



FEATURING
Ed Stetzer

Leading with Truth and Courage in a Polarized World

Episode 13 • TML Episode Guide

“Winsome is not a strategy—it’s the way of Jesus.”

Overview

In this episode, Rob sits down with his friend Dr. Ed Stetzer to explore what it means to lead truthfully in a polarized culture—speaking with courage, conviction, and grace without losing our witness. They talk about navigating public leadership, engaging controversial issues with integrity, and how missional leaders can remain faithful to the gospel while being meaningfully present in today’s cultural moment.

Core Insight:

The Missional Challenge of Our Moment

One of the key insights from this conversation is this:

Missional leaders must learn to tell the truth without surrendering love or silencing truth out of fear.

Ed reminds us that leadership today is formed in tension. Cultural pressure can often push leaders toward:

- Silence instead of clarity
- Tribalism instead of discernment
- Outrage instead of wisdom

Yet the call of the gospel is different.

Ed describes his life's work as helping the Church remain:

- **Faithful to the gospel**
- **Engaged in the culture**
- **Fruitful in its mission**

This is not about winning arguments; it's about stewarding influence for the sake of mission.

Why This Is So Hard Right Now

Ed names a growing reality among Christians:

“Many believers have convinced themselves they cannot speak up when something is clearly wrong—because ‘that’s our side.’”

Missional leaders feel this pressure acutely:

- Fear of alienating supporters
- Fear of being misunderstood
- Fear of being labeled

But silence comes at a cost. **When leaders stop speaking truthfully, the mission suffers.**

The Framework:

How Missional Leaders Speak with Courage and Credibility

Drawing from Ed's lived experience as a pastor, missiologist, public theologian, and institutional leader, this conversation reveals key principles for cultural engagement.

1. A Firm Center, Soft Edges

Missional leaders lead from deep theological conviction without weaponizing it.

It's critical to remember the following as we lead with both conviction and compassion:

- Orthodoxy anchors the message
- Humility shapes the posture
- Charity guides the tone

Truth and grace are not opposites; they are partners.

2. Call Balls and Strikes, Not Teams

Ed describes his role not as a partisan voice, but as a faithful witness:

"I don't see myself on a political team. I see myself as an umpire, calling balls and strikes."

Missional leaders:

- Resist tribal loyalty
- Critique their "own side" when necessary
- Refuse to confuse political power with Kingdom authority

3. Let Anger Drive Clarity, Not Cruelty

He writes to persuade, not to perform, especially when addressing a secular audience.

"Winsome is not a cultural strategy—it's the way of Jesus."

Ed is candid about anger but also disciplined in how he processes it. Here's what we can learn from his approach:

- Anger reveals what we love
- Writing clarifies conviction
- Openness to revision cultivates wisdom

4. Be For People, Even When You Disagree

Credibility grows when people know you are **for them**, not against them.

Ed's leadership across denominations and movements reflects a deep commitment to:

- Evangelical unity
- Missional collaboration
- Respectful disagreement

Missional leaders build trust before they challenge assumptions.

Formation:

Reflection and Next Steps

Reflection for Missional Leaders

Pause and reflect on the following questions—whether personally, with your team, or around the boardroom table. Let them guide you into deeper formation as a missional leader in a polarized world.

Identity

- Am I more concerned with being misunderstood by people or being faithful to what God has asked of me?
- What convictions form my “firm center”?

Practice

- When and where have I confused silence with wisdom?
- How do I process anger before speaking publicly?

Vision

- What Kingdom challenges might God be calling me to address with greater conviction and grace?
- How can my voice serve the greater mission rather than individual platform?

A Simple Next Step

Missional leadership always moves from clarity to action.

This month, take one intentional step that could include:

- Clarify one conviction you won't avoid out of fear of criticism
- Practice truth-telling with greater humility
- Initiate one hard conversation with prayerful, Spirit-led courage

Faithful presence in a polarized world is not accidental—it is formed.

Resources mentioned in this episode:

- Biola University: <https://www.biola.edu/>
- Talbot School of Theology at Biola University: <https://www.biola.edu/talbot>
- Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College: <https://wheatonbillygraham.com/>
- The Lausanne Movement (North America): <https://lausanne.org/>

Connect with Rob

Missional leadership is formed in community, not isolation.

Join the ongoing conversation and stay connected as we explore Kingdom leadership, generosity, and global mission together.

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