**Interview with Aimee Walker**

**Maria:** [00:00:00] Do you ever feel like you are wandering in the midst of a desert? That life has lost its joy and purpose? And like the Israelites, you are simply killing time? Maybe one day you will thrive, but for now you are surviving. If so then today's episode is just for you.

[00:00:18] Welcome to Mennonite Girls in a Modern World! I'm your host, Maria Dyck. And today on the show, I have a very special guest with me. Aimee Walker is joining me, and she's special for two reasons, and I'm just going to give some quick background before I let her speak. One, she is not actually a Mennonite, which is kind of rare on this show, but you're going to love what she shares with us today.

[00:00:40] And secondly, she is one of my Joyful Life coworkers or boss. I'm not sure, are you my boss, Aimee?

[00:00:48] **Aimee :** [00:00:48] Hmm, definitely not your boss.

[00:00:50] **Maria:** [00:00:50] Nobody at Joyful Life feels like a boss.

[00:00:53] **Aimee :** [00:00:53] No, but definitely not me anyway. So I get to be your friend.

[00:01:00] **Maria:** [00:01:00] Yes. I love that. So this is going to be so much fun. I've been really looking forward to doing this with you, Aimee. Aimee is from New Zealand, and I think that's one of those places that everyone wishes they could visit, because I just want to know Aimee, is it as lovely as it looks?

[00:01:17] **Aimee :** [00:01:17] It really is as lovely as it looks, and I haven't traveled a whole lot, I've only been to. Australia and to the States to meet the Joyful Life team in 2019. And when I flew back home over New Zealand, I really was just in awe, like I get to live in the most beautiful place in the world. It is a really wonderful Island to get to live out life on.

[00:01:48] **Maria:** [00:01:48] It always looks like it. It's one of my dreams to go and visit one day. I did say the other day, we were having an Instagram conversation that you could yell at me in your accent, and I would be okay with that because I love the sound of it, but you probably don't notice.

[00:02:04] **Aimee :** [00:02:04] Yeah, it's so funny because everybody always says, "Oh, you know, we love your accent", but it doesn't feel like an accent to me obviously. And I think now that I've been working with the Joyful Life team, and you all have Canadian and American accents, I don't notice your accents very much anymore. And most of our TV in New Zealand is American as well.

[00:02:26] So our kids often speak and say things with American accents. And so your guys' voices all sound very normal to me. So I forget that for you, I don't sound normal - that I have an accent.

[00:02:44]**Maria:** [00:02:44] I loved how some of the influence from your New Zealand culture came through in the book that we're going to talk about today. And I mentioned it to you, the one where you were talking about sheep going on a "walkabout". But then I caught another one I was going to ask you about Aimee.

[00:03:02] And this is such a privilege to sit down with the author of a book and just say, "Hey, listen, I don't know what you meant. Could you explain this?" You were talking in the one chapter about how you were thinking of having another child because you were feeling "clucky" and...

[00:03:16] **Aimee :** [00:03:16] Oh, you don't have that expression?

[00:03:19] **Maria:** [00:03:19] No.

[00:03:20] **Aimee :** [00:03:20] Okay. So clucky is like your ovaries are hurting, and you need another baby.

[00:03:27] **Maria:** [00:03:27] Okay! There you go.

[00:03:29] **Aimee :** [00:03:29] Like a mother hen wanting to add to her brood, you know, you're clucky. I didn't know that that was not an expression for you guys.

[00:03:38] **Maria:** [00:03:38] I think I'm too old to feel clucky, but I understand what you're talking about.

[00:03:44] **Aimee :** [00:03:44] Yeah. I don't feel clucky anymore. I feel very much over that.

[00:03:49] **Maria:** [00:03:49] It made me smile because I just love that this is just a unique part of who you are, and it's coming through the book. Your book is called, "But IFflourish", and it has been such a delight to read. I feel like it's the book I needed to read 10 years ago when I was going through one of the hardest seasons of my life and feeling so, so stuck.

[00:04:13] But even more recently, I feel like I've kind of entered another desert, and maybe this desert isn't quite as long or deep or challenging, but it's still a desert and. And I just wish, wow. I wish I would have had that book in my hands because I feel that it is a topic that so many people can relate to.

[00:04:34] And I know this book came out from some really hard seasons in your own life and without giving too much away of what's actually in the book, what inspired you to write it? What was the struggle that inspired this book?

[00:04:46] **Aimee :** [00:04:46] Well, it's interesting that you say that this is the book you wish you had 10 years ago, because this is the book that *I* wish I had 10 years ago. And as I was thinking about this question, it wasn't any one struggle in terms of my external circumstances or experiences that caused me to want to write this book.

[00:05:10] It was how I felt, and I felt very alone. My twenties were very difficult. They were filled with a lot of the things that all of us face as we enter into adulthood. I had come to realize, I think that decade of our twenties is far more formative than many of us realize. You know, often we'll be getting married as believers -we tend to marry younger than the world does- so we're navigating becoming wives, perhaps becoming mothers, forging a career. And we're still in the midst of all these things, trying to figure out who we are and how we operate in all these new roles and responsibilities that we have -how we adult. And for me on top of those, there was also a lot of very difficult circumstances and seasons that I had to navigate.

[00:06:01] And so I felt very alone. And like, I knew that there was meant to be more to this Christian life. I wanted to be fruitful. I wanted to honor God with my life. I honestly, I just didn't know how. *How* do I do all these things? *How* do I be all these things? And *how* do I do more than just survive all these things?

[00:06:26] And I really, in that season, desperately longed for spiritual mothers, women who were further along the path than I was to come alongside me and say, *"This is how you navigate the season. This is how you become a good wife. This is how you become a good mother. This is how you navigate valleys and suffering and had seasons without losing your faith and without losing who you are."*

[00:06:54] So I very much wanted that person. And while I don't want to say that I didn't find them *at all* because absolutely there were moments of encounter with older, wiser woman, but in terms of like a day-to-day mentor that just wasn't there. And so my heart in writing this book is very much to lend my strength to those who are walking hard paths, to those who are trying to answer all the questions that I was trying to answer. And I guess I want to be that spiritual mother and come alongside and encourage and equip because I wrote this book in a difficult year and I, you know, I wrote it in the midst of a pandemic and I was parenting a child with mental illness.

[00:07:46] And it was in many respects, one of the most painful years of my journey, but at the same time, I could see that all the truths that God outworked in my twenties and early thirties and my next birthday is 40. So I very much feel like I have, you know, God has really cemented these lessons in my heart and my life. And what last year showed me as I walked through yet another desert, because the deserts don't end - I think they don't end in this life was- that these truths had transformed how I live in the desert. That was really encouraging for me.

[00:08:26] And so my heart very much in writing the book was to be the woman that I wished I'd had come alongside me 10, 15 years ago.

[00:08:36] **Maria:** [00:08:36] It's interesting that you talk about your twenties being that for you, because I didn't feel that way in my twenties. My twenties were some of my best years ever, but it felt like it came to a grinding halt in my thirties. So it does feel that it doesn't really matter when it comes, it's going to come.

[00:08:54] **Aimee :** [00:08:54] It is going to come. Yeah.

[00:08:56] **Maria:** [00:08:56] I feel like it comes on the heels of realizing that you simply aren't smart enough. That you're not as smart as you thought you were. You're not as tough as you thought you were. You are not what you thought you were. And this realization that you are ill-equipped for what is in front of you, it's very demoralizing and humbling.

[00:09:15] **Aimee :** [00:09:15] For me, it was also realizing I wasn't as *good* as I thought I was. I grew up-I was a pastor's daughter- I had loved Jesus from a very young age. I had a profound revelation of Him in my early teens, and so I had never really wrestled with my faith. And yet in my twenties, I found myself wrestling and realizing all the things that you just said; that I wasn't as smart as I thought I was, I wasn't as able, but I also realized I wasn't as *good.* That taking less and, you know, doing all the good Christian girls stuff, it wasn't enough when life got bad; that wasn't enough to keep a healthy, vibrant faith. I couldn't reduce my relationship with God down to *doing*.

[00:10:08] And yeah, that was a very confronting experience, a very healthy experience that I think we all need to come to that place, whether it's our twenties or thirties, or even our forties or fifties, where we, realize, *I am not enough*. And that's okay because I know the One who is enough, and I can get what I need in His presence and my relationship with Him.

[00:10:33] But it's a hard place to come to.

[00:10:35] **Maria:** [00:10:35] Your book talks a lot about this striving, and how we really do think it's going to be on our own steam and our own wits and our own knowledge that we're going to accomplish so much. Can you talk a bit about how striving actually does more harm than good?

[00:10:50] **Aimee :** [00:10:50] There's so much about striving that is damaging, but I think the thing that it all comes down to is that striving takes our focus off Christ and it puts it back on ourselves. And so that means that, that we get stuck in a cycle that it's all about what we have, what we are able to do. And that might be okay- we might experience some measure of success for a season when it's all on us, but at some point, like we've just said, we all do reach the end of what we are able to cope with.

[00:11:27] And so if we have put the focus and the expectation on ourselves at some point, what we're going to be met with is failure and narrative of shame. And the more that we get stuck in this, it's all on me, and then I fail, and then I feel condemnation and shame, the more we then tend to retreat from our relationship with God. Now the lies of the enemy just seem to take root more and more, and it just becomes the cycle. So I think striving is a very dangerous place to live in because it only ever leads to disappointment.

[00:12:08] And it really does disconnect us from Christ. And I think then it's in that place that the abundant life Christ talks about the fruitful life has, you know, His commissioning that we would bear much fruit so that we would show the world has glory, all those things, they feel impossible. Yes. I think the big thing with striving is really that it disconnects us from Christ.

[00:12:37] And like He said, in John 15, "*Apart from me, you can do nothing*". And so anything that we allow into our lives that disconnects us from our true source of growth and flourishing is always going to set us up for disappointment. So I think, you know, striving is something that we all struggle with at some point, or maybe in a specific area.

[00:13:04] Like I know in my own life now overall, I wouldn't say I strive, but there would still be pockets of my life where I'm more prone to it than others, that there are specific areas where I've really grown, and now find it quite easy to rest in Christ in that area. But then in a different place, it's still very much a work in progress.

[00:13:25] And so I think being mindful of where we are prone to strive is also very, very important.

[00:13:32] **Maria:** [00:13:32] Well, I'm coming from a Mennonite background. If I had to say it, I would think striving would be considered a godly asset for people who work hard and are self-motivated. And so I feel like it is one of those characteristics that is very well looked upon. And so for someone who already struggles with it, that becomes very difficult then to not just go for it.

[00:13:55] But I think one of two things can kind of happen when you're striving. One, you're going to feel like an utter failure and that sense of shame and condemnation you were talking about. But secondly, if you're somewhat successful, it's very easy to become very proud and to look on others who may not be striving as well as you.

[00:14:12] So I just loved what you shared there, and how I think it's such a hard lesson to learn. And I wish that some of these lessons didn't end up-and there's this description in Lamentations that talks about our, our teeth being crushed to gravel - sometimes I think that's what it looks like when you come to the end of yourself.

[00:14:32] Coming from a Mennonite culture, I do appreciate what you're saying because, a few years ago, I spoke at a conference for Mennonite women, and I was talking about the Israelites coming out of slavery and headed for the promised land, but stuck in the desert. And at some point I asked the women to put up their hand if they felt they were stuck in a desert, and we were praying, so nobody could really tell if you raised your hand. And I was absolutely floored by how many women put up their hand, and it made me sad. Of course it grieved me because I understood it. But I do feel like our culture really promotes and values striving. So then learning to rest in Jesus is just something we really have to learn how to do because they're exhausted.

[00:15:18] You know, it exhausts you.

[00:15:20] **Aimee :** [00:15:20] It is. It's really exhausting.

[00:15:22]**Maria:** [00:15:22] So that just kind of leads to the next question of why do Christians and, and I think in this case, we're going to talk particularly about women. I know men struggle with this too, but why do Christian women then resign themselves to living in the desert to say, "W*ell, I guess this is what life is and it'll never be better."*

[00:15:41] Why do we settle for that when God wants more for us?

[00:15:45] **Aimee :** [00:15:45] As I thought about this question in the context of my own life, I realized that subconsciously I'd held this belief that the desert was more holy. That to be struggling was more holy than to be thriving, to be in lack was more holy than to have abundance, that only then was I really, depending on God. It was almost like I was afraid that if I prospered, if I thrived, then I wouldn't need God as much.

[00:16:21] And God really convicted me through a very well-known verse. Paul's words in Philippians where he says, *"I've learned to be content, whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need. And I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."*

[00:16:49] It was just like the Holy spirit highlighted for me in that season, those words: A*nd. Or.* That Paul wasn't saying one situation was better to be in than the other. He was saying he knew how to steward *both* plenty or want through Christ. That *both* offered the opportunity to be dependent upon Christ just in different ways.

[00:17:17] And that for me became really quite transformative; that God wanted me to be able to navigate any and all seasons through His strength. But the other thing that really began to transform how I saw the desert places of my life was an understanding of hope. Hope, if we were to sort of combine all the different definitions of the original language, we could just really distill it down to: *a confident expectation of God's goodness in our lives.*

[00:17:52] And you talked about, you know, growing up in the culture that you have, that striving was actually like an attribute that was praiseworthy. And I wouldn't have necessarily called it striving. I would have said perseverance, you know, because in passages like James we're told that we should rejoice in suffering because it develops character and maturity and perseverance.

[00:18:15] And so I had this mindset of *I just need to be a good perseverer*. I just need to be good at getting on with it. And because of passages like Romans 5 and James 1 that call us to embrace suffering because of what it forges in us, I very much turned the focus on myself in desert seasons.

[00:18:39] So it was: *I* must need to go through all these things because *I* am obviously very immature. *My* character must be very lacking for God to feel that *I* need to go through one thing after another. And *I* just need to keep persevering because obviously He's not happy with where *I'm* at, and He needs *me* to get stronger and better and more mature.

[00:19:03] But the focus again was going back on me rather than on God. And it almost became like a little bit of a witch hunt when something would go wrong in my life, I would be like, *where is the sin in my life that has caused this circumstance?* And hear me right, we need to examine our hearts. I talk about this a lot in the book that we need to be willing to deal with the weights of sin, but sometimes we're just experiencing things because we live in a fallen world, and we haven't done anything wrong.

[00:19:33] And it's about a much bigger picture than just us. So, in all of that, God highlighted something for me in Romans 5 that I'd never really noticed, and I just want to read the verses to you. Because this, again, for me was one of those *aha* moments, alongside recognizing God wanted me to be able to steward, lack *and* plenty through His strength, that neither was more holy than the other, was this understanding of His heart for me in the hard things.

[00:20:08] So Paul writes in Romans 5:3, he's been talking about how we rejoice that we've been restored to relationship with God through the cross. And then he says, *"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character hope."*

[00:20:29] Now I had always viewed the perseverance and the character as God's ultimate goal for me in suffering. Again, it put the focus on me. But the progression is actually rejoicing in what God is doing, even in the hard things, leads to perseverance, which leads to character and the King James actually translates that word as *experience.*

[00:20:56] And our experience with God is meant to lead us to hope- a confident expectation of His goodness. And that really for me began to change how I saw the desert because rather than looking at what might be wrong with me, I began to look for, what is God doing here? How can I see His goodness right where I am?

[00:21:22] How can I possess hope? And The Message talks about this particular verse, The Message paraphrase talks about how 'alert with expectancy'. We basically don't have containers enough to hold out the goodness of what God is doing in our lives. And that shift, we don't throw away perseverance or character or growing and maturity, that we recognize that God's heart in all of those things is that we would be led to an increasing understanding of His goodness and His heart toward us.

[00:21:59] And as I was praying about this particular question that you'd given me, I just felt to encourage all your listeners to think about when they plant something, when they plant something in their garden, be it a vegetable or a flowering bush or tree.

[00:22:18] What is the expectation for that plant? Do you plant it thinking, W*ell, I hope you just survive plant. I hope that you, you know, that you never really reach your full potential*. No, you plant it in the hope and the expectation that it will grow and thrive, and it will flourish. And Isaiah 61 says we are the *Lords planting*.

[00:22:41] So if we, in our flawed humanity, can plant a plant, can give birth to a child and hope for the plant, for the child to grow and to thrive and to be fruitful and reach their potential, how much more does the Good Father plant us and believe that we will grow and thrive and be fruitful? And Isaiah 61 says, *"We are His planting for the display of his splendor."*

[00:23:09] And so when we find ourselves in a desert planting, God's heart is still in that place that we would thrive. And if you think about how you tend to the plants in your own garden, when they go through different seasons, when it's cold or it's hotter, or the soil has got stripped of its nutrients, you come alongside them and you tend to them, and you add to them what is needed for them to be able to withstand that season, to come through it and be able to continue to grow.

[00:23:42] And I just felt like God really wanted to remind and encourage woman- being His planting does not mean they will not encounter difficult soil. But what it does mean is that in that difficult soil, they can find rest and be confident that His heart is still for them. And His heart is still for them to be able to grow and thrive and to have hope in that place because He is good, and they are His.

[00:24:12] So I hope that picture of what we want for our own plantings reminds and encourages us that God wants so much more than we can ever imagine. He's just so good. And for me, as I say, I wrote this book in a difficult season that the understanding of who God is, His heart for me, the purpose of the dessert, it has changed how I walk through the hard places of life.

[00:24:43] **Maria:** [00:24:43] I love that, Aimee, thank you so much for sharing that. What would be the one thing you would want every woman to come away with after reading your book? The one thing you would not want her to miss?

[00:24:55] **Aimee :** [00:24:55] It is in essence some of what I've just shared and it's, it's not, I don't know if it's one thing or if it's two things, but it's that God is for you, and He is utterly trustworthy. And, you know, David and the central Psalm that this book is built around -this book stemmed out of Psalm 52, where David is on the run fearing for his life, and he says, *"But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of the Lord. I trust and his unfailing love."*

[00:25:29] And when I read that and saw that he said, *but I am*. Not, I *will be*, but I am right now on the run, fearing for my life, I am a growing thriving, olive tree because I trust in the unfailing love of God.

[00:25:48] That was an invitation to me that I didn't have to keep waiting, but more than anything, it was an invitation to trust God, to be loved by Him, and to really grow in my understanding of His heart for me in each and every season of my life. And so I would say to your listeners, and to anyone who reads the book, that my heart is that you come away, and whether you currently find yourself in a very desert valley or rejoicing on the mountaintops, that you would be reminded and encouraged God is for you. And that you absolutely can trust in His nature and His character and His wisdom and His love for you in each and every season of your life.

[00:26:37] **Maria:** [00:26:37] Well, I cannot tell you how much I appreciate Aimee, you coming on the show and sharing that with us. Partly because I know this is a message that the women who listen need to hear, but also partly because it was something I needed to remember just where I am right now in my own life. So I just loved everything you shared.

[00:26:57] I am really excited for your book to come out. We at Mennonite girls in a Modern world are really excited to be able to share a copy of Aimee's book with you. If you are interested in winning a copy of, "But I Flourish", be sure to head on to our Instagram page today, and you'll have all the details for a giveaway.

[00:27:16] And I'm just going to say this. Aimee's already done a giveaway in New Zealand and in the States, so this giveaway is for Canadian women just to kind of give everyone a chance to get their hands on this book. Her book is live out on Amazon, so I really encourage you to go in and check it out. I have been enjoying it.

[00:27:38] It has been an absolute treasure to have you here with me today and to be able to share the message that God has given you through this book. So thank you for being here today, Aimee.

[00:27:49] **Aimee :** [00:27:49] Thank you, Maria. It has been such a privilege and an honor to be able to share with you and your listeners. And yeah, I'm just really praying and believing that you would each and every one of you be able to declare like David that, *I flourish, right where I am right now, because God is good.*

[00:28:09] **Maria:** [00:28:09] Amen!