



Amir Tsarfati
Anchor Podcast with Paul Valerio

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AMIR: Hey, Shalom everyone and welcome to one more *Anchor Podcast*. That hope that we have in our faith is the anchor to our soul as the book of Hebrews says. And we would love to have these type of podcasts bringing a lot of hope to people all

over the world; hope that is connected to our faith; hope that is coming out of amazing journeys and stories of not only faith, but also the faithfulness of God to people. And today with us is a special guest whom I've known probably for the last almost 30 years. And of which, by the way, the last 20-plus years he's out of Israel. But I've known him when he was serving the Lord, he and his family here in the city of Haifa in northern Israel. And I want to welcome to the *Anchor Podcast*, Paul Valerio. Shalom Paul.

PAUL: Shalom Amir.

AMIR: It's great to have you here. I know that three years ago we said goodbye to your other half, Traci. I remember three years ago, a little less than three years ago, I was sitting in my living room and my beloved father-in-law and us, we were watching the memorial service for Traci. And I looked at Hanan, my father-in-law—who passed away a month after we were sitting and watching Traci's memorial—and I was talking to him about you guys, and I said, this is a story that is still untold, and a song that is still unsung. And people don't even know how amazing the story of this couple is and how faithfully and quietly



they served God, and they serve the body of the Messiah here in Israel. And it always amazed me that Gentiles out of the blue leave their place of comfort, a place like America, and they come to this chaotic part of the world and God is using them. So first of all, I talked to you and to your son earlier today and your son said, “If we can summarize my dad’s life story, it would be three parts.” And of course, the second part is the main part of serving in Israel, but you cannot get there before you tell us the story of how you came to faith and how, we may think it’s accidental, but of course it’s not, how God led you eventually to serving in Israel. So, tell us your story because Valerio is obviously a what? Italian?

PAUL: It is Italian. [AMIR: Yes.] Yes. I was born and raised in Bristol, Connecticut, brought up an Italian Catholic, deeply-rooted, traditional family, a loving family, a large family with many aunts and uncles and cousins. We laughed a lot. We had a lot of fun together. We ate a lot. So it’s that classic picture of the Italian American. I am second generation. My grandparents, my mother’s parents and my father’s parents immigrated from Italy. I only really knew my paternal grandfather who immigrated in 1908: 17-years-old with a few dollars in his pocket, and he didn’t know English, and didn’t know anyone. And two generations later, I had the great privilege to even go to university. So I grew up in an exciting, fun, but very narrow, very small bubble of a family. So where I grew up, we had an Italian Catholic Church. We had an Irish Catholic Church. We had a French Catholic Church, and we had a Polish Catholic Church. [AMIR: Wow.] We had another Catholic Church for everybody else. That was my world.

AMIR: Amazing. And originally from Bari, from the southeastern coast of Italy.

PAUL: That is correct. My grandfather was from there.

AMIR: Yes. And so here you are, second generation of immigrants in the United States. Am I right?

PAUL: That's correct.

AMIR: And a Catholic Italian that grows up on the eastern coast of America. And how did you end up coming to faith and then eventually coming to Israel?

PAUL: Well, as I described my family, it was a loving, big, loud, fun family. But I felt out of it. I had tremendous insecurities. I didn't feel like I fit in because I'm not a real loud type of person. So I was always trying to be somebody else. I saw people even in my own family who I really wanted to be like. And I would see celebrities that I wanted to be like. And I loved sports. Thing was, I wasn't very good at sport. I wasn't a great student, and I didn't have great friends, and I didn't feel like I fit into my family. But I didn't even recognize this. It was just a lifestyle of insecurity.

So somehow I got into university into a very good program in physical therapy. And I was trying to figure out life and it was a new experience. I was meeting people I didn't know before. I broke out of that Italian bubble. That was already a traumatic cultural experience. [AMIR: Laughter] It was also interesting, Amir, only in hindsight, 60% of that university population was Jewish. Most of my friends were Jewish. I didn't, they weren't Italian, and they weren't Catholic. So I thought, well, they're the other ones. So I figured they went to another church. I had no idea even what a synagogue was at that time. But I struggled with my identity. I think like a lot of college students do. I did have a course that I was tracking and some aspirations in a profession that I really, to this day, still practice. In part of my insecurities, I volunteered for a hypnotist's program, show. It was a show at the university. I thought, well, this ought to be fun. And I got to be on stage and people saw me and I thought, "Wow, okay, people are going to recognize me and they're going to think this is cool." But there was something about it that kind of made me feel uncomfortable. And he didn't put me under. Everybody else went under, not me. He knew it. So

when the whole thing was said and done, I had a get together with a few guys in my dormitory room. And it was a discussion about the meaning to life.

AMIR: Wow. The big questions.

PAUL: The big questions, because this was weird. People actually were hypnotized and did strange things, and it wasn't nice. It was funny, but at the end of the day, it's very strange that someone else can tell you something to do that...

AMIR: ...and you're just doing.

PAUL: ... that you're just doing. So that was kind of how the conversation was launched. One guy said he was saved. I had no idea what that even meant. The other guy told me he was god. So, we had a bit of a wide range of ideas that we shared. But this one fella said, "I'm saved." I said, "What does this mean you're saved?" He said, "I'm saved. Jesus saved me." I said, "Really? Okay." I don't remember anything else about that night, but that resonated in my mind, my heart, and I laid in my dormitory room next to a big picture window. And there was just this bright light that shined into that picture window. And I said, "God..." I said, "God, I need You, God." I didn't pray a prayer of repentance. I didn't confess my sins. I just said, "God, I need You."

AMIR: Which is everything He wants us to say, literally.

PAUL: He knew my heart. The next day I woke up and I was a different person. All I can tell you was things that I thought I wanted no longer were attractive. I tried to do everything that I was always doing. Some of those things were not really very good, but there was no pleasure in them. And I had this deep sense of wrong and right I had never had it before. So this actually launched me into further anxiety of personality. And now what is this going on? I knew something had changed. I knew I was different.

AMIR: You just asked God, “God, I need You. Help me.” And as the Bible says, He’s close to those who call upon Him.

PAUL: And that was exactly the case.

AMIR: That’s it. He came. He showed up.

PAUL: And then...

AMIR: ...And He touched you.

PAUL: A girl on campus knocked on my door and said, “I’m a Christian. I heard you’re a Christian.” I didn’t tell anybody.

AMIR: Wow.

PAUL: Go figure. And that was how I started into learning about believing. And I was invited to a Bible study.

AMIR: Which was different than the Catholic world you were part of.

PAUL: Oh, I made appointments with priests. I said, “There’s something wrong with me here. I am confused.” And they said, “Oh, these Christians have confused you.” But they were answering my questions. And the priest was confusing me. I have the deepest respect for the Catholic Church, just so that you know. And the gospel is in the Catholic Church. And I know many Catholic believers who love Jesus and are serving Him. But I was confused. Slowly over time, I realized that I was in a relationship with God. Through Jesus. This is something I grew up in, but it wasn’t personal.

AMIR: You had religion, not relationship.

PAUL: Exactly. Exactly. I knew I needed to break out of this bubble, both the family bubble and now this university experience, which is only four years. So I decided I would move to Georgia because the Georgia is where the—it’s called the Bible Belt in those days, I thought, “Well, there’s

Bible Belt, this got to be people that believe in the Bible and believe in God.” So I actually packed my car. I had a ’71 Toyota Pinto with everything I owned in it. And I drove to Georgia, and I found my first job at the University of Georgia as a...

AMIR: Physical therapist.

PAUL: Yeah, in the hospital there. I lived in a tent.

AMIR: You lived in a tent?

PAUL: I lived in a tent for the first week I was there. And I started my career. And I felt...

AMIR: ...Were you excited?

PAUL: It was like spreading my wings and going someplace else. I had never been anywhere. To make a long story short, I met Traci in an organization called Young Life, which was a Christian organization that reached out to high school students who were confused, actually all high school students. And when I met her, I saw something in her that was really attractive more than the normal attraction. I saw something in her eyes about Jesus. And we developed a friendship. We got married a year and a half later. We were part of a big Presbyterian church that had a lot of work going on around the world.

Now, she had been to the Soviet Union in those days. She had been to Africa. She lived in England. She had been—I’d been to Florida. That’s as far as I got. There was something magnetic, something energetic about her. And we decided to take a year off from life. Now we were in our career. She was working in broadcasting. She was an incredible broadcast journalist. I had a great job in university. I had aspirations to be an instructor at the university level, even though I wasn’t so smart, but I thought I could do it. And I say that genuinely. I really had this insecurity about who I was still, even as a believer. And it’s taken years to work through that. So we ended up going to England to Capernwray Bible College.

AMIR: Okay, the famous Capernwray.

PAUL: The famous Capernwray, which you probably heard about.

AMIR: We call it Bridal school, not Bible school.

PAUL: Well, it was a bit of a Bridal school. There were a few marriages that took place there. And I really loved it. There were 180 students from 23 different countries. I met people from different language groups and different cultures. And it just did something in me. And Traci was really good at it because she traveled. She was very smart and very, as you know, a great communicator, very friendly, very outgoing.

AMIR: She always smiled.

PAUL: Had a smile on her face all the time. So when we really prayed, “Lord, what do you want from our lives? We’re willing to do anything and go anywhere.” But we didn’t have any calling. You know, this calling? And we had no calling. Interestingly, we met some Israelis. By the way, there were Israelis in our...

AMIR: ...Oh yeah, that’s how I heard about Capernwray.

PAUL: Yeah, so... [AMIR: the Israelis...] Israelis that were there. To this day are some of my closest friends I met there. So we met some Israelis. And at the end of that year, we had nowhere to go. So we decided we were going to go back to the United States because we heard all year, read the Bible, go back home, live the life. And that was really the message of Capernwray. We had a little extra time, and we were invited to stay at Capernwray and run the children’s program. Go figure. And while we were there, there was an Israeli couple of four kids, and we were responsible for their program.

AMIR: And their kids.

PAUL: And their kids. So can I just say who they were?

AMIR: Yes, please.

PAUL: So it was John Pex.

AMIR: Wow.

PAUL: I don't know if we can...

AMIR: Yeah, John Pex.

PAUL: I'm sure he wouldn't mind that we're bringing his name up.

AMIR: I'm sure he wouldn't. You know, he's the founder of the shelter, the youth hostel in Eilat.

PAUL: That is exactly right.

AMIR: And I've known his family. And of course, his son also used to work at the replica of the tabernacle.

PAUL: Correct.

AMIR: ... at the Timna [Park]. And I used to bring groups over there. And what an amazing place. So, yeah, John was a very known evangelist in southern Israel, right by the Red Sea, the city of Eilat. I even brought my mom to one of the—Because my mom lives in Eilat.

PAUL: I know that.

AMIR: And I brought her to one of the services there as well. And she loved it. So, yeah, wow. So, they were there?

PAUL: They were there. And we were taking care of Josh and Racheli. And I was also responsible—Actually, Trace and I were responsible for taking families out on outings around the north of England. So, and they discovered—Traci and Judy discovered they were from the same place in the United States, from suburban Washington, D.C. So they had an immediate connection. Anyway, at the end of the summer, John said, “Ah, if you ever come to Israel, look us up in Eilat.”

And we didn't take it seriously. We just thought, "Oh, all right, great. Thanks. And if you're in the States, come and visit us too."

AMIR: The American politeness. [Laughter]

PAUL: The American politeness. So we decided, Traci and I decided to go back to the United States. We made reservations to travel. The night that we decided to make those reservations, we didn't sleep. We were beside ourselves. And in the morning we said, "Wow, that was a bad night." And Traci said, "Maybe we're not supposed to go back to the United States." I said, "Really?" I said, "I feel the same. What should we do? We had a lot of time; we just didn't have any money." So I don't know who said it first. We said, "Well, you know, we're so close and we can go to Israel. We met the Pex's; you never know." We thought, "Well, why not? We were free birds." And I did really have this—I was breathing, and the wings were still spread.

AMIR: You were out of the bubbles.

PAUL: We were totally out of the bubbles. And we were really enjoying life. It was really—So we made reservations to go to Israel for three weeks. And... but we bought... Traci suggested we get a... In those days we were able to get a one-year ticket. So, we made a round-trip reservation back to London in one year with no thought of ever thinking of staying. But she brought a sweater. This was the middle of the summer. Who brings a sweater to Israel in the summer, right? We get here, we're doing the tourist thing with backpacks, staying in the hostels. And who should we meet staying in a hostel in Jerusalem? We bump into John in the street. [AMIR: Wow.] And he looks at us. I said, "We're Paul and Traci, you know, from..." "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. So what are you doing here?"

AMIR: So you didn't even tell him you're coming.

PAUL: No, no.

AMIR: You just bumped into him in Israel?

PAUL: There was no internet. There were no international phones. You had to go to the wall that we used the phone, or you put a coin into the phone booth. And he said, “What are you doing?” He said, “Well, you know, we were going to go to Tiberius. We’re going to go to Haifa.” He said, “If you go to Haifa, you know, Bethel.” I said, “Oh, yeah, yeah, we’re going to Bethel.” We had made reservations or something. I don’t remember. He calls Bethel. I said, “I know this couple from England. They might want to volunteer there.”

AMIR: So he already planned it for you.

PAUL: Unbeknownst us. So we get to Bethel, we sign up, we register, and then we got invited by the management to have a meal. They said, “Would you like to volunteer for a time?” We thought, “Sure.” I mean, it was an opportunity to stay longer in Israel. We had a place to stay. We were given a food stipend. So that’s how we started. We landed in Bethel.

AMIR: And Bethel is an existing youth hostel in Haifa.

PAUL: It is.

AMIR: And it’s a place in a very central location, by the way.

PAUL: Central Haifa. And it’s the sister hostel; it was the sister hostel of the hostel that John was running in Eilat. [AMIR: Wow] It was under the same canopy organization of the shelter.

AMIR: Which, by the way, there is another shelter in Amsterdam.

PAUL: Yes, there’s another shelter in Amsterdam.

AMIR: And my daughter just volunteered in another one in southern Argentina.

PAUL: Oh my goodness.

AMIR: In Patagonia.

PAUL: Hostels are great places because you meet people who are searching. And great opportunities to speak with people, to meet people, talk with them, hear their hearts, hear their minds. Anyway, so not long after we were there, I still had aspirations to go back to my profession eventually. So I went into Carmel Hospital just to walk around. It was after hours; it was late in the afternoon. And I found my way to the physical therapy department. And the chief was there. And I said, “Hey.”

AMIR: Carmel Hospital is where my first and my fourth boys were born.

PAUL: Really? Oh, it’s a nice place. Nice hospital. So I meet the chief of the physical therapy department. And “Who are you? And what are you doing here?” And I’m telling her the story. She says, “If you ever want a job, give me a call.” I said, “Oh, yeah, sure. Great.” It’s like, “If you ever come to the States, come and visit me too.” It was that kind of a conversation. So, you know, I get back and I tell Traci. And Traci says, “What did you think about that?” I said, “Maybe.” So we took some time. We thought about it. And I called her up. I said, “You’re serious about that?” She said, “Yes.” She said, “Come up.” And I said, “Look, I need a visa.” I said, “We’ll take care of all of that for you.”

AMIR: Wow. She basically gave you a lifeline here when it come to a visa.

PAUL: So I went and consulted with a brother. I said, “You know, what do you think? Is this a good idea?” He said, “No, there’s no way. You can’t stay in Israel for any length of time.” And I said, “Well, yeah, I realized that. But I’m actually being offered a visa to stay in to work.” And this brother said to me, “Maybe God is calling you here.” And I thought, “Really?” The thought, honestly, never crossed my mind. So I started working as a physiotherapist at Carmel Hospital. And I began to interface with Israelis. I didn’t speak a word of Hebrew. So I thought it was really important to learn Hebrew.

AMIR: And for anyone who's watching us, you speak fluent Hebrew. I mean, up until this podcast, we just talked Hebrew. I mean, very rarely you see an American that used to live here, but then went back home that still speaks *fluent* Hebrew. So wow, that's quite amazing. So you started learning Hebrew.

PAUL: Well, yeah, I felt like...

AMIR: ...You had to.

PAUL: But to learn the language of people is to love a people. [AMIR: Correct.] And early on I already saw that I needed to learn Hebrew. So I bought a learn-Hebrew-on your-own book. I taught myself Hebrew. And I was going to work in a hospital. And in those days, I mean, people spoke English, but I just tried, and people were gracious. And it was a struggle. It's still a struggle, 40 years later, it's still a struggle.

AMIR: Not an easy language. And we're not easy people. So combination. Exactly.

PAUL: Before I knew it, I was working in my profession with Israelis and learning about them, learning about Israelis. I met Holocaust survivors. I met people from different language groups. This is all new to me. And truthfully, I didn't know what a synagogue was. I didn't know what a Talmud was. I didn't know what kosher was. I didn't even know what Shabbat was. Traci and I were invited to people's homes including Orthodox Jewish homes. We were invited. And I had no clue that in a way they're kind of breaking the rules... I didn't know... and, hindsight is 20/20. So slowly I developed an interest in who these people are and what this State is about. And that was our launch pad. Six months later, I was invited to manage the youth hostel. It was Bethel.

AMIR: Wow. From someone who just came to volunteer. You didn't even come to volunteer.

PAUL: I didn't come to volunteer.

AMIR: You ended up volunteering because somebody recommended you will do it. And then six months later, you were offered the position.

PAUL: I was offered the position to manage the hostel.

AMIR: Wow.

PAUL: And I have to say, and Traci was 100% on board. We were here for 18 years, and we went through the '91 war also with missiles. Nothing like what just recently happened here but...

AMIR: ...That's the first Gulf War. Saddam Hussein fired 39 SCUD missiles towards Israel.

PAUL: Yeah, nearby Haifa. Haifa was an evening adventure for him. And my son who's here with us today, he was a baby at the time. And if you remember, the threat was chemical weapons.

AMIR: Oh yes. I do because that was my basic training during that time. I did most of my basic training with a gas mask on my face.

PAUL: Interesting. And it was scary days. Never once did Traci say, "I want to leave." She was here. And on that point, we had a little baby, and she was very sociable. And she had built relationships with ex-patriots. But we actually found our place in a local congregation that welcomed us with open arms. So we started building a life here. And Traci wanted to be around other moms with kids. So, she started something called the "Moms and Tots" group. And we had



a big, beautiful playground with all sorts of things. It was a great place because we had room. In Israel, there aren't big apartments and big backyards, right?

AMIR: And Bethel, not only that it's an unusual space in the middle of a busy city, but it's also walking distance from that congregation.

PAUL: It is. It is. So slowly, Traci built relationships with moms, and they had the kids together. They prayed together. Well, that gradually evolved into a kind of kindergarten. And an Olim volunteer offered to be a kindergarten teacher, in an English environment, just to teach them colors and numbers and basic things. So by this time, we were getting to know people, Traci was building relationships. I was running the hostel and working as a physical therapist. By this time, I had found a different job working in Fligelman Hospital, which is a rehab center. And that was really a launch into a new dimension professionally for me. And that's a bit of a side story. So, we were involved in a lot of—between the hostel, with moms and children, and the medical world, we actually had a full life. [AMIR: Amazing.]

PAUL: Bethel was actually founded by Jewish believers from Poland who rescued children during World War II, during the Holocaust. So on Friday evenings, we would serve a free meal just as a courtesy, just to meet people, and I would tell the Bethel story. And it was just to provide exposure to...

AMIR: ...And the free meal was for needy people?

PAUL: No, just to meet people. A meal is a bridge.



AMIR: But it was for those who stayed at the hostel?

PAUL: Those who stayed at the hostel, but we always had Israelis with us. It was a great interface for Israelis,

with tourists. Israelis love to speak English. It was just a meeting point of sharing ideas. And really, that was the goal of it.

A meal is a fellowship, no matter who's sitting at your table. And that's what it was. And we grew and matured. For me personally, something really worked in my heart. And I'm going to choke up when I tell you this. I started finding a deep love for this nation, for this people. Now, it wasn't easy. I mean, year two in Israel, I really thought I was going to lose my mind. I didn't have a command of the language. I didn't know how to do things. I was victimized. But Traci was a



backbone, a support. We just worked through that first year. We knew we'd get through it. And then once the language came in this growing love for people, we really found a home here. And really,

Amir, it wasn't a ministry, it was a home. People around the table talking, discussing life, growing, maturing. We had volunteers from all over the world, and we had Israelis working together and interface. Actually, your sister-in-law worked with us for a year. She was wonderful. And a great asset just showcasing Jew and Gentile around the table, living together, working together. The Scripture was read every day.

AMIR: And were they interested in your faith?

PAUL: People traveling are searching for the meaning to life. So yes, people are always interested in faith. Most of it is curiosity. Some of it is genuine searching.

AMIR: Because that's what I see about Israelis. A lot of them, including very close people to me, they'll just appreciate what you believe. And then they'll say, "Well, it's good for you." It's like,

“Well, if it’s good for you, I mean, it’s great.” They do appreciate it. They see it in a positive way. But it takes time for them to understand that it’s not just good for me. It’s actually the answers for you also. And that is something that requires a great miracle.

PAUL: I think that’s critical. We’re not the Holy Spirit.

AMIR: Exactly.

PAUL: We plant seeds. We just... be loving people.

AMIR: Exactly. Walk the walk. Don’t just talk the talk.

PAUL: I had relationships with Orthodox Jews who would say to me, “I love you, but I stand against everything that you believe.” I’ve had others say, “I want what you have, but I can’t have it in that package.” And I never forced it. I’m just Paul. Simple. And Traci was an incredible hostess. We’d have people over. We were invited to homes. It was about the life.

AMIR: It’s your style of what I call sharing your faith in your own way. It was a way of, “I want to get to know you. I want to love you, and I want to be part of your life.” And God will do the



rest. I mean, you know why it’s so challenging? Because if that’s the path you take, then you need to reflect Christ in your life.

PAUL: You absolutely do.

AMIR: Because otherwise, you’ll need to do all the talking all the time because they won’t see it in your life. They’ll just need to process it through what you say. But I’m not saying don’t share it with words. I’m just saying don’t share it with words when you cannot back it up with your life. Because people will eventually test your life and to see if it matches what you’re saying.

PAUL: That is *so true*.

AMIR: And so, you were very cautious in a place that is—And you know, Romans chapter 11 says, “Concerning the gospel, they are your enemies, but concerning the elections, they are beloved for the gifts, and the callings of God are irrevocable.” So, God... obviously, there is a certain hostility when it comes to the gospel. But again, they are still beloved, and God still chose them as His nation. And so here you are walking on eggshells because you know there is hostility towards the gospel. But at the same time, you know they’re God’s people. And you also know that you have a love that God has injected into you for them that cannot be explained other than it is from God. Because it’s not natural if you really think about it.

PAUL: Something else I’ve learned. There is a side of the Israeli population who genuinely care. They’re caring people. I’ll give you an example. So on 9/11, everybody—You were in New York, if I remember.

AMIR: I was.

PAUL: So I was in the air with my son coming to New York because my dad had died. So we were diverted to Toronto. We got to Toronto very late. We were in an El Al flight. Every hotel was booked. And they actually announced on the flight what had happened. Versus every other airline from what I understand was...

AMIR: ...They were not telling them.

PAUL: They were not telling them. So we land in Toronto. There’s no place. We were 400 passengers, and the Chabad community took all 400 of us.

AMIR: Wow. The Orthodox Jews.

PAUL: The Orthodox Jews. And my son and I, we stayed with a rabbi in that community who was so gracious and loving. He thought we were Jewish, and I said—He asked if I wanted to lay

Tefillin. I said, “No, we’re not Jewish.” And then, “Well, who are you and why?” And we had a very intimate conversation. And then he said, “By the way, why are you coming to the States?” I said, “Well, my dad passed away.” He said, “Take my car.” This was 12 hours away from Connecticut. He said, “Don’t worry about it. Take the car.” I know rabbis in New York, Connecticut, don’t worry. And I couldn’t do it. I just didn’t feel comfortable about it. There was also an issue whether the border was open. You remember what it was like— His daughters, he had eight children, if I’m not mistaken. Two of his daughters overheard the conversation and said, “Dad, we’ll take Paul and Ben to Connecticut. We’ll take him.” [AMIR: Wow. Wow.] You know, Amir, my heart just was overwhelmed. I’ve had so many other interfaces with Israelis, with Jewish people, who, they’re God-fearing, acknowledging God, trying to be God’s people. You know, as a light to the— And that was a light to the Gentiles.

AMIR: You felt the meaning of it.

PAUL: In a special way, at that moment with the grief of my father.

AMIR: And so here you are, serving in Israel and God is working in your life. And now you are becoming involved with a local congregation.

PAUL: Correct.

AMIR: I think the revolutionary thing is that you operated Bethel as a youth hostel but at the same time, it started becoming a hub of activity for the congregation after the service hours, such as times of fellowship, and midweek studies, and programs for the kids. So Bethel becomes now— And I used to go to that congregation for many years. So I remember Bethel is like the other arm of the congregation. And side by side, you were running it as a youth hostel for everyone and was holding your professional career as a physical therapist in a rehabilitation center in Haifa. So God was really working in an amazing way. Who would have thought, huh?

PAUL: That was a privilege. As you know, congregations are small with limited space. And here we had this big beautiful spacious area. And we said, “Come here.” And we would put coffee and cookies out, nothing’s fancy. And I think once a month we just hosted, we just opened the gate and said, “Please come.” And it was...

AMIR: ...It was potluck, people brought food. No? Am I right?

PAUL: Yeah, I think it was potluck. I don’t actually remember. It wasn’t as much about the food.

AMIR: No, I just remember this was the only time, because our congregation was in such a small building, that it was the only way for us and the only time for us to really get to know each other. And you just made it available, the place.

PAUL: Well, one of the other benefits was—I was young, I was a young believer. I didn’t know anything. I mean, even going to Bible college was only an exposure to the Scriptures. And I saw in this congregation a seriousness about the Scriptures. And when I was in Bible college, the mantra always was, “Just read the Book, just read the Book.” Now, I was going to a church that spiritualized Israel. And it wasn’t long after I was here, I took seriously, I read the Book. I read it and reread it and reread it without any bias. In other words, no Catholic bias, no Protestant bias, no Jewish bias, just read the Book, author...

AMIR: ...And let the Holy Spirit just walk you through it.

PAUL: Just read the Book, an author, an audience, and a message. And this incredibly impacted my heart. When I read stories about, one day there’s going to be a kingdom, and the Messiah is going to reign in Jerusalem, and the nations, or better, the Gentiles, are going to go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord at Zion.

AMIR: And not to celebrate Christmas or Easter.

PAUL: And not to celebrate—Spears will be turned to plowshares, and swords will be turned into...

AMIR: ...The millennial kingdom, yes.

PAUL: I didn't have any idea. And then I read about a covenant. And I thought, wait a minute, this is a one-sided covenant to a people in a land. That was revolutionary for me. And then I read in Romans that you refer to, that Gentiles are grafted into this story. It really affected my heart.

AMIR: I mean, it's completely different than the narrative you're being told, or introduced to by most of the so-called Christian world.

PAUL: And I learned early on to read with an unbiased view. So when I read Jeremiah 31, I'm simple-minded, uninformed, "A new covenant I'm giving to the house of Israel and the house of Judah." Now my first thought is, wait a minute, there is no house of Israel, because there are ten tribes who have been dispersed. And James says, well, he writes to the twelve dispersed tribes, He's going to bring them back.

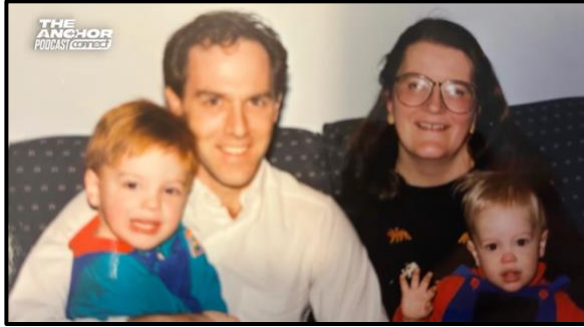
AMIR: In other words, He's not done with them.

PAUL: The covenant is for them! We come into it. Jesus cuts that covenant in His blood, but it includes us. It's not for us, but we're in it.

AMIR: It includes exactly... Wow.

PAUL: That for me, Amir—So as we move into the next stage, part three of the story, we have to leave Israel, not of our own choosing, but we were our visa was terminated. It was an extremely, extremely difficult time in our lives.

AMIR: I remember that. I felt so sad for you because I knew your heart is here. Your life is here, your calling is here, but in a way, God is still in control, and God had allowed it to happen. And that's probably the only thing that comforted me is the knowledge that the way He led you into



Israel without... unbeknownst, I mean, without you knowing that you're ever going to stay here and serve here. That means that He knows what He's doing, but I knew it must be super hard for you.

PAUL: Traci was amazing. She built our home. Our children just thought they were Israelis. We abandoned them at the very beginning.

AMIR: Your son still speaks fluent Hebrew, and he left Israel when he was 13.

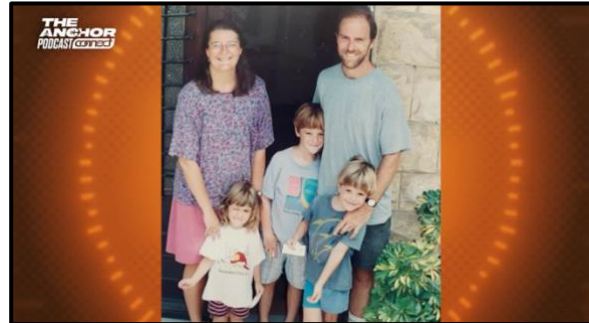
PAUL: My three children still speak Hebrew.

AMIR: Amazing.

PAUL: Their hearts are still here. They're the classic third world... not third world... third *culture*-type kids.

AMIR: Third culture.

PAUL: And that's a whole story in itself. But Traci built us a home, and we knew without doubt that this was God's doing, and we were at peace with that. It just hurt. Now, pain is not



necessarily a bad thing. And it's actually the pain of having to leave that's kept our hearts here. And I never want that pain to be taken away. That pain that...

AMIR: ...It's the healthy pain.

PAUL: The healthy pain.

AMIR: It's the one that if you don't have it, something is wrong with you.

PAUL: But, you know, God in His immeasurable wisdom had the next level. So I have worked with different organizations, and one particular group sees partnership as critical of being in the work of the gospel here. And a brother said to me, “What can we do?” And I said, “Come and meet people and just befriend them and listen. Be a good listener. Don’t come with an agenda.” So this one brother came with me in over the last 20 years. He has built friendships here and has created partnerships with people here that are involved in various works just to create a fellowship, a unity, a prayer bond, a support bond. And my point in this is this never would have happened...

AMIR: ...Unless you were here before and had the heart for the people.

PAUL: And made the connections.

AMIR: So see, God—Most times we understand things only when we look back and look at the journey and the route that He took us through. And you can also see why God chose Traci for you.

PAUL: Absolutely.

AMIR: I mean, think about her being the rock [PAUL: Whole time.] and the smile that you needed and the confidence that you needed and the assurance that you needed. Many times the Lord is using either our spouse or children or our friends to be that vessel that we can see that will convey His message. So here you are, you happened to be in Israel. I heard that you’re here and I said—But this is an amazing thing, Paul, you were here on October 7th.

PAUL: I was.

AMIR: You actually, you were in northern Israel. Am I right?

PAUL: Correct.

AMIR: On the very morning of that Shabbat when October 7th, Holocaust massacre, whatever you call it, took place. How was it to be here in this most terrible time in the history of modern state of Israel?

PAUL: On October 6th, I was in a place called Horshat Tal, which you would know, right in the Lebanese border with a group of young people for a time of fellowship. I was invited to lead a Bible study. And it was a group of mostly post-army-aged young people, some were in the army. But everybody was at a type of crossroads. So, I thought, you know, a good text to read tonight would be Joshua going into the land and preparing for war. So we had an incredible conversation around what it means to prepare for the future, to prepare for...

AMIR: ...Joshua 1!

PAUL: Joshua 1. Yeah. Be strong, be courageous, three times that appears in that. So in that group were some special forces, soldiers who were the next day called up, and others that were well, several were called up the next day. And one of them contacted me and said, "That was unbelievable."

AMIR: I needed to hear Joshua 1 in order to be prepared for the war that I had no clue is going to start the next day.

PAUL: Absolutely. So the next day I was invited to speak in a congregation in the north of the country. And...

AMIR: ...That's when Hezbollah launched his attack on October 8th. So you were on October 7th in a congregation when it happened in southern Israel.

PAUL: Correct.

AMIR: So you were still able to teach.

PAUL: Well, so I asked the pastor, I said, "What should we do?" He said, "Can you think of a better place to be than in the Lord's house?" And I said, "This is what I was planning to speak on. Joshua 1." He said, "Praise the Lord."

AMIR: Do that, yeah.

PAUL: So, you know, even in the chaos, even in the black Saturday that that was, I was able to be able to see something of God's hand, and His overruling power; things that we can't understand in this life, that God does not invite us to scrutinize His ways, but we know that He's always good, and He reminds us that He's with us. I was actually yesterday at the Nova Festival site.

AMIR: And what did you say to your son?

PAUL: We were silent. We were silent. I cried. And we also spent four hours with the father and the husband of a family whose home was invaded by terrorists that day. And he told us a story of how God protected them. There are no words. You listen. You weep. You pray. And I said to this brother, this brother, I said, "How can I pray for you?" And he said, "Pray for my kibbutz and pray for my neighbors." Who were his neighbors? "700 meters from the fence of Gaza. Pray for them." I got choked up. You know, what can I say? This is the truth of the love of God in impossible situations. God is always there. One other place in the Bible that I discovered something that I've always known, but never saw its appropriate application is Psalm 23. God is Israel's shepherd. When Jacob blesses Joseph, he says, "God is my shepherd." When the nation came through Egypt, He shepherded them; that they lacked nothing. This was David's source. This was David's resource to write that. And then I realized I'm part of the—There are other sheep that are part of, I'm part of the other fold that are brought in. And again, for me, that I'm brought into that fold is overwhelming for me. And what a privilege and honor it is just to be part of it. To see, God is shepherding.

AMIR: Yes, and He's not done with Israel.

PAUL: He is still shepherding.

AMIR: He is. He's not [done] Yeah. So you came back to see a country in almost post-trauma, almost because we're still going through the trauma. And you visited the modern-day Auschwitz,

basically, the music festival grounds over there. And yes, less people were killed there than in Auschwitz, but the brutality that was displayed and shown there maybe even exceeded Auschwitz in a way. But anyway, and you still stand by Israel, and you love the people of Israel. And you love the believers, the local believers in this country, which are the glue for you to this country. And I think Traci is still smiling from above, looking at how you continue to carry on with what your life journey was all about. And you're in your third chapter of your life, and the story is not done yet.

PAUL: Our story is not done until the last day.

AMIR: Exactly. And my prayer for you and for your children and their spouses is that they will be—My prayer for them is that they will be as obedient and cheerful as you and Traci were and as you are, still are. And whenever God opens a door, they will be courageous enough to just walk through it. Because there are so many opportunities that we don't take only because of fear. But God doesn't want us to be afraid.

So Paul, listen. Wow, I want to thank you for sharing with me, but in a sense with the world, your angle of a Gentile, Catholic, Italian Catholic from the eastern coast of the United States. That God first changed his life and then brought him to a country where you can now be used by God to change other people's lives. And He's not done with you. And we're privileged to be your friends and to know you. And just as I miss my father-in-law, of course, I'm sure you miss Traci as well. But we are not like those without hope.

PAUL: Absolutely.

AMIR: We know as 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 says, we should not mourn like those without hope, but we're going to see them and probably even very soon. I think that they're having the time of their lives in the presence of the Lord.

PAUL: We have had much to talk about.

AMIR: Yes, and it's us who just miss them. And that's the pain that I think we all should have. But one day we will be reunited and hopefully it will be very soon. So thank you, Paul, for your heart, for your service, for who you are and your obedience and faithfulness. And you know, the Bible says that our future plans in the millennial kingdom, in that kingdom that you described, is determined much upon the faithfulness that we display now in this life here. So we are going to reign and rule with Jesus, remember. And so I'm wondering which part of the world He is going to give you to reign over. Which district, which one would you like to be governing? Because right now in this life, we're just ambassadors. But when we come back with Him to rule with Him, we're going to be governors, we're going to be rulers with Him. So, I offer you Haifa, maybe Haifa would be... [Laughter] Maybe more, maybe somewhere else. I don't know why, but just think about it. These are the things we need to ponder on and think about. The Bible says if indeed you are raised with Christ, then seek those things which are above. And we need to already plan—with a smile and with the hope that we have—we need to already think about those days when we're going to be with Him and come back with Him and reign and rule with Him.

PAUL: He wins in the end.

AMIR: Always.

PAUL: He wins in the end. All of this one day will come to its climax and the glory of what He will do at that climactic point in future history will pale compared to all this horrible stuff we're experiencing today. It'll be about Him.

AMIR: Exactly. And we sure need in these days that type of hope. So I want to thank everyone that have been watching this really amazing conversation that I just had with Paul Valerio. Pray for him, pray for his family, pray for his journey still here. And until the next *Anchor Podcast*, I

want to say thank you, Paul, and thank you everyone who's watching. Remember to like, subscribe, share, and also comment on this video. Thank you. God bless you. And Shalom from Galilee.

* Scripture is taken from the New King James Version unless noted otherwise.

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