master's in social work from the U S and we have two Ugandan social workers who are forming this department.

And their goal is just to write resources, get everything that we know and have learned at Ekisa into some sort of form that is teachable and distributable and free. let's start offering consultation to other organizations and kind of a more official manner. because again, like, It's going to get children home.

It's going to get, it's going to keep children and families. It's going to give children a better quality of life. And those are the things that we at Ekisa are passionate about, And so this is just another way that we can go about accomplishing our mission. So yeah, being collaborative,

Dr. Rick: [00:40:59] I think one other, one other thing I'd love to hear you just kind of talk about a little bit is in the, in the foster care collective that you're, that you're part of, you talked about the foster care training that you guys are doing and the realization that, probably not every foster family, every family that presents themselves for training is, is going to be in a place where they can take your child with, with disabilities, are there, there's very strata that, and you guys have a pretty healthy philosophy about what you do with those families and how you, how you cooperate with other ministries and all that.

And just would like to kind of hear you, just talk a little bit about, about what you're doing through your training and the ways that you're collaborating in that collective.

Jared: [00:41:41] Yeah, we have, we have a very healthy philosophy and a very, very young program. Our program is, is really brand new, but again, it was one of those things where we were asking the 30,000 foot view question, like what, what do we need to do to get our residential children back into family?

And in foster care is the best option for children who are. Who have untraceable family who are truly orphaned, which represents, a little more than half of our children in residential care. And so we said, okay, well, if we start a foster care program, there's some other ones happening in Uganda. And we started going around and training people and recruiting foster carers, not everyone can take a child with special needs.

Right. And that's, that's fine. Like I get that. Not everyone's equipped. Not everyone has that heart and passion. So we said, okay, if we start doing it, let's just say like one out of 20 says that they could take a child with disability. Okay. Well, what are we going to do with the other 19 people? Just like tough luck, And it was like, well, that doesn't, that doesn't make any sense. So I said, well, let's just do it as a collective Let's try to get all the children in our county, in our district. Back into homes. And so we can partner with the other children's homes that are here, the, the collective can form, as a project, have these member organizations of other children's homes and the, the project and the funding will go or go towards outreach events and educating people about foster care.

doing assessments, doing foster care training and basically producing, what, what we call, approved foster carers who are ready to be matched. And so as, as, as a project, which is a key size project at this point, eventually we, we see the project just becoming its own organization, that a case I would then just be another member of, and that's what makes the most sense.

So. Hey, let's let's work together. Let's all accomplish the same goal. And so it's, it's just getting going. We just ran our first foster care training and put the first couple of families through training. And it was all on hold for months and months because of COVID. And so, yeah, we're just super excited.

Again, like I said, the philosophy, like I truly believe in, and it, it takes when, when you have somebody who is, who's passionate about collaboration and working together. Like it's naturally contagious. It takes one. So, so don't, don't wait for other people to reach out to you, like be the one to reach out.

Like, if you want a friend be a friend, right. Like, Start a network, find other OVC organizations in your, in your area and be the person who starts a network meeting. And Hey, we're going to get together once a month and we're just going to share what's going on. And you know what, you, you, you will probably get very little out of it.

Right. But collaboration is so important in the little bit that you get out of it will, will be the salt that you need, right? It'll be that little bit extra that you need to, to guide your

programs, to guide your decisions, to guide your philosophy, to not overlap services, it'll help your resources go further.

but it's going to take effort and I think that's a, where a lot of us fall short is we wait for somebody else to do it.

Dr. Rick: [00:44:58] And I think, I don't think he's too crazy to say. I mean, I think that God's, God's going to honor the fact that we approach things in a, in a kingdom sense in that way.

And, and so when, when we're not trying to hold everything to ourselves and trying to, to only, pursue, pursue our goals, but we're, we're dealing in an open-handed way with, with other people and, and we're willing to, to give away to see their ministries thrive. I mean, I think at the end of the day, God's honored by that.

That's, that's a, and, and he's, and he's going to bless that as well. And, and, and all too often, I think we get, we get lulled into a sense of not thinking that's important and, and thinking that those, those other urgencies that are really apparent to us are. The important things. And so I just, I love hearing, the fact that even at the beginning of this and, and, you guys are not far in, but you're in, and you're, and you're thinking in a way of, of not just feather in your own nest, but, but ultimately about a wider transformation and a wider impact.

And I, I just, man, I appreciate that so much and really thankful, for the, for the work that you're doing

Phil: [00:46:07] So, Anybody listening to this podcast for more than one episode knows that you're speaking. My love, love language with collaborations.

So, just, I was very excited with that last answer.

I, I was encouraged when we talked about. What you guys are doing. Brandon Stiver with 1 million home actually introduced us. And, the work that 1 million homes doing the collaboration area as well is fantastic. And I just absolutely love seeing kingdom collaboration in real ways. not just talking about it, not just saying we need to do it, not just rah, rah speeches.

But actual collaboration, it's just super encouraging. I'm very excited to see what God continues to do with it. And we've been talking about a lot of different possibilities with collectives around the world, for training, for, for working together, to get people, the resources they need. you guys are a big part of that, kind of piloting these little things around the world that will together be doing some pretty awesome things that I just can't wait to see.

So keep it up. Keep it up, keep it up. So with that, we're going to come to the last couple of questions that, we ask all our guests. Again, I start the it's kind of the sandwich that this is the bread of this, the questions that I really, I love hearing the answers to, to not just, just hearing what you got to say about this one, which is what have you read, watched or

listened to recently that has informed your thinking on how we can love orphaned and vulnerable children with that.

Excellent.

Jared: [00:47:37] one. Is, I was listening to church this weekend and the pastor was talking about, Tim Keller addresses this issue in his book, *Counterfeit Gods*. And I actually, I'm home in America right now. And so I got up into my parents' attic and dug through multiple boxes trying to find this book, which I know I owned, but I couldn't find it.

I think I lend it to somebody. So it was a wasted trip into the attic, but, he talks about in this book, the difference between surface idols and source idols. And it just like really hit on this idea of like root causes. Right. He talks about four source idols of, of comfort approval control and power, and, and from those things come to these surface items, of, of money and sex and drugs and other things.

And, and just the idea that like, within our own lives. Like we need to be looking at that, but it it's a, it's a framework and it's a mentality that we can also approach into our ministry, into our, into our work that, what's the root cause. What, what's the source idols of the families that we're dealing with that are ending up in these situations, that are obliged, neglecting or abusing their kids or whatever, how do we help them draw back to God and overcome these things. And so, another one too. I remember seeing this, I was on a website the other day and I saw a little thing for, for Jedd Medefind's book, *Becoming Home*. And I was sitting with, with one of our other staff members and I said, have you ever read this book?

I said, do you need to, I said, I have it at home. I need to get it for you. It's a little tiny, like one to two hour read, but coming home. And it's just, it's just excellent. A little read, a little refresher, even, you may live, live and breathe this work every day, but, take, take that wind into the bathroom with ya, and, and, work through that just as a good little encouragement.

So yeah, those are great.

Phil: [00:49:34] Yeah. Jedd's book isn't on audio yet, so I, read it, No, I actually read it because it has some pictures and stuff in it. So I, I definitely made it through that one. It was

Dr. Rick: [00:49:45] fun. Say it's small enough. You could probably call Jedd and just ask him to read it.

Phil: [00:49:49] I tried that.

I tried, but

he's too busy. It's too busy for

Jared: [00:49:54] Everybody during COVID is doing story time. So that's true. That's

Dr. Rick: [00:49:58] true. Hey, you heard it here first, folks. Jedd Medefind is too big to read to Phil. So

Phil: [00:50:03] The problem is he moved off of Pacific time. So it's too late when it's my bedtime for him to, get on the phone. When he was there in California, we were able to do that, but you know, it's too late now.

Dr. Rick: [00:50:13] Well, Jared, the other question that we always want to ask our guest is, is who, who is the one person that's most impacted how you think about, how we can love orphaned and vulnerable children, with excellence?

Jared: [00:50:26] When, when I worked in the church world, I used to like, get that question a lot as a pastor.

Like, who do you, who do you follow? Who do you read? Like, who is the, who's kind of the one pastor, theologian you look up to and I was. And in some ways I was always kind of a little bit like put off by it, And I think it's obviously like, it's good to have heroes and it's good to have role models.

Right. But like, especially in pastoral work, like, well, not to be cheesy, but like, if your answer is not Jesus, then like you have a problem. If you're, if you're, your idol is this pastor or that pastor, then, you're probably gonna end up in not a good place one day. So, In, in, in the spirit of our conversation about collaboration, I'd say I would never just pick one, right?

Like my, my thinking, my philosophy, my passions about the work that we do have all just been like slowly shaped through lots of conversations and experience and, and, and trying to continually evaluate and learn. and, and so, I'd say like, if, if you're looking for, Oh, who am I going to read next?

who am I gonna, what, who is somebody I can follow on on Twitter, Instagram, or, or something? I'd say, don't, don't look for one, like, look for 20 people, like find 20 people around you. And. And be mindful when you talk to them, like have, have more pointed conversations. Like do more collaboration, like, like I said, start a networking group.

man, one thing that's just, it's just amazing is, is find somebody else. And just meet with them, just to hear what they're doing and why. What are you doing in your ministry? What are you doing next year? Why are you doing that? How are you thinking? Just to hear from, from people on the ground, and, and just keep that open, that open mindset.

'Cause it is, I, like I said, like, you're not going to get much out of it. And you might feel like, Oh man, I just wasted an hour of my busy schedule, like having coffee with this guy, but it it'll be that little bit of salt that you need right. To make everything taste a little bit better. So

Dr. Rick: [00:52:43] that's awesome.

Phil: [00:52:44] That's great, Jared. And I think you might be the first guest to tell us that one of our questions put you off a little bit, but that's okay. It's all right. that's good. That's good. I, I, we're not going to scrap this question if that's what you were hoping for. But the good news is there's no wrong answer to any of our questions, So that was great. No, I mean, in all seriousness though, I totally agree with what you're saying there. I mean, as I said, I'm a

team guy. I love, just really learning from a lot of different people. Absolutely love that response. And it's a safe answer on this show that are just say Rick Morton.

'Cause I don't know if you know that this, but Rick wrote the ology book on orphan orphanage. So if you haven't picked that up, we have this thing you haven't been back in the U S that long it's this thing called Amazon. So if you can't. Find that *Counterfeit Gods* book, you can probably go on there and get Rick's book while you're at it.

It's probably the one at the bottom that says,

Jared: [00:53:40] okay.

Phil: [00:53:41] Bought with this book usually because Rick's like every orphan care book. It's Rick Morton is one of those three books at the bottom. And

Dr. Rick: [00:53:48] you were obviously running neck and neck every time. There's a Tim Keller book sold is one of my books sold. That's

Phil: [00:53:54] obviously exactly.

Yeah. So anyway, on that note, Jared, thank you. all seriousness, bringing it back to the serious here. Thank you so much for, for what you're doing. Thank you so much for, just what Ekisa is doing and what God's doing in and through you guys over there in, in Jinja, Uganda and throughout Uganda and how it's impacting the whole region and no doubt the world, with the work that you guys are doing collaboratively. Very much, excited.

Very much encouraged and just want to thank you for that. So

Dr. Rick: [00:54:26] Jared wife would kill me if I didn't say this before we were done, but, she's a Noonday ambassador. And so part of giving day today is, she's been, she's been working to, to make sure that Ekisa makes a little money today and, through, through the sale of Noonday jewelry.

So excited to see that and excited to see you guys out there in that way.

Jared: [00:54:45] Yeah, they're doing a give back a percentage to all their sales to Ekisa. So we're super excited for that partnership.

Phil: [00:54:51] So. Awesome. Thanks again, brother.

Jared: [00:54:55] All right. Thanks so much guys. thanks for having me.

Phil: [00:54:57] Well, thanks again, Jared, for just, being a part of the show for all that you're doing over in Uganda. It's just so encouraging to me, Rick. And I assume it is to you as well to just hear not just what they're doing, but his heart, just his, his passion for working with other organizations, his passion for working for these children that, that nobody's fighting for really, and it's just, this, it's something that we hear about.

It's something that we talk about a lot and to see it in action, and to hear about him from other people as well, to know that he's not just spouting off words here, but this is the real

deal. That, I I've, I'd never met him before talking to him about this. I'd heard about him. I'd heard him, different things about Ekisa, but to get to know him, I've just been very, I'm definitely better for it.

How about you?

Dr. Rick: [00:55:49] Man, absolutely. And I was, I was really, just, encouraged to hear the things that he said about, about valuing children and about the, about the idea that, that that's a place to start. With, with parents and a place to start in reunification and, personally having been involved for a number of years and in a ministry or in partnering with the ministry in Kampala that works with kids with disabilities, blindness and deafness.

what we've seen in that has is that, that, that the initial, the initial problem is not, is not dealing with really the fruit of the disability. It's, it's helping the community and helping ultimately the family understand these kids are created in the image of God and, and that there's that they have worth, and they have dignity and it's not because of what they can do or what they can't do, or, or any affliction or anything else.

It's, it's about the fact that they. they've been given this dignity because, because they're a reflection of, of God and who he is and the really cool thing, and that is, watching that over the years, not only transformed families, but it transforms communities, you know, the community is watching.

And so when, when ministries are esteeming those who are disregarded and who were, despised by, in many cases by the rest of the community, it really it, speaks and it has a really has a transformative value and it quite frankly, puts the gospel on display in a way that very few other things do.

And so it was just, that was just really cool to hear. And, and he really articulated that well, and I was really appreciative of, just of the things that he said there. And I wholeheartedly agree with him that the, one of the next looming questions for us in this community is, what are we doing to, to minister, to kids that are struggling with disabilities, because that is a marginalized group within the marginalized group that we minister to that are getting very, very little attention on the whole.

Phil: [00:57:52] Absolutely. And that was something that really struck me talking about, if we don't do something about it, that's the only kid, those are the only kids that are gonna be left in institutions. Right. We're just going to have a bunch of kids that we just don't know what to do with, and that that's something that we have to.

Yeah. I mean, he talked about it, so we don't, we don't need it to be labor that I think he stated it as well as it could be stated. So, yeah, but that's a point to ponder carrying away from this. And I think that's probably the takeaway for me. I think it's takeaway for you. Sounds like I don't want to put words in your mouth, although I do that all the time.

but, I think that, that's also a good place to think to, just to leave off. we talked about a lot of our thoughts throughout that interview, because it was, I think both of us were really encouraged by it and also just, it raised a lot of things that we all need to be thinking about.

So with that, Rick, do you have any final parting thoughts other than what you've already said?

Dr. Rick: [00:58:47] Man not, not at all. Just I'm really thankful for, for Jared. Thanks for the opportunity to talk with him and always glad to be able to have this conversation. So we'd love to hear from you and, and love to for you as our listeners to reach out with questions, thoughts,

what are your takeaways as you're walking away from this and, what can we learn and what do we need to yet learn? and we'd love to, we'd love to hear your thoughts and, maybe even shaped some of the things that we do in the future here on the podcast.

Phil: [00:59:18] this interview, this wouldn't have happened if one of, as I said, Brandon Stiver introduced me to Jared. And so it wouldn't have happened without you folks out there sharing who you think we should be interviewing. Who you think we should be connecting with and connecting us with them, and, and join in the Facebook group on the think orphan Facebook group.

And that's where this came from is just, I, I put on there, who do, who should I be interviewing? And that's what came back. And so one of the things that came back, some other people that were going to get on as well. we're we're there. So those are things that we absolutely want you to be part of that Facebook group, email us info@thinkorphan.com.

That's another way to get ahold of us rate and review the show. Subscribe if you haven't done so already. So you don't miss any episodes. Folks. It is giving Tuesday. If this is something that you do want to give to, to the, to the podcast to keep it going, you can do so just at the Providenceworld.com website.

You can go to their, their giving page. And there's a little spot there to give, to Think Orphan, if that's something you do, we don't really ask that on this show. but since it is giving Tuesday, and since we want to give, we want to make sure you know how to, so they're there. That is, we appreciate your downloads.

We appreciate your engagement. And mostly we appreciate that you are taking everything that you're, you're listening to here, you're engaging it. You're helping it. Or you are using it to shape how you think about how you can love orphaned and vulnerable children better and better each and every day.

Thanks a lot. Have a great week.