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SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Interview with Kevin Harney Pt. 1: Organic Outreach

Now, here's Pastor Nat Crawford with today's guest, author and internationally known speaker, Pastor Kevin Harney:

N: Today, I am excited because I've got a special guest with us: that is author and pastor, Kevin Harney. Kevin, thank you for joining me and our listeners today.

K: It is absolutely my joy. And I'm honored that you invited me to have a conversation with you.

N: Well, Kevin, I know a lot about you. I've spent time with you in California. I've been part of your cohorts and part of Organic Outreach for, I think coming on four or five years now. I've been around you and your material, but our listeners may not know who you are and what you're up to. So if you don't mind, take a few minutes and share a little bit about yourself, about your ministry and what you're doing.

K: I grew up in what I would describe as a loving, fairly healthy, pagan home. And so I grew up in a non-believing home, over a hundred extended family members, and just one Christian. And so now that's changed. And a lot of people in my family know and love Jesus, but out of that, I was called to follow Jesus. And then I had the privilege of being called to pastor a church. And then along the way, God just gave me a passion.

It's interesting the day I became a Christian, I just felt like God called me very clearly, to spend the rest of my life telling people about Jesus. I was only 16. And what I felt in my heart, was spend the rest of your life telling people about Jesus, or you'll be miserable. And my life mission statement is to reach the lost, and teach the found, to reach the lost. So I want to help people that don't know Jesus, and help people that do know Jesus, to learn to naturally reach out. So along with pastoring a local church, along with being a husband to a great wife, and a dad to three adult kids, and a grandpa to two little kiddos, I lead Organic Outreach International with my wife and a great team. And we're equipping and resourcing about 40,000 churches globally, to help them fulfill the call of the Great Commission. So that's me in a little snapshot.

N: I just want to start by asking the question, and it's your area I think of passion. There are, you know, four letter words that we don't like to use, we don't like to hear, as Christians, but I'm convinced that the number one four letter word for Christians, the word is evangelism, right? I mean, you talk about evangelism, people freak. If you have a Sunday School class, I mean, I was

a pastor for five years. And it's like, okay, we know we need to get people excited about outreach and evangelism, but man, if you label that class "Evangelism" or "Outreach", people just scatter. I mean, you may well just have said COVID-19 in this room, they're gone, right? So my question for you is, I mean, is that your experience as a pastor? Are people that afraid of evangelism, and why do you think so?

K: So absolutely that what you're just saying, I think almost every pastor on the planet experiences the same thing. You know, you pastor a church, and you ask your people, do you believe the Bible? You know, do you believe this book? You know, your program is all about the Word of God. Do you believe the Bible? They'd be like, "Yeah, we believe the Bible". And you say, "Okay, you know, do you believe the world needs Jesus?" "The world needs Jesus." "Do you believe in the mission of Christ to go and make disciples of all nations?" "We believe in it." "Okay. Who wants to go?" And the room clears.

And I think it's really, I think it's two things. Number one, I think it's spiritual warfare. I believe that we have that, you know, your whole program is about the Word of God, is about the Bible. We believe the Bible is true from beginning to end. And the Bible tells us that we have a very real enemy. And I believe that that enemy, when we get together and have potlucks, I don't think the enemy trembles. But when a local church is equipping their people to share their faith in natural ways, to do the work of evangelism, that's a battle cry, man; that's a war cry. [Right] And there's spiritual resistance. So I think that there's a battle going on and there's a lie. The enemy is a liar and the father of lies; when he lies, he speaks his native language. He lies to us about people are going to think you're weird, and people are going to run away from you, and all these lies. So we get that battle going on and we kind of pull back.

And the second reason that we resist is personal fear. Most Christians, and I'll let you in on a little secret Nat, most pastors are scared to death to share their faith outside the pulpit, and sometimes even in the pulpit. But to actually articulate the Gospel, and to invite people to follow Jesus, it scares people. And so between the spiritual resistance and the personal fears, it's a battleground. And if we're going to press forward, we have to acknowledge those things and say, it's worth pressing through those for the sake of the Gospel. And that word evangelism, it brings all those fears to mind, and so, but evangelism is a great word; it's about bringing the Good News. But sometimes that word freaks people out, and we've got to let them see that it can be organic in what we're doing, not a scary thing.

N: Right. So how do you coach your people then to reject that notion that it's something to be afraid of, but rather something to embrace? I mean, yes, it's part of our directive as followers of Christ: *go therefore and make disciples*, but it's actually a great privilege. And when you lean into it in organic ways, it's definitely not as complicated or as scary. I mean, is that what you've found? And so, how do you coach your people in that?

K: Well, imagine a person who's never dared to get into a pool and swim. And now they're, you know, 35 or 40 years old, and you say, "Swimming is easy. I'm going to just throw you in the ocean." They're going to be terrified, probably with good reason, because they're looking and going, "But I don't know how to swim." I think one of the best ways to overcome the fear of our people, is to teach them, to say, "We can get you skills and tools, because sharing your faith,

shouldn't be scary for you. It shouldn't be scary for the person you're talking to." And so if we can equip people, and give them the skills and train them, that confidence will start to grow.

It's still kind of scary, but once people start to practice the tools, you teach them, and that's what Organic Outreach is all about. We give tools that are natural and easy. When I wrote the book, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People*, I had a college student I knew, this young college student, and he said, "I'm terrified to share my faith. I love Jesus. I believe the Bible, but I'm terrified to share my faith." And I said, "Hey, will you read the manuscript of this book I just wrote?" before it was published. And I thought, just read the first chapter. He comes back to me, I don't know, a week later; he read the whole book. He said to me, he goes, "I think I'm an evangelist." I said, "What?" He goes, "Well, everything in your book, I can do that." [Right] And I said, "You're not an evangelist. This book is for the 97% of Christians that don't have the call of an evangelist. They're just Christian. I said, "You're a Christian and you love Jesus. You can do this. You can tell your story. You can tell His story. You can pray for people. You can serve people and then tell them why you serve. And he said, "Everything in this book I can do." And that's how I think you break through, is you help people see the truth. And that is, that they can share their faith in natural ways if they have the courage, and if they'll follow the guidance of Scripture, and be equipped and trained, God can use them.

N: Yeah. How I came across Organic Outreach was, I was new into the pastorate, and I was a teaching pastor in that role. But also I was in charge of local outreach, and we wanted to move from this notion of events and the pastor being the main evangelists, but to mobilize the people. And so I got online and I searched a bunch for different outreach programs. And what I came across was you were having a conference out in Monterey, The Organic Outreach. And that was the year, I think it was the last year, that Nabeel Quereshi was there presenting. And I remember my wife and I, we came together, and we're listening, and we're going, "Holy smokes. What he's talking about, an organic outreach, really is what we're doing. And it's nothing complicated. It's nothing programmatic. It's simply allowing God to use you where you're at, with the people that he's put you around, and leaning into it." And it was such a great playbook that it's really a no brainer. So yeah, for the evangelist like myself, it's like, "Oh my goodness." But then when I handed this off to our congregants, they're like, "I've completely overcomplicated this. I can do this." What a great resource for people.

K: Thank you for that word of encouragement. You know, as a pastor, that all you want to do when you preach, is know that God uses what you preach to touch some hearts. Then when you write a book, you want to know that God uses it to fulfill His mission and His kingdom. And so when you describe that, that brings joy to my heart, because that's why I do what I do, is to help equip believers, to naturally share their faith. And that you describe it that way, tells me that God's accomplishing His purposes through that. So thank you.

N: Well, absolutely. It's had a huge impact on my life and our family's life. And even the church that I was pastoring at. One of the things that you write about in your book, is the notion of *everyone plays*, right? Outreach is not just meant for the evangelist. You know, we're all called to do the work of an evangelist. And you talk about that, *everyone plays*. Would you share a little bit about that? Because it's one of those things as a coach - I've been a coach of youth sports - and we have the same motto, Everyone Plays, and that's a great way to bring people in, who they may not think that they've got the gift, or they're not that interested, but it's so powerful, because

it's a team effort, and this has to be a team effort. So talk about *everyone plays*.

K: Yeah. You know, I coached for about 10 years. I coached youth soccer and the youth soccer program my three sons were in, that was one of their philosophies. And what was so beautiful to watch is, that I remember one couple came, and they dropped their son off, and they said, "He's not athletic. He's never played any sports. We just want him to get outdoors a little bit and some friends. So if you never play him, that's okay." And I said, "That's not going to be happening. He's going to be on the field. And his name was Matt, Matthew, with two T's, and the guy who was the goalie, who was a real verbal guy, said, "Your nickname is Double T." This kid had never had a nickname before. He was so thrilled to have a nickname. And this kid turned out just to be a tiger, man. He loved playing. He was a team player. He was not the most gifted athlete, but he grew into an incredibly gifted part of our team, and a valued part of our team.

And I watch that happen again and again, with evangelism. I watch people who believe the Bible, they love Jesus. They have friends that don't know Jesus, and they long for their friends to know the Savior, and they go, "I don't want to do anything, because I don't know how to do this". And when you get them on the field, and you start training them, get a little practice time, give them some drills to work on, and they go out and try, and they go, "Man," and they just go, "I can do this". And then I would always say, "Yeah, because you're filled with the Holy Spirit. You believe the Bible. And you're a follower of Jesus, and this is what we do". And so Nat, I have seen, you know, probably tens of thousands of people now, all around the world be unleashed. And I mean, think about a church of 50 or 80 people, where all of them are sharing their faith, a church of about a hundred or 200, where they're all sharing their faith, that's dynamic. That's what God's looking for.

N: Yeah. It's amazing what people will do when they lean into that concept of *everyone plays*. I remember there was this one lady, she was in her late seventies, early eighties. And I had taught this, from the pulpit, about this notion, *everyone plays*, and she came up to me and she goes, you know, "Can I do this at my gym?" And I'm like, "Well, what do you mean?" She goes, "Well, you know, I work out at the gym and I'm not that good at it, but I connect with people. Can I, you know, do that there; is that my way of playing?" I go, "Absolutely, it's your way of playing. That's just one of many ways, but it's a very organic atmosphere for you to be in and to share your faith." And one of the things you talk about is sharing, you know, not just your testimony, but sharing testimonies, or the many stories, of God's faithfulness. And I thought, I mean, that was kind of like a mind-blowing one for me, because we're always talking about, "Know your testimony - be able to share it in a hundred words or less", and we should, but why not have the stories in your back pocket of God's faithfulness for those everyday conversations?

K: Yeah, exactly right. And I tell people, you have fresh testimonies every week of your life, if you're walking with Jesus. Right now when we're recording this, we're right in the middle of this Coronavirus thing, and it won't soon be forgotten. You can look at this podcast in a year, and people will say, "I remember that time in history". Right? And so people have stories about how God has shown up for them, how God's provided for them, how God's given peace in the midst of anxiety. Those are all testimonies to God's faithfulness, to God's presence, to God's power. I tell Christians, you have hundreds of testimonies. You have one conversion testimony, but you have hundreds of testimonies.

And here's the thing about people who don't know Jesus. They wonder if this is really real for you and me; they wonder, you know, are you just playing church? Are you just playing religion, or is God real in your life? And when you tell them, "Man, in this time of loss and pain, my comfort was God's presence with me. And His Word and the Psalms brought me joy. And His Holy Spirit filled me to carry me through. And I could have never made it without the presence of Jesus in my life. It's not religion. It's not church. You're talking about life. And when a nonbeliever hears that, they start to wonder, well, maybe there's a God who could help me through a hard time. Maybe there's a God who would give me power when I feel weak. Our testimony tells people that God is real. He's alive. He's present. We're not playing church. We're not playing religion. I know Nat, that your listeners are people who love the Bible and they know Jesus. They're not playing religion. They have met Jesus. So tell a story about how Jesus showed up last week in your life or last year. And nonbelievers will be like, "Wow, that sounds like it's real." And they might even say to you, "Man, you're serious about this. You really mean this." And you go, "Yeah, I know Jesus. This is real". And that opens the door for all kinds of spiritual conversations.

Again, joining me today, is author and pastor, Kevin Harney. One last piece about your book, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People*. And we're going to transition over to families. The one last thing I wanted to talk about is the power of prayer. And I love your chapters on that: You know, praying for other people and praying with people. And I think when you're talking about making your faith real, can be manifested in that praying with people. And at first I was like, man, that's a big step, but it's amazing what happens, because I was at a restaurant. And I think, - I know you talk about this in your book - I actually started doing this, where I'll tell the waitress, "Hey, I'm going to pray for this meal. And is there anything I can pray for you about?" And they usually just go like, "Are you serious?" And I, "Yeah, I'm going to pray. I'll pray for you right now." And they go, "Well, no one actually ever prays for me. They always say they will, but I never know that they will." And I do it. And it's amazing how their demeanor changes. Even the most rough looking people, here I'm thinking they're not going to want prayer, they're the ones who open up. And what's great about it is, after the fact, I'll come back a week later to the restaurant, and say, "Hey, remember I prayed for that last week. How's it going?" That creates credibility and long term opportunity to share the Gospel.

K: And you know, what's beautiful Nat is, that when there's an answer to that prayer - I've had this happen many times - they'll circle back and they'll say, "I've got to tell you what happened. This thing happened, that after you prayed, these things happened, good positive things." And they're like, "Do you think maybe God did something?" and you go, "Oh, I know it. There's power in prayer. There's a real God. And He really wants to encounter you." I know that over the years, the last 30 years, I want to say - well into the hundreds and hundreds of times, maybe over a thousand times, I've asked non-believers, "May I pray for you?" And they'll share a great joy or a great pain, or some of their story. And I'll look at them and I'll say, "You know, this may seem kind of weird and you may not be into this kind of thing, but I'd feel honored if you'd let me right now just say a prayer for you."

And, you know, I had a guy in the airport that told me he was going to visit his mom, who was in stage four lung cancer. How do you not say, "Can I pray for you?" How do you not offer

something to that person, right? And when I offered to pray for him, he said, “Really, would you really do that?” I said, “I would be honored.” And we were right by the little turnstile, waiting for our baggage to come, and we’re in the airport. And he let me pray for him. And then we just had a conversation. I found out really quickly, he wasn't a Christian at all, nowhere near that, but it meant the world to him to have someone pray for him. And I can't tell you how many times nonbelievers, when I say, “Amen” to a prayer for them, there's tears running down their face. They don't know why. And I know why, because the Holy Spirit of God has shown up, and God has drawn near.

You know, we want to get people to church. That's good, but let's take church, so let's take Jesus, where they are, and that can be anywhere you are. So I would challenge your listeners, when they're talking with somebody who's not a Christian, and they share a deep joy or a deep pain, either of those, to just to take a second and just look at them and say, “You know, I'd be so honored if I could take just a moment. And just right now, if I can, I'll just say a short prayer for you”, and don't turn it into a sermon and don't turn it into a preachy thing. Pray, but pray in the name of Jesus, because that's where the power is. And that opens the door for all kinds of conversations.

N: Absolutely. I see it time and time again. Okay. So for our listeners, if they want to pick up a copy of your book, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People*, where do they go? What's the best way to get a hold of your book?

K: Yeah. Zondervan is my publisher on that series of books, all three of the Organic Outreach books. And also, if they go online to Amazon, or any, you know, it's out there. And you've got a version, it's actually, there's two new versions beyond the one you were showing a moment ago. There's a new version, then one that came with revised, actually new, content. And also if there's a group that wants to use these, they can go on to Zondervan website, and we've negotiated where they'll give down to 50% off, which is what bookstores get them for. If a pastor or a group gets a bunch of them, I've really worked with Zondervan to try to make it as inexpensive as possible, because I want people to be equipped to share their faith.

N: And I will say that he really does do that. And Zondervan will work with you. When I was a pastor at our church, we ordered a ton of these and we got them for, it seems like next to nothing. So great resources, highly recommend. In our last few minutes, I want to talk about your book, *Organic Outreach for Families*. Again, this was a great book. My wife and I ate it up, because it's a game plan for people who are passionate about outreach, and want to lean into it, by turning it, their home, into a well, the concept you talk about, a lighthouse. So talk about the book, why you wrote the book.

K: So in the series, there's three books, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People*. That's how do you personally share your faith? *Organic Outreach for Churches*. How do you mobilize a whole church around outreach? and *Organic Outreach for Families*. How do you turn your home into a mission station, an outpost, a lighthouse of the grace and the truth of Jesus? We actually wrote that book with our three sons. They each wrote portions of the book, and we've got people telling us, “The best part of the book is the part your kids wrote”, which is kind of a compliment, kind of an insult, but they said, “We love the part that your kids wrote.” But really Nat, what we did was, we looked and said, everywhere we go, we're God's people. And if God's people are

captured by the heart of Jesus, we're going to shine the light of Jesus. And you can't hide it under a bushel. No, you don't; you put it up on a stand, right? And so our home with our kids, we prayed with them for their friends. We opened our home to our neighbors. And so that book really was our effort to say to people in your own home, if you're a college student and you have roommates, and you're in an apartment, that becomes your mission station. If you live in a trailer park, that's your mission station. If you're military and you're on a base, that's your mission station. If you live in a neighborhood, that's your mission station. So that book walks through how to reach our own family, for raising our own kids, and then how to become a family of faith, that shines the light to your community, through doing just the natural stuff that any family can do. And I've loved seeing families all over the place, who are really living on mission, and their home has become a place, not just for the presence of Jesus for us, but for the light of Jesus, for their neighbors.

N: Yeah. Embracing the idea of your home being a lighthouse has so much power in it. And it's a place where your neighbors can come and know that they're safe and secure. I think in your book, you even share a story, you know, about one of your son's friends coming over, and I think throwing a baseball or something through a window, and it breaking, and you know, if I was a kid, I'd be freaking out, running out the door, and try and blame somebody. But that's not at all what you shared about that story. Because I thought, "Man, I wish I had you as a dad." No offense to my dad, love my dad, but man, I'm like, you're a cool dad.

K: Well, it's funny because what actually happened was, there's about 30 junior high kids in our basement. And we were in Michigan at the time, and basements are a big thing there, and they were doing something down there. They're hanging out in a big group - there was always a big group - you know, we always kept our home open, as much as we could, for other people to gather. And so a big group of kids were there. And actually my youngest son decided to be funny, to go outside the house and bang on the window and scare them. But he actually slid on the ice through the window, [That's right.] into the basement, and he caught himself on top of the big TV, and they all screamed. And when we heard that, we were upstairs and Sherry said, "Something's wrong!" I said, "It's just the kids." She's a mom. She goes, "No, that was a different kind of scream." We ran down there and we taped up the window. We told the kids, "Well, you move to this part of the basement. We'll clean up the glass." And so we didn't scream at our kid and we didn't scream at them. We just kind of moved into that part. We cleaned it up, cleaned the glass up, and went back upstairs, and they kept hanging out. And I guess the next day at school, it was like the big talk. Kids were saying, "Man, if you spilled water at my house, the party's over." "If you spill a juice on the couch." They said, "You blew through a double pane window and your parents ..." And what was really interesting Nat, is that after that, some of those kids, when they would have a tough thing in their life and they were afraid, they would come to our house and talk to Sherry and I, my wife and I, because they knew that we would extend grace.

We talked about the home being a place of grace, and they knew that there would be grace there. And our son, Nate, talks about how after that, he'd come home sometimes, and see one of his friend's bikes or something in front of the house and he'd be like, "Oh, they came to see me." And he came to find out, they came to see his parents. And we were talking and praying with these kids, that a lot of cases didn't have a church home, or a faith, but they came, and they had messed up, and they wanted to know that there's a place they could go when they mess up, where

they will be loved right where they are. And then we'd always say to them, "You've got to talk with your parents," but they just, they wanted a place of grace. If we can create that place, it is a lighthouse in a graceless world.

N: Yeah. Your concept with being a grace bearer is honestly profound. And our time is wrapping up. Our listeners are obviously living in a world of COVID-19, and they're struggling to know, okay, how could they put this into practice today? Whether it's as a family, in their home being a lighthouse, or as an individual, how would you coach them today to live on mission organically, in the face of COVID-19?

K: I put it in a very simple statement that's actually a whole initiative, what we're doing as a church right now. And that is just be a good neighbor, "Hey, I'm heading to the store. Can I get you something?" "Hey, we went out for pizza tonight, and we just bought a couple extra pizzas," and we'd bring one each neighbor next to you. You know, if someone's real nervous or physically struggling, "Can I mow your lawn, or can I take your trash can in or out?" And in the midst of all of that, you know, "How can I be praying for you?" And right now, boy, people are open to be prayed for. And so, "How can I pray for you?" And so I think just be a good neighbor. Don't lock yourself down in your house, but kind of open up a little bit. And as things get open more and more in the coming weeks, you'll be that one who extends grace, kindness, and an encouraging word. You know, drop your neighbors a note and just let them know you're thinking of them, and praying for them. And you're here to help if they need help. And a good friend of mine, Lon Allison, who used to be the head of the Billy Graham Center, and he talked about, *just remember these three words: prayer, care, share*. Just pray for people, care for them, and when the doors open, share your story, and Jesus' story, and you say, "Well, can it be that simple?" In a lot of ways, it really is.

N: Kevin, thank you for your time today. Kevin's actually going to be back with us for the next episode as well. We're going to be talking about a whole different area of organic outreach, and that is organic outreach for churches.