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SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: An Interview with Kevin Harney Pt. 2: Organic Outreach

NC: Today I am with a special guest author and pastor, Kevin Harney. Kevin, thank you again for joining me and our listeners today.

KH: It's an absolute privilege - looking forward to our conversation.

NC: By God's grace, you've impacted a lot of people: you know, your pastoring - you wrote a book called *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People*. You wrote another book called *Organic Outreach for Families*. But the topic I want to talk about today, is really your book, *Organic Outreach for Churches*. We have a lot of pastors who listen, church leaders, and people, obviously, who just attend church. And the reality is, outreach kind of goes to the back burner of a lot of churches. And in fact, you talk about that in your book. So why don't you share first, why you wrote this book, because this was a much-needed book.

KH: Well really, I felt compelled to write that book, because I'm a pastor. I know lots of pastors, and I know that every single pastor, deacon, elder, Sunday school teacher, every Christian in a Bible believing Christian church, believes that the local church is supposed to be a motor, an engine, a driver for the Gospel, going out into our communities and out into the world. We all believe that because we believe the Bible, and Jesus was very clear about that. But we're not doing it. And so, I began to study, looking for models of how churches can change their culture from being inwardly focused to outwardly focused – from being us-centered to Jesus-centered, and with the heart of Jesus, world-centered, along with caring, discipling, reaching out with the Gospel. And I had a hard time finding what looked like a reproducible, generic enough model, that was simple, that churches would say, “We can do this”.

So I made it kind of my calling, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, to try to figure this thing out. And I started beta-testing things. I got together leaders from different churches and started trying – so that doesn't work, that doesn't work. Oh, that works! And for probably 15 years, researching studying - I didn't want to roll something out that wasn't going to be effective. I love the church. I don't want to ever hurt the church. And it drives me crazy when somebody writes a book, or starts a ministry, and they say, “Hey, everyone can do this just like I did.” And it's not true. And so I had to beta test: so I had a church of 75, and a church of 2000, try some stuff; and I had denominational churches, independent churches, try some stuff. And I tried to find out what was truly, consistently reproducible. And really the things that are reproducible are the things that are Biblical, the things that are true to Scripture and true to the heart of Jesus.

And so I began developing those things, and testing those things, and teaching them, and then felt like I was far enough down the road, and had enough good data, and research, and feedback, to feel like I could begin to share it in a way, of putting it in writing. And so, *Organic Outreach for Churches* is what I call an operating system of changing the culture of a church, to make it truly evangelistic. I believe that if the culture of a church is wrong, and I call it, like an operating system - like we're going back and forth on computers here; a lot of people are listening on devices that have an operating system - if there's no OS, if there's no operating system, your apps and your programs don't work. If your operating system works the way it should, all your apps work. Well, I've tried to help churches get a culture and operating system that was truly evangelistic, and Biblically centered, so that anything they try for outreach will work.

And here's the thing; if you don't get the culture right, you can try ... well, we tried those 20 outreach programs; nothing worked. It probably wasn't the program. It was probably the culture of your church. [Right] So Nat, my call has been to create culture transformation. And it's not easy. It takes time. It takes prayer. It takes faithfulness, but it happens when churches live it out. And when it does, the Kingdom of Heaven is being transformed, because people are coming to know Jesus through churches that have changed their culture.

NC: Well, and it's your experience, and my experience as well, as I've been a teaching pastor, but also a local outreach pastor, that vision leaks. And if you don't keep beating this drum of outreach, I mean, it'll fade away. And I think you've talked about this in your book, how, you know, if you removed preaching from a service, how long would it take until someone says, "Hey, what's going on here?" You know, day one, unless the pastor is not good at preaching, then it may be a couple of weeks; they may enjoy it. Worship - if you removed worship from a service, you better believe people are going to say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, time out. What are you doing?" But you remove outreach from a church, it could take years until anyone says, "Hey, wait a second. What are we doing?" I mean, that's what you've found, right?

KH: Oh yeah, if you don't do outreach in your church, you may have some people who will thank you. "Thanks for not making us feel guilty and pressuring us anymore." You know? Yeah, you're exactly right. You know, worship - a church would say, we're not a church if we don't worship. A church would say, we're not a church, if we don't grow people in their faith, we don't disciple people, and do children's work, and youth work. But if a church doesn't do outreach, which most churches don't, or not intentionally, they don't recognize that they're really not fully manifesting what God has intended the church to be. [Right]. And so, I challenge people to look and say, worship is essential. Discipleship is essential, but also evangelism - or we call it organic outreach - naturally reaching out and training our people to do that, that is also central. When you put those three things together, it is beautiful.

NC: Right. And a key component, and this is where it all starts - and in fact, it's Chapter one of your book - it starts with loving God. Our outreach has to flow out of loving God. Talk a little bit about that, because I think sometimes we do outreach out of obligation, not out of our love for God.

KH: Yeah, I kind of go with progression of, you have to love God, we have to love the church -

because not all Christians really love their church, or love *the* church – so love God, love the church, and then love the world. But if we don't love God first, then we're not fully captured by the heart of God. And our love runs out. I mean, I love my wife, I love my kids, but there's moments where I'm pretty much running out, and we all have that. Well then, thinking about loving somebody who's difficult, or challenging, or far from God, or living in a way that's totally opposed to how you live, man; it's too easy for our love to run dry. But if we love God, and His love fills us, then our outreach comes out of the overflow of the love of God. And that will never run out. Because God's love for the lost, I mean, think about ourselves before we knew Jesus. God, you know, it's while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. He didn't wait to give His life, until we cleaned ourselves up, because we couldn't. Still, God loved us when we were totally messed up. We've got to love other people at that point. That happens when we walk closely hand in hand with God, and feel His love, and His love overflows through us.

NC: Right. One of the things you bring up in your book is when Jesus approaches Jerusalem, you know, and He looks over and He weeps. How many of us look at the world around us and our hearts break? I think you share about how you were walking through an airport, and you just kind of got overwhelmed in realizing that all these people walking around you, and majority we know are not on the pathway to Heaven, and that should break our heart. But that has to flow first from loving God, and then you say loving the church, and then loving the world. That's powerful.

KH: Yeah. It's true. And I think we can get moving so fast, and get so busy doing Jesus stuff, or doing personal stuff, we forget that we were placed right where we are to be on mission. I tell people, even if you're in a place you don't want to be right now, there's a way that God wants to use your presence there, to shine the light of Jesus. And so we've got to just embrace that and say, "You know what? I am a person on mission." And that mission is always - and we use the term organic outreach, because the word evangelism kind of scares people, and it feels like something foreign - but can I reach out to people in natural ways, and share my story and His story? Most Christians will say, "I think I can do that". And then, if we'll come alongside them and equip and train them, man, we can unleash the church. And I know you've seen it in the churches you've served. And when it happens in little ways, it's revolutionary, but when it becomes part of the culture, it's transformational.

NC: Yeah. And I'll be the first to say, that when you apply this to a church, it works. But why it works is because it's still organic. I remember in an early church meeting, a leadership meeting, we were talking about this, and they said, "What's your strategy?" I'm like, "*I want to use Organic Outreach for Churches.*" And they go, "Wait a minute. But it's so systematic. How is it organic?" So if there's a pastor listening today, who's like, "Man, this sounds really good, what I've heard so far, but I know I'm going to get pushback on it." Well, what's the response?

KH: Nat, that's a great question. And you know what, I've had questions asked many times, and people misunderstand that; people assume that organic means, it happens with no effort, and automatically, spontaneously. But I live near the Salinas Valley, which is some of the richest farmland in the world. I mean, people call this area I live in, they call it sort of the salad bowl of the world. And if you're having a salad, almost anywhere globally, there's something that came

out of the Salinas Valley, literally. But some people do their farming organically, and organically is with no pesticides, and with certain guidelines. It's actually harder to farm organically. That's why the food costs more money, because they're doing it more naturally; natural doesn't mean easy. And so if you ask a farmer, you know, "Do you just throw seeds out there and hope things grow?" They say, "No. We know when to plant, where to plant, how to plant, the kind of soil, the depth, how far apart." I mean, there's a lot to it. For things to happen naturally, it takes a lot of work.

If you ask your listeners who are married, "Hey, you have a good marriage, because it just happens spontaneously, naturally. And you put no effort into it". They're going to go, "No, it doesn't work that way. That's how you blow a marriage. That's how you ruin a marriage." Right? And so no, organic doesn't mean that we're lazy, we don't try, and it just happens. It means, we say, "What is the natural way that God has designed?" And we get in step with His design and His Spirit. And I believe every church can do that. Part of His design is that we have accountability. We talk about this. We train and equip people. We stay true to the Scriptures. All those take effort. So, organic doesn't mean easy or lazy. Organic means intentional, prayerful, and the way that God designed it; we're trying to come in line with the Spirit of God and the Word of God.

NC: Again, joining me today is author and pastor, Kevin Harney. Okay. So churches are probably listening, you know, congregants are listening, and they're saying, "Okay, wait, this is resonating. I recognize we need to become intentional. Yes, it's organic, but that means intentional. But we've been so vested in having committees, and having a map on the wall, with, you know, as you call it, pushpins, and we're sending money, but I know we need to make the switch; I know we need to be mobilizing the people. How do I start? Where do I start?" What would you tell them?

KH: Well, let me first give you, there are people that are going to say, "Hey, if we start doing this outreach thing right here in our church and our community, we're going to stop doing mission. We're going to stop sending money to other parts of the world." I came to a small country church in West Michigan, and five years after I was there, the outreach and mission budget was larger than the entire church budget when I came. And in fact, it had grown by four times, and a lot of those were brand new believers, who now had a heart to give towards world missions. So being on task with local outreach isn't that we jettison and forget doing global outreach. That's all part of it, but it, really, organic outreach, is looking and saying, we have to change the fundamental culture of our church.

Most churches are inwardly focused. We've got to be inwardly focused, upwardly focused and outwardly focused. Most churches are doing lots of discipleship and almost no evangelism. We've got to do both of those things. I tell people that outreach and discipleship are not enemies. Some people look at evangelism and discipleship as conflicting things. They're not enemies. I say, they're not friends, because friends is not close enough. Evangelism and discipleship are marriage partners; the two become one, and wed together. You know, a true growing disciple is

going to reach out. And when you reach a new person, you have to disciple them. These things go hand in hand, they are marriage partners, *and what God has joined together, let no one tear asunder*. Can I get an “Amen”?

So you're talking about an intentional cultural shift that will not take you away from your other kinds of outreach and your global outreach. But here's the challenge: we go from saying, “Look, we give money far away”, to say, “We're going to get prayers, love, care, and do outreach next door”. And so many churches can be comfortable saying, “Because we pray for our people on the mission field, because we send money, because we write them Christmas cards, we've done our part”. [Right]. But we are showing the light to the ends of the Earth, but our Jerusalem and our Judea is right where we live. [Right]. We've got to do mission there as well.

NC: Yeah. And that's exactly what we did. We were both a globally focused, minded, outreach church, but we also had a local concept. But we weren't doing it as a church. We weren't doing it together. Yeah, we had the money, but we weren't actively going out into the community. And so one of the things we created, was this brand of #ForLincoln. And it was this notion that, you know, we want to not be known what we're against in the city of Lincoln, but rather what we are for. And we are for you, our neighbors, the place, the people that we work with, the people that we go shop at; we're for you.

And so we put up this big, I don't know, eight by eight foot map of Lincoln. And I remember this one Sunday, we kind of gave the charge like, okay, for the next summer, we're going to push hard and actively invest in the lives of people around us with Gospel intentionality. But we're going to start by putting their name on a sticky note on this map, in the neighborhood, wherever you are going to be at. And we, as a church, are going to pray for those people. And then we would touch base and we would say, “Okay, now how's it going? Share your stories.” And it was amazing how the people – one, really prayed, as a staff, we prayed - but they began living life on life, and simply doing exactly what you're talking about, doing outreach organically. And it was so easy, because it's what they were doing anyway, which is a perfect segue into what I want to talk about next. In your book, there are two concepts that are fantastic and so practical. First is the one degree rule, and second, is the two degree shift: fantastic tools. So let's just start with the one degree rule: probably one of the most uncomfortable things you can introduce, but man, one of the best ways of managing how your outreach is doing as an individual, as a ministry, and even as a church; talk about that.

KH: Yeah. And it's kind of fun to know that there's tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Christians around the world, talking about, “What's my temperature”? The one degree rule is just looking at the temperature of our heart, and our passion for reaching lost people, and saying, “How do we take it up one degree”? So we just use this little scale from one to 10. It's something I came up with, because my brain actually thinks very simply, and I think in terms of pictures. I'm not a complex guy. I think that Jesus brought simple truths. And we can, I mean complex in the Heavens, but in our own lives, children can understand most of them. I tell people, just, “How's your heart right now? Are you praying for lost people? Spending time with them, loving them, connecting with them?” If you're avoiding people that aren't Christians, if you don't want to be around them, if you're not praying for them, you're like a zero or a one. If

you pray passionately, regularly; if you spend time with nonbelievers; if you can share your story of faith, you're like a nine or a 10, you're living into it regularly. And I ask people to say, "Where am I right now?" It's a self-assessment. Somebody says, "I'm a three"; somebody else says, "I'm a seven"; somebody says, "I'm a nine". Here's the beauty of the one degree rule: I say, "Just right now, make a decision to raise your temperature by one degree. If you're a three, become a four; if you're a seven, become an eight; if you're a nine, become a 10; if you're a 10, you're on a new scale, you can become an 11." The point is, turning up the dial; we're heating things up. Right?

And then in my book, I talk about, how do you raise the temperature? By praying for people, by praying with people, by serving, by proximity. If I'm not spending time with my non-believing family and friends, my temperature comes down. When I'm around them, when my proximity is close to them, man, the heart of Jesus captures my heart, and it goes up. If I'm not praying for lost people, I journal prayers, and I put OO in my journal every day - that's organic outreach - and I'm praying for my nieces and nephews; I'm praying for my dad. I am praying for a couple of business guys in town here, and their wives, that I'm good friends with. I'm praying for a good friend of mine's wife. And so every day, I pray, and when I pray, it raises my temperature. So there's things we can do to steward our own path and temperature. And if we ask that question, then we're reminding ourselves to keep our fires burning hot.

It's a simple concept. Raise your temperature by one degree from where it is. If I tell you to go from a one to a 10, that's going to be overwhelming. If I say, go from a one to a two, "Oh, I can do that. What's my next step?" And before you know it, and here's the tricky thing, Nat, in my board meetings every month, every one of our board members out loud gives their temperature and what they're going to do to raise it one degree. We do that year-round until Jesus returns. And our board members are praying and loving people like they never have before. That one practice has made a difference.

NC: Well, and there's a key component in that, is you're consistent in doing it, right? [Yeah]. I know when I first did it for our first OIT meeting, people were like, one, "I'm not doing it". And two, "We're not going to continue doing this, right?" And I said, "I want you to listen to me. We are going to do this. As long as I am on staff at this church, we will be asking, 'What is your temperature and what are you going to do to raise it by one degree?'" And we did. And because we were consistent, people took it seriously. They were thinking about it and they knew they really had to develop it. And was it uncomfortable at first? Absolutely, it was. But it's not about your number compared to anybody else. It's all about you raising that by one degree. It's almost like, what was it? *Spinal Tap*, right? Even if you're at a level 10, if you can be a level 10, crank it up to number 11, right? Just do one thing to raise by one degree. But consistency is key. Okay. The second thing I brought up was the two degree shift. This was transformational for our church. So what is the two degree shift? And how do you do it practically? And this honestly can be a big sticking point, I think, for a lot of churches.

KH: Yeah. The one degree is about the temperature of your heart. The two degree is about the direction of your ministry. So I describe it like a needle on a compass: the needle's going to always go to North, but what we've got to do is understand, that when the needle of the church

points to North - North is us, it's Christians, people in our church. Our time, our energy, our resources tend to go to people that are already Christians. So what happens is, most churches, even small churches, are doing things to help believers. And they're providing meals after a surgery, or after baby comes, and they're praying for them, and they're helping them, and they're serving them. And they're doing these different things for Christians. So I tell people, look at all the things you're doing for us, the needle pointing to us, and then just vector it a couple of degrees out into the community, and say, "Is this thing we're doing for us, couldn't we also do it for people that aren't Christians?"

So the church where I kind of invented this concept, and began to write this up, I was in a kind of a smaller country area. The church had grown quite a bit, but the church for over a hundred years, had a meals program, where they would take food to people in the church, who had a surgery or had a baby. And so somebody said, "Well, could we take that meals ministry, and vector it, and say anyone in the church, if you have a friend that's not a Christian, if they have a surgery, or if they have a baby, what if for four or five days, people in the church brought them meals?" At one point, one person said, "Are we allowed to do that?" "Of course we can do that. It's just being nice. We'll call them first and get permission". And so we had people in our church start calling their friends, saying, "Hey, can our church bring you meals for five days after your baby comes?" People were like, "Oh". Yeah, you want to talk about opening up a door, right? [Right]. Here was the beauty of it: in this church, we didn't add any new staff. We didn't add any new budget, because all the people making the meals did it for free. A lot of the people on the list to bring meals were complaining, "You don't call me enough. I want to make and bring more meals." So we didn't have enough people to bring meals to. So all of a sudden, we added a whole new outreach ministry, by just taking what we were already doing, and thinking in a slightly different way, beyond ourselves, and vectoring it out. And saying to the church members, "You can share what we're doing with your friends." And one of the first families to get those meals were dear friends of mine, through my kids' soccer league that I mentioned, I think in our first podcast. They were very resistant to spiritual things, but they were open to meals, and after those meals, the door opened for more spiritual conversations. It's just vectoring what you're already doing and vectoring it into your community.

NC: Which really comes back to one of the concepts at the beginning of the book, where we usually think about outreach as being one person's ministry, right? Part of my title was "the outreach pastor": so, who's going to do outreach? Nat is; it's his job to evangelize. No, no, no. What this does is, it puts outreach in every ministry area: worship, men's, women's, children's. What's great is, it's Delegation 101, but it actually just makes us all responsible to fulfill the mission of God, right?

KH: Exactly right. Yeah. And that's the heartbeat of Organic Outreach International, and of the book, *Organic Outreach for Churches*, is how do you mobilize? I mean, we're called to equip the saints for the work of ministry. And the thing about Christians, is a Christian can say, "Well, you know, I don't have the gift of giving, so I'm not going to give anything to the church". Everyone gives; some people have a special gift of giving more. Somebody says, "I don't think I have the gift of compassion. I don't have to care". No, some people have special gifts of compassion; everyone cares. When it comes to outreach, some have a particular calling as an evangelist, but

we're all called to be salt and light. And the goal of this all is to equip every person, children, adults, youth. If you're a follower of Jesus, we can train you to naturally share your faith. And when that happens, man, things start really opening up.

NC: Yep. Our time is wrapping up. So if people want to learn more, if a church leader, an elder's listening to this, a pastor, they're listening; they're saying, "Okay, this is what we've been looking for, or at least it's worth trying." How do they get involved? How do they get plugged into this?

KH: So just go online; you go to [organicoutreach.org](https://www.organicoutreach.org) or just type in Organic Outreach International.

NC: I cannot thank you enough for your ministry and what you've done both for my church, but also in my own personal life. Kevin, our listeners really did benefit from our time, I have no doubt, and I have no doubt they're going to be contacting you soon.

[\(https://www.organicoutreach.org/\)](https://www.organicoutreach.org/)