

Engage360 Episode 162 | AsOne Ministries: Lessons in Empowerment, Faith, and Community

Andrew DeVaney

[00:00:16] **Angie Ward:** Hello friends. Welcome to Engage 360 Denver Seminaries podcast. I'm your host, Angie Ward, and thank you for joining us for today's conversation. Today I am honored to have on the podcast Andrew DeVaney. Andrew is a graduate of Denver Seminary. But even before that and what we're gonna talk about today, he is the a founder of AS one. Ministries which works to help alleviate or provide pathways out of poverty in rural Uganda. And so Andrew, we're gonna hear more about this your story, how you got your heart turned by the Lord through Uganda and what you're seeing, what we can learn from you. And I'm really interested to learn from you. But thanks for being here.

[00:00:58] **Andrew DeVaney:** Glad to be here. It's an honor. Thanks a ton.

[00:01:00] **Angie Ward:** Well, so I'm gonna ask you to tell the story that you've probably told hundreds or maybe thousands of times. But tell listeners what you're doing right now, what your role is in that, and just kind of the short story of how you got here.

[00:01:15] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah. That's great. Yeah, so I, I guess I, function on the day to day as like the CEO of As. One. And we're a rural community development organization in Uganda, so primarily working in the eastern part of Uganda and rural and remote communities. We have a holistic community development model where we build a school, a health center, a farm, and a business in each community, and think of them as Ugandan income generating assets that have an earned revenue component. In Uganda to help fund the direct services or the direct programming that we're doing across the country. So probably our number one goal is to. Make our community model self-sustaining, where the earned revenue can cover all of the programming and operating expenses, and we raise the philanthropic capital here to build out this model in different communities. So sort of in the stage that we're in now is beginning to replicate or scale. Across the country. So we just finished our fifth community working on six, seven, and eight. Trying to get to 10 here in the next three years. So that's sort of current update we have, I. I think a team of it's like 326 Ugandan staff as of this week.

[00:02:26] **Angie Ward:** Wow.

[00:02:27] **Andrew DeVaney:** little over 2,500 kids enrolled across our school campuses, but the team will serve, over 60,000 people through Ag Extension services, patients at health facilities students within our vocational training program. So it's cool to see. And, it's makes a kind of a dense and very focused impact in these rural communities that we work in. So,

[00:02:49] **Angie Ward:** And well, and talk a little bit more context for Uganda. I was doing some research about 47 million in the country, and it looked like there's there's been some fairly significant progress, at least in urban areas, but very rural still.

[00:03:04] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah.

[00:03:04] **Angie Ward:** Very, yeah. Right. So. Share a little bit more about the country and kind of your focus in that.

[00:03:10] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah, you may have to do exact fact check after this, but I'm gonna pull some stats outta my head. You're right, close to 50 million people. The country's geographical size is about the same size as Oregon.

[00:03:22] **Angie Ward:** Okay.

[00:03:23] **Andrew DeVaney:** So you know, Oregon's maybe like four, four and a half million people. So you'd be thinking like entire population of California. In a small state like Oregon, and 80% of that population base is under the age of 30, 50% under the age of 18. So, dense population, lots of young people and probably the leading some of the major challenges that they face beyond, maybe that would result from, material poverty. I think the GDP per capita is getting close to about a thousand dollars per year. So that's what the average person is living off in a calendar year. And some of the leading causes of death are diseases that probably we don't, aren't prevalent here in the United States. Malaria, typhoid and has a really high dropout rate. For students. I think it's almost 70% of students are dropping out before they finish high school. So the World Bank I think it is, has this human capital index, and they would say, Ugandans end up being or are able to lift into their kind of full human potential at about like 35 or 38% due to issues of. Disease on, lack of education, lack of accessibility to essential services. And I guess our goal is to not only reverse that in rural communities with a very intentional Christ-centered Christian discipleship approach, but also, we, we want to figure out a way to sort of move the, call it Overton Window about. What kind of financial models are possible by creating something that can be financially, self-sustaining through a different vision for community development. So

[00:05:06] **Angie Ward:** Yeah. Which is a I think a more historical charitable model was you kinda

[00:05:11] **Andrew DeVaney:** I.

[00:05:11] **Angie Ward:** resources go and start things, but it never necessarily becomes self-sustaining. Is that right?

[00:05:16] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah. Yeah. You just think that typically aid or philanthropy, I mean, and I would say, we piggyback off great work that's been done in the past. So, but some challenges I mean, yeah. So a lot of times aid or philanthropy is paying for the direct services that are going on, to meet human needs, which is really understandable. And I mean, I think when I was a college student, I had read, so some of the, more popular level literature that came out, like when helping hurts or toxic charity, and one of the things Robert Lupton talks about is there's actually a sense of dignity in asking more from your beneficiaries.

It communicates that they have value. And so, we just think that there is a deep sense of like inherent value in moving beneficiaries. Maybe how we would talk about in the NGO or nonprofit sector. To look, as customers and what will tell us if our services are, meaningful or valuable to them is if they're willing to pay for it. So it like holds the programs to a certain level of accountability of like, this is something that people want and they actually, with very little margin in their lives, financial margin, they're willing to pay for it. And so yeah, that's, I mean, that's a big part of how, like what kind of frames our thinking. And so yes, the goal would ultimately be that these would be cashflow positive communities. They're generating enough income to,

[00:06:39] **Angie Ward:** Yeah.

[00:06:39] **Andrew DeVaney:** yeah. From within the communities. So yeah that's kind of what we're exploring to do and really making, I feel like great progress year over year towards it.

[00:06:48] **Angie Ward:** Yeah. That's great. Well, and your passion and excitement are just obvious in your facial expressions that some people may not be able to see when I'm talking to you right now, but that's really fun to see. So how does a Kid from South Dakota, how, what,

[00:07:03] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah.

[00:07:04] **Angie Ward:** happened?

[00:07:05] **Andrew DeVaney:** So

[00:07:06] **Angie Ward:** Uganda,

[00:07:07] **Andrew DeVaney:** I. I ask myself the same question sometimes 'cause it feels oftentimes fairly accidental. But, I without belaboring my story. I came to Faith a little bit later. It was like, kind, kind of towards the end of high school. And so I was very enthusiastic by the time I got to college from like getting involved in campus ministry to getting involved in the local church, to wanting to take, mission trips and explore my faith in that way. So I had done several trip experiences by the time I was at like kind of a junior in college. And I think. Felt fairly cynical at that point about the trips that I had been on. I felt like, for lack of a better way of thinking about it, I was like the bad missionary. I was the, when helping her, or I had done the, and participated in toxic charity and I, maybe was just willing to throw the baby out with the bath water at that point and go, I'm, I think I'm kind of done with that.

Ex, experiment during my Christian faith and gonna try to find something else. When I was in college, had a professor then who was organizing a trip that two week trip or whatever, and I had originally told her I didn't think I was gonna be a good fit for it. Didn't have interest in going, and she kind of came back and proposed, how about you spend your summer over in East Africa instead? And maybe a very different heart and vision for thinking about how to go about it. First off, she said, focus more on building relationships. Learning and listening and understanding the complexities of what people live in. And also from a spiritual perspective. Don't view it as your job to, to fix people, to solve these problems, but to see how God is already at work.

And I honestly that kind of shifted my entire paradigm. For thinking about the category of missions or how we do cross-cultural relationships or work with different people groups, different cultures on the other side of the world. And so, yeah, I spent a summer and without trying to cus too much confusion I spent a summer mainly over in Rwanda, a neighboring country. Volunteering at a school. And it was a little rural school and some of the teachers, I had become good friends with it, and they were Ugandan. And one of 'em named Henry is my, is kind of my co-founder today. He's our executive director in Uganda. And Yep I kind of did what she told me learn, listen, build relationships.

And I left that first summer. Very inspired very inspired to, with a lot of like, values and ideas around how to empower and how to give agency and authority to people coming out of like a maybe a deep sense of vulnerability. They were, in challenging circumstances, call it poverty, suffering. And how do you empower them and give them authority to enact like meaningful change. Within their communities and in their country. And so I kinda went back the next summer, spent a lot more time

in Uganda with Henry, did a more immersive type experience. You're showering with a jerry can, you're using a pit latrine, sleeping in houses where there's structures of, are made of mud. Like things that

[00:10:20] **Angie Ward:** life. Yeah. Up.

[00:10:25] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah, I wasn't as familiar with that. I felt like just gave me a whole different level of. Exposure and curiosity and getting to see the nuances of what people value, what they envision for their lives, what they hope for their families and their future and for their country. And, you're just kind of in it every day. And so, I, that 20 14, 20 15, so about 10 years ago now. Were the years of like re really kind of the formative groundling work, kind of the invisible things. I didn't really know what was going on and after that summer, sorry, I graduated from college in 15. I was an education ma major mainly, but then I changed my, my my degree last minute. Got a religion degree in the final semester of, or final year of college, and simultaneously got a full ride scholarship to Denver Seminary through the.

[00:11:17] **Angie Ward:** Oh wow.

[00:11:18] **Andrew DeVaney:** the Kern Scholarship Program. So shout out to them. That was very meaningful.

[00:11:23] **Angie Ward:** Yeah.

[00:11:24] **Andrew DeVaney:** I, kind of in this liminal period, a couple of weeks that I was still in South Dakota, shingled some houses saved enough money to pay an accountant to help set up a 5 0 1 C3. I think it was August 19th. It was like right around the time that I. Moved out to Denver to start my M Div program that officially we got formed as got our LLC. So we got set up as a five one C3 and Henry and I, yeah, had this kind of a couple of values. I feel like a shared heart. Passion to, to help rural communities move out of cycles of dependency to what we felt like was dignity through kind of this new vision for community development that would be very focused on empowering Ugandans to be the change, to enact change, to have like, a real sense of authority and leadership. To do it with more of a holistic vision for God's redemptive purposes in the world without sounding like, cynical, is like. I didn't like the idea of doing a lesser thing by caring for people's maybe material and physical and aspirational needs to do a greater thing to, help them for get saved.

But really viewing that like God is interested in all of creation in the whole of our lives. What we do with our hands and what, what is happening in our souls. And they're all very deeply intertwined. So I wanted to see that kind of holistic or integral mission come to life and, to do something that had a, model for self sustainability or financial sustainability. So that's when, chapter two began while I was in seminary. And that was kind of the exploration phase, just trying a bunch of different kind of things that some worked, some didn't work.

[00:13:13] **Angie Ward:** shell and started kind of trying, experimenting.

[00:13:16] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah. Yeah. And I think almost every break I had in seminary, I was in Uganda. It was like during fall break, during spring break, during winter break, during summer break,

I was traveling back and forth thanks to some of the professors, was able to do some independent studies to make that work. And so that was like, that was sort of the tilling of the soil. And I am like an unfortunate part of my personality. Is having to learn things the hard way. And so it's like only can learn things through experience, unfortunately. And so, yeah, found out, learned a lot about, I dunno what worked, what didn't work, and was able to reflect on that during my time in seminary. And I think it would've been like 2018 that we officially started building the model that we have today in two communities that you know to start. And that, that felt like, a huge kind of clarifying process to go.

I, I think we maybe have a model or a product or something here that can have a deep impact in specific places with people in Uganda. So that that's a little bit of the background and the narrative. I, one, one, like little anecdotal story, I just remember. It was like 2017 in our charity account. We maybe had like two grand in the bank account. And I just remember sitting in like the airport in Amsterdam, kinda asking myself like, is this really gonna work out like this? This kind of curious idea. Am I gonna be just kind of another young person that got passionate? About a country in Africa and people in Africa that had just sort of fizzled out. And so that was, I have a lot of memories like that. Wondering is what are we doing here? And so it's pretty miraculous to me in a lot of ways to see where we're at today and what's kind of come to life through, honestly a lot through God's grace.

[00:15:06] **Angie Ward:** Yeah that's amazing. You said your, you i. Goal right now is to move ramped up to maybe 10 communities.

[00:15:12] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah,

[00:15:13] **Angie Ward:** what do you wanna see and hear 10, 15, 20 years from now?

[00:15:18] **Andrew DeVaney:** it's a good question. We actually, yeah.

[00:15:22] **Angie Ward:** a big vision on your heart.

[00:15:24] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah and honestly, it's a curious question to give a little more texture to your question. That makes it pertinent. Just a couple weeks ago, we were in Uganda. A bunch of our US board members came out. Our Uganda board of directors was there. A lot of, like, our leadership and management from across all the communities came and we did this dinner to kind of celebrate the milestone of five, officially five communities. And part of the activity is we prepared, like we buried this time capsule that will open in, in 2050. Asking that question and less probably about what we've accomplished more about. What kind of heart? What DNA, what is the culture of this work gonna be and what do people aspire to, to see?

And I think there is just this shared value that we have across the organization that deep and wide are both important. Like we, we want to see. Humans, people experience a deep sense of transformation within their, within themselves and within their lives. And I think that's sort of embodied in this little phrase that we have kinda written all over the place across Uganda and probably on our website and everything that says Ugandans, empowering Ugandans. That there, there would be this movement of away from like thinking that, we have to wait for somebody else to come in. To solve our problems or we have to wait for, the donors or aid to kind of solve our solutions and that people would discover within them a belief in themselves.

And a, I think as Bryant Myers would say in walking with the poor, that like, part of what God wants to do in people's lives is to help them have a reclaimed sense of identity and vocation. Like children of God have a calling on their life and have a clear defined purpose for what God has for them. We wanna see individuals, come to experience that. And I think we'll move as, fast as we need and as, as slow as we by, as fast as we can and as slow as we need. It's like, I think I have, big aspirations to see this work. Scale across Uganda, and I've always had a desire for it to be a denser impact. Where we would think about new communities or new countries. It's like. There's a lot of work to be done in Uganda, and as we're seeing communities coming up next to each other, there's just a lot of unique potential that's unlocked through more of a dense network of places that we're working in.

So I'm kind, this is kind of a long roundabout answer, but it's like, yeah, I think we want to continue to scale across the country. Feel like there's opportunity for it. I mean, it's like for everything we're. Fundraising, just a fraction is going into subsidizing our current work in Uganda because of the earned revenue model there. So we're set up, the financial model's set up to replicate and but, we'll go as slow as we need. When it comes to people really Ugandans are the ones leading and enacting the change, and so. We're trying to develop and bring up the people necessary for the work. And there's a lot of them, but sometimes that people development side just takes takes time.

[00:18:31] **Angie Ward:** I love that phrase as fast as we can, but as slow as we need,

[00:18:34] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah.

[00:18:35] **Angie Ward:** trusting the spirit for that. Well, so you mentioned you had some experimental like startup things and now that you've figured out more of the model. And you can replicate, and you're getting to that point of being able to scale. me a little bit more about, the personal transformation in your own life. Like you said, you started out, you were kind of cynical you've done the quote, short term mission trip, that kind of thing. I'm confident that along this whole journey, not only have you been learning about, business models and systems and all that type of stuff, and the country. that the Lord has, I'm sure, continued to chisel away at false notions or assumptions or understandings. And I would just love for you to share a little bit more about what that's been like for you

[00:19:20] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah.

[00:19:20] **Angie Ward:** How the spirit has continued to polish you during that process and shape your heart.

[00:19:26] **Andrew DeVaney:** Y. Yeah, I, um. that's a really good question. I mean, cha, change is a very hard thing.

[00:19:32] **Angie Ward:** Yeah.

[00:19:33] **Andrew DeVaney:** It's hard practically in a different culture, communities, people, I find remarkably how hard it is even for myself to change. And so yeah, I may be a bigger project at times for God. And so I, I. I've been reflecting a lot on kind of my time at Denver Seminary in preparation for this and where, like, what were some of the really big catalytic things? And I think one, one real like shift in transformation for me was early on in like my training and mentoring sessions at Denver Seminary that sort of opened my eyes and opened my heart for a deeper theology of like, of work. I

think I, when I first became, a follower of Jesus, I sort of had a vision for, there's like two ways. If you're a serious Christian, if you're a serious follower of Jesus, you're gonna kind of live out probably two occupations and it's, it's,

[00:20:25] **Angie Ward:** I

[00:20:25] **Andrew DeVaney:** Yeah. Yeah. You nailed it. And that idea sort of just got shattered during my time at Denver Seminary and gave me, I think probably the most robust implications of it is for in, in positive ways. How our work and what we do in our everyday lives deeply impacts what God is doing in our souls

[00:20:48] **Angie Ward:** Hm.

[00:20:49] **Andrew DeVaney:** how meaningful our work is. In the sense of like probably the vast sense of building God's kingdom. And even more practically in, it's just like starting with the end in mind. You have this like vision of. Revelation 21. Like, there's this whole city, this new Jerusalem, like, like our embodied lives on earth. Like God is interested in them and they're part of this grand work that he's doing in the world. But also maybe how work can be an idol and how, that affects our soul. And I think if you like, have it off to the shelf and you don't even have a category for it, I think those two things become like you just miss 'em. And you're just focused on this idea of like, well, I'm focused on spiritual things. And so I think like I, I built a much broader, much more robust theology of work and how God is at deeply, I think like, I just like you, you think of the fact that God is a creator and his first, his first act is creating.

And if we're made in God's image and likeness, like part of our first act, part of our mandate is to be a creator, to have dominion over the creation, to name things, to bring things into order. And so like, at least from a practical standpoint, when I see people in Uganda and the process of moving from. Being just a receiver or a beneficiary to a giver, to a contributor, to a creator, it's like there's deep implications for them living into their image of godness. That's

[00:22:23] **Angie Ward:** Yeah,

[00:22:24] **Andrew DeVaney:** all of us. And I think reinforces like, why doing things in a certain way has a deep sense of inherent value

[00:22:31] **Angie Ward:** yeah.

[00:22:32] **Andrew DeVaney:** it.

By giving people opportunities to work, to contribute, to be a part of making something is like, it's kind of going with the stream of how God designed things to be.

[00:22:43] **Angie Ward:** Yeah. The word that comes to mind is, is dignifying.

[00:22:49] **Andrew DeVaney:** May maybe second on a really higher cosmic level is a theology of mission. Like, I just think on, yeah I think kind of for me, a theology of kingdom. Like what is the kingdom of God? What is God's rule? And reign over all the creation and his desire, his, mission to

reconcile all things. Back to himself to make all things right, to make all things new. And so how our everyday ministry, whether we're, leading a podcast, teaching a class, building an organization landscape, what, whatever it might be, how it can, how our little stories how our lives kind of get grafted into this greater narrative and greater mission. And I actually think that in the larger development space, in the larger, justice type work. I actually think Christians have a strong role to play in kind of helping people understand maybe the tea loss of history. And so I feel like yeah, our little story with as one, it's a part of god's much greater masterpiece and work of setting all things right and we wanna participate in that narrative.

[00:24:01] **Angie Ward:** Yeah I, I wanna land there for a minute because you gave kind of the perfect transition to that. You're just talking about like each of us having a role to play. Some people and I think I in the past would've heard your story and go, that's great, you're, you are the super Christian 'cause you became the missionary who then started the thing in the poor country. Right? You're doing all the things right. And I think, I guess what would you say to those of us who are listening that, I, and I'm using this word just to kind of put like, I think sometimes as an assumed value judgment. Well, I'm just a. Fill in the

[00:24:37] **Andrew DeVaney:** Hmm.

[00:24:38] **Angie Ward:** on the ground in Littleton, or I am, I'm, what do I, what can I do? I'm just, whatever, what would you say to any believer? I was gonna say everyday believers, but really we're all everyday believers, hopefully seeking to be faithful. So, so, what would you say to, to me and to other listeners who are not necessarily called to. What somebody say is this, this big grand vision for a whole country in Africa. That type of thing about our role and maybe some notions that we may have that are incorrect about that.

[00:25:10] **Andrew DeVaney:** It's a great question. I, what I wanna say is like I may. You may categorize me as a missionary or I have a fancy title, but I kind of think about what I do day to day and I, spend a lot of time on the phone, a lot of time meeting with people. I spend too much time on airplanes and I have to raise money all the time. So like functionally those things I don't, aren't like the most spiritual activities. And I've had to think about the ways that they have cha, like let's take fundraising for example. The ways that it has challenged many assumptions, my relationship with money, my fears, anxieties around, interacting with people and having to ask them to contribute their resources. So I sort of think like. Activity we are doing day to day. There are like deep soul forming implications embedded within them that give us that facilitate opportunities for us to grow. And so I would probably, first think about that like process that, like what in my day-to-day activities can facilitate like the formation of my soul, my faithfulness and obedience to Jesus.

I just like, not that long ago, I was on roof shingling houses and I remember, very, I remember kind of being a bad employee like I was. I would get, would get crabby, I would complain, I would talk bad about my boss. I didn't, I, all these different things. And I remember having kind of a vivid point where my boss sort of corrected me. He kind of scolded me and I maybe had a very humbling moment. Offered my, deep sense of apology to him and I just look back at that, the, those seasons of doing things that felt meaningless or didn't have deep, spiritual implications to them as very formative points in my life that like I have to apply those same principles today. And the same practices today of like. Take what's in front of you, take your everyday work, the things that God's placed in front of you, the people that God's placed in front of you, and like they have tremendous implications for who we're becoming and shaping and forming who we're becoming.

I think when we take the big and the small and we surrender it to God and we face it, we look at it, we find ways that we can grow and engage. Even if we don't feel like it's the very place that we're supposed to be I still think there's tremendous space for growth in, in a very, spiritual sense. It can be kind of our own domestic sort of monastery. To for God's, for God to do deep work within us. 'Cause I, there's a lot of things about my day to day that I don't really enjoy, that I, at the same time have given me, unique skills in and maybe have helped me grow and understand myself and understand what, what God's doing in my life better and better.

[00:28:16] **Angie Ward:** Yeah. Yeah. So I mean, it sounds like discipleship and impact formation and impact can all happen. Wherever you are. Sometimes even the, sometimes, especially in the most mundane things.

[00:28:30] **Andrew DeVaney:** I mean a hundred percent. I don't even really get to do the quote unquote ministry work.

[00:28:35] **Angie Ward:** Yeah.

[00:28:35] **Andrew DeVaney:** Ever these days, I lead meetings, I facilitate discussions. I, talk to people, but I may make decisions that influence people's lives to a strong degree. But it's like they're. There are other people doing the day-to-day ministry work. And I've kind of had to learn to lay that down, and try to pursue things that can help multiply that as much as possible. And I would say at, in the beginning, there weren't things I necessarily loved doing or were overly fulfilling.

[00:29:02] **Angie Ward:** Yeah. Yeah. Wow. Well, so, if people wanna find out more about as one ministries, where do they go?

[00:29:09] **Andrew DeVaney:** Uh, our web website's probably the best place to start. as One africa.org. Lot of good information on there. From vlogs and stories to all of our financials are available for people to look at. You can see. The impact reports Right, right in front of you. And then, in, if you're in the South Dakota or Denver area, we tend to do events in the fall every year if people are interested in coming. But there, there's a lot of great entry points to learn about what we're doing. But our storefronts the website probably.

[00:29:37] **Angie Ward:** Great. Great. Andrew, thank you so much for being on the podcast and it's just great to, to get to know you a little better, hear what the Lord is doing in and through your life and work and as one. And thanks again for your time.

[00:29:50] **Andrew DeVaney:** Angie, great to be with you. This was this was awesome an honor. Thanks for listening to me.

[00:29:55] **Angie Ward:** Thanks. Friends, we are grateful for your interest, support and prayers and until next time, may the Lord bless you. Peace.