



## **Back to the Bible Daily Program**

**Message Title: See the Need pt. 1**

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Patti and I were at the Barnes and Noble. She was kind of looking at books and I was back in the music area and there was a lady back there, probably about my age and she was, uh, sitting on one of those stools with the headphones on and she was listening to music. And I happened to notice that there was a tear running down her face. So just kind of hung around and pretty soon she started to cry harder. And then she took the headphones off, she put them back on the rack and she just began to weep uncontrollably. So I just kind of hung around until she regained her composure.

I sat down on the stool next to her and I said, ma'am, can I help you with anything? First thing she said is she looked at me and she said, are you a pastor? I said, actually, I am. She just stared at me for a little while. And then she said, pastor, is it true that if I kill myself tonight, I can't go to heaven? And for the next hour we sat and we talked about her story and her life and I tried to connect her with people that I thought could help her. But that night as we walked out I was reminded there is a lot of pain in this world. If you're just willing to see it. We have a tendency to just think everybody's fine and nobody really wants to hear the message of Jesus. I would say that's totally false. It's a matter of fact. It's completely backwards. I don't think most people are fine. I think most people are experiencing deep pain, frustration, despair, hopelessness and actually they would very much like a meaningful respectful, compassionate conversation about Jesus.

Greg Easterbrook in his interesting book called *The Progress Paradox*, he makes the case that we as Americans live better than any people have in the history of the world. Spends about the first third of the book making his case for that. Then he goes on to say that the evidence would show that we are more hopeless, more despairing, more unhappy than any previous generation. And he goes on to make his case for that. And then raises the question, why is that? One of the things he talks about is they used to go out onto the street and ask people, are you happy? And the majority of people said yes. And so then they would ask a follow-up question, are you really happy? And he said, they stopped asking the question because so many people burst into tears. I think if you look at our culture, the evidence of pain is everywhere from our addictions, from our busyness to our materialism, to our immorality, to so many evidences that we are a people in pain.

Several years ago I started to see something in my heart that I didn't like. As a result of information coming into my heart and mind through multiple sources, through news, through talk radio, through media - all of a sudden I realized that on the basis of certain labels and certain behaviors, what I've found in my heart was there were certain people I just didn't like. I'd never met them. I'd never had a conversation with them. I just didn't like them, and I could tell that was the emotion that was in my heart. I thought I, I'm disliking the very people that Jesus would sit

down and dine with. And decided I need to be much more thoughtful about what's coming into my heart, what's coming into my mind, what is feeding that, and to choose to discipline myself to see people through a biblical lens rather than this lens that is so driven by the media that divides the world into us and them. To realize that the end of the day we're all people made in the image of God. And if you take away the behaviors and the labels at the end of the day we are people that want to love, we want to be loved, we want to find happiness, we want to find joy, what we want to have meaning and purpose life. If we separate all that other stuff that divides us, at the end of the day, we're very much alike and to actually choose to view people through a lens of scripture and to realize actually, we are people in pain. And it is sobering to realize that we as Christians have the message of hope to carry into the darkness, to meet people at their point of pain and to let them know there is hope.

I think it takes a lot of pressure off to realize that being a faithful Christian doesn't mean I have to fix everybody. I don't have to change everybody. I don't have to argue about everything. I don't have to debate everything. Every time something comes up in a conversation somewhere, if it doesn't agree with scripture, I don't have to argue about it. I don't have to have a fight about it. As a matter of fact, the whole idea of taking a stand biblically is much more the idea of me, myself taking my stand, living my life according to truth. According to integrity, it doesn't mean trying to fix everybody that doesn't know Jesus. As a matter of fact, expecting people who have never had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus to have a Christian worldview is just rather ridiculous. I don't expect them to agree. I don't expect them to see it from God's perspective. So until they have an encounter with Jesus, nothing of substance is really going to change.

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Unless someone has an encounter with Jesus, nothing's going to change. So, the strategy has to be, how do we create an environment where we can have that conversation?

Now, one of the ways that we need to think about this is as it relates to social media. Now for me to have this discussion with you is probably right on the edge of lacking credibility. I mean, I am the pastor that still uses the overhead projector in the foundations class, so I'm quite technologically challenged. So, I don't get much of this social media world, but I will tell you this, I am absolutely positive that it does not take an ounce of courage to sit behind a computer and tell somebody off. It's cowardly and it is unproductive to the cause of Christ. I am continually surprised by the hurtful things that Christians post on Facebook and on social media, and we somehow convinced ourselves, this is taking a stand. Really, are we really going to say that we put that out on Facebook and somebody that doesn't agree with your opinion reads that and says, Oh, I've completely changed my mind. It doesn't persuade anybody, which means what we're doing is we're venting. We get frustrated, we get angry, the frustration builds up and we emotionally vomit in social media and it is totally unproductive to the cause of Christ.

This is why for those of us that are working really hard to make a difference in the trenches, it usually goes something like this. So, I build a relationship with an unbeliever and then I get to know some of that person's friends. They get to know some of my friends, and you start to have this web of relationships that starts to develop and pretty soon people start to connect with each other in social media. And inevitably somebody finally says, hey, doesn't that person go to your church? Why would they put out something so hateful? Isn't this person supposed to be a Christian. For them and their worldview and their behavior, it's personal. And now whatever

conversation we were going to have that was meaningful about the cause of Christ is 10 times harder to have because you just confirmed all their prejudices and stereotypes of what it means to be a Christian. I'm just telling you, it's not helpful at all. I just would ask that we be more thoughtful for the cause of Christ, of what we're posting in social media.

We talked about the importance of understanding that it's not about making converts, it's about making disciples. The mission is to go and make disciples. When we understand that, it changes our methodology, it changes everything. When we're thinking in terms of converts, it's not a conversation. It's a presentation. It's a transaction. It's trying to close the deal. It's one, two, three and are you in, are you out? And frankly, that conversation rarely goes well. One of the things that I noticed years ago when I was wrestling with some of this is the Bible simply isn't written that way. In other words, you can't show me a single text in the Bible that is one, two, three, here's the gospel. Are you in or are you out? Look at every gospel presentation out there and they plug verses from different letters, different books of the Bible to put it all together in what we might call a summary. Now there's a place for that, but skipping the conversation and moving right to the summary is typically not helpful. The closest to one book carrying the message would be the book of Romans and people sometimes refer to what they call the Romans road, but the reality is it took Paul eight very tedious chapters to have the conversation. Of this is ultimately the message of the Gospel. We need to think in terms of a conversation.

Now when we think in terms of converts, so again, the mentality is I need to make a presentation and then at the end of that I need to close the deal. That's kind of how it feels. What happens in that is we tend to focus on the wrong things, so typically that presentation of the gospel ends up like this, hey, it's been nice talking with you. By the way, you're a sinner, you're going to hell. God's made a way to heaven, are you interested? Let's pray. No, obviously I'm being a little bit sarcastic there, but the fact of the matter is when we think presentation, that's what we think it is and you have to ask yourself the question. Isn't that part of what creates the anxiety? I'm building a very nice relationship with somebody I care about, but in the back of my mind I'm always thinking, I have to have this conversation. You're a sinner. You're going to hell and aren't you interested in heaven? Who wants to have that conversation? And so, it creates this unnecessary anxiety besides the fact I think it totally misses the heartbeat of the Gospel.

The point is not just forgiveness. The point is that forgiveness is a means to an end. The end is the abundant life. The end is eternal life. The end is a relationship with Jesus. At the end of the day, the Gospel is not a change in geography. Hey, fellow, you're going to hell, why not go to heaven? It's about a relationship with a person. It's about recapturing the longings and the desires that reflect what you were created for. It's about knowing God and the God who loves you and made you. Forgiveness is a means to an end.

It's totally different when we start thinking about this in terms of a conversation, in terms of making disciples, and I actually start pursuing people and I have a conversation with people and I want to know what are your hopes? What are your dreams? What are your hurts? What are your pains? What are your struggles? And I start to understand that this is the place where Jesus would intersect your story in a very meaningful way and would you be interested in knowing there is actually a way that you can find relief from that struggle, from that pain, from that despair, and this is what God has done to make it possible. It's a very different conversation. When I genuinely care about people, I actually want to find their pain, their hurt, their struggle,

and I want to genuinely help make a difference by introducing you to this Jesus that has so radically changed my life. That means that evangelism isn't primarily an event. It's not a program. It doesn't mean a whole bunch of additional activity. It means that we just need to be more thoughtful, more intentional in the things that we're already doing. Something as simple as going from here to there.

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Cara: Bryan, what do you mean by something as simple as going from here to there?

Bryan: Yeah, so it's a little bit of a teaser of what's to come. But Jesus so often just in traveling from point A to point B encounters someone whose life is ultimately changed. If we think in terms of it's not so much doing a whole bunch of different things, it's thinking differently about the things we're already doing. We're already going to school. We already live in a neighborhood, we already go to a job. I already have our hobbies. So how do we think differently and what's the possibility in those everyday environments that we have opportunities to share Christ?

Arnie: So Bryan, it sounds like you're saying evangelism can be a practical thing like, in your daily conversation. So why is it so hard for so many Christians to have the guts to share their faith?

Bryan: Yeah, that's a great question, Arnie. So I'd start with saying if there's people that have something that works for them and they do it all the time, then God bless them, then go for it. But the reality is most people don't. And so we have to rethink why that is. I think maybe it's bad methods, methods that that create more conflict, that create bad experiences and people think I'll never do that again. Maybe sometimes it's just the fear of looking foolish.

Bryan: But I think sometimes it's an insecurity that we can't answer all the questions. You know, I've been a pastor for 36 years and I can't come close to answering all the questions. You know, if that's the standard, none of us are going to share the gospel, nobody has all the answers and it's okay just to say, I don't know, and keep the conversation going. I think sometimes we make it harder than it needs to be.

So in the message I shared a story about a woman that I encountered in a Barnes and Noble and had the opportunity to sit down and share Christ with her. I know both of you have a real heart for reaching lost people, so I'm guessing you both have stories of opportunities you didn't expect that presented themselves to, to share the gospel of someone.

Arnie: Yeah, for me, I've had lots of moments like that from a, I remember sharing my faith on a plane a couple of different times. One time to a guy who turns out he was a pastor. In fact, he ended up praying with me. So I said, wow, that's pretty cool. And we remained friends. And another guy on a plane, he was very, very upset about his son making some choices and lifestyles that just broke his heart. And, I was able to share Jesus with them. And, I know Cara and you, Bryan, it's in your DNA. It's just not in my DNA. And so I pray about it. I do now wherever I am, ask the Lord to give me wisdom if, if this is one of those divine appointments.

Cara: I Remember one time I just had this urge to text my aunt and I said, hey, I'm just saying hello. I'm going to come over and look at your flowers. She's probably listening. I could care less about her flowers. But she texts me back and I went over there and I said, it was so funny because I did not know what to say to her. I just knew I needed to put the gospel on her. And I just said, you know, this is so weird, but I feel like I need to tell you about Jesus. And she started crying and she said, I've been talking to God. And she said, I just don't know him. And so it just solidified the fact that it's not about me. We're these messengers, that if we're listening to the prompting, we just do it. It's uncomfortable and it's inconvenient, but do it. Just do it.

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