

**Tuesday, August 4, 2020**

**SERIES: REWRITING JESUS**

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**TITLE: Who Should We Spend Time With? Pt. 2**

If you have a Bible handy, open it to Matthew Chapter 9. We looked into this passage yesterday and discovered that **being obedient** is the first trait of a Christian who wants to change their community. Let's keep listening to Jesus to learn the next trait. Verse 10 (NLT):

**<sup>10</sup> Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners.<sup>11</sup> But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?"**

Don't you love the compassion and outward-focused nature of those Pharisees? Ha!

Matthew follows Jesus, and that night he throws a party. He invites his friends, who were the outcasts, misfits, loners, and sinners, like Matthew. Matthew has been healed on the inside, and he just *had* to introduce Jesus to his friends. Matthew uses a Greek term here, *hamartōlos*, referring to sinners. It means someone who is devoted to sinning; someone who is especially wicked and sinful. In Jesus' day, these were the thieves, the prostitutes, and even murderers. The "professional sinners" were gathered at Matthew's house, and Jesus went there and spent time with them.

Now I just want you to pause for a second, and think about walking into your friend's house for a gathering or a party. Now imagine the people that you dislike most. Who would those people be? Are they people of a certain political party? A certain religion? Is it a specific sin? Is it the prostitute? Is it the drug user or drug seller? Is it the sex trade leader or abuser? Is it the abortionist?

Who are those people that you despise because of their sin, or their worldview? That's exactly who Matthew had invited into his home, and who was with them? Jesus! He was in the room with all these "professional sinners".

Here, in verse 10, we find the next trait of someone who wants to change their communities: **They are outward focused.** They're focused on evangelism. They have committed their lives to give their time, their attention, and their discipleship to the lost.

One of the things I'm passionate about is organizational culture. I'm passionate about seeing the behaviors of a workforce flow out of core values. One of the values I saw for a church, was the value, "we reach the lost at any cost, short of sinning, of course."

I think that's a fantastic value for a church, and I think it's the right value for us as Christians. Jesus did not come to entertain, or to golf on the Country Club golf course.

Jesus said, **“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners.” (Mark 2:17, ESV).** Jesus came to seek and save the lost. That means He came and died for every one of us today. We are all sinners who were dead in our sins. And guess what? He didn't save us from an ivory tower, or from a pulpit, or from an avatar on social media. No, He went into the streets, and He went into the homes where the sinners were at.

What was his reputation because of this?

Jesus' enemies called Jesus **“a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!” (Matthew 11:9).** Why? Because He was outward focused. He was not afraid to go to where the lost were. He would sit, talk, dine, and share a coffee with them.

Jesus said, **“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock” (Matthew 7:24).** So, we need to be like Jesus. We need to go out to the lost and to penetrate the culture. We need to be salt and light. We need to stop thinking that sitting at home and watching Netflix is going to do any good.

Being outward focused is not seeing your neighbor come home and waving our hands to “what’s his name?” Being outward focused is not gathering at a coworker’s cubicle discussing how much you like “Game of Thrones” on Netflix. This is not being outward focused. So what is being outward focused then? What would it look like to translate Jesus’ actions into our world today? There are literally thousands of ways you can put this into action. Let me offer two ideas.

First, is being part of an affinity group. By affinity, I mean common interest. So, what are you into? Are you into coffee? Why not go to your favorite coffee shop and get to know some regulars. Bring a board or card game down with you and find a new player. Are you a runner? Why not join a running club with Gospel intentionality?

A friend of mine moved to Madrid, Spain, for some mission work. One of the ways he quickly built a community, was by running with strangers, who quickly became friends. What about joining a book club and do what people in book clubs do? (I honestly don’t know). Do you like gardening? Why not join a community garden and begin to invest consistent time with new people? But whatever your hobbies are, use those to approach the lost with Gospel intentionality.

A second option: what about having a “Matthew party”? Matthew threw a party to bring together his new band of brothers and his friends made up of sinners. Why not throw your own Matthew party once a month? Invite some of your Christian friends and invite some of your nonbelieving friends. Have a BBQ. Host a movie party, and engage in conversation about the film afterward. Host a murder mystery or a game night. The key is to open your doors to believers and nonbelievers. Let their lives intersect, and let them see and hear what difference Christ has made in your lives. Friendships will form, and lives will be changed.

This is exactly what my wife and I have done for years. Our home has been a rotating Matthew party. We have intentionally brought together Christians and non-Christians in our backyard and house. We have grilled out, played games, and the result has been softened hearts to Christ. In fact, a neighbor shot me a text at 10 pm at night, asking if I’d like to hang out in their backyard. I

was tired, but knew God had opened a door from our open door. So I went and chatted till midnight. That night I was able to share the Gospel, all because I was willing to be outward focused.

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: I'm excited to bring Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney in at this point, because I know they each have stories to tell about bringing people together from all spheres of life. So I'd like to hear from each of you, how have you seen hearts soften when Christians meet up with non-believers?

C: You mean like hanging out? [That's right. Just hanging out with the sinners.] All right. I would say in my experience, success rate of 90%, when the worlds intertwine, and then I'd say, about 10%, the worlds collide. You know, you fall in love with Jesus, and darkness runs from light. So I've had friends that, and I haven't even been too pushy on, they run, and then some run and come back, because then I'll... It's like fishing, you know, you throw the line out, but then you tug it away a little bit. But I would say I have a pretty good success rate. You know, my friends aren't wild Bible thumpers. They're just regular people, and they're fun, and they have a good, good vibe to them.

N: What about you Arnie?

A: I think we have a pretty good balance also. I mean, it's kind of unfair, because we hang out with a lot of - because of our other ministry, the equestrian ministry - we have probably three to one ratio - three non-believer to one believer ratio - in our equestrian ministry. So we have a ton of kids from all walks of life. What's interesting is: I've observed over time, no matter what the background, when these kids go from being teenagers to young adults, that's really where you see if church, all of the beliefs, kind of come to fruition, and sadly, most of the time, it doesn't. One gal who I've known for years, ridden at our barn - I think we even gave them a horse or two - just loved the Lord, you know, in Sunday school and all that. Well now, first opportunity, I think, let's say she's 19 - as soon as her boyfriend gets back from wherever, Afghanistan or somewhere - they're going to live together. Just bam, just like, that's what you do. That's what everybody does. And I totally get that. It's just, you've had 10 years of Christian upbringing, that you were aware of, you know, sexual conduct. And of course, I can't say this. I just pray for her, but it just amazes me, as kids get on their own, the decisions they make without even any thought. It seems like, "Well of course we're going to live together. I mean, that's what everybody does. I mean, is there something wrong with it?" You know what I mean? It's just that kind of, matter of fact, that's what we do. So I thought that's interesting.

N: If only they asked the question, "Is something wrong with that?" I found most of the time that they don't. They really don't care.

C: Well, I think they know the answer to the question, is why they don't ask it.

N: Yeah. I think what's really key though. And I've seen this in both of your lives, is the fact that what you do is you live your lives with intentionality, and you leverage the everyday opportunities that you have for the Gospel. You're living with Gospel intentionality, with the

things you're passionate about and with the people you care about, and you let worlds collide, and you're just simply scattering seed and watering. Because you know, at the end of the day, you don't do the saving - it's God. And that frees you to just live organically, and you let God do the rest of the work. It's beautiful to see. And it's beautiful to see what God is doing through it.

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So, believers who want to influence their communities have this in common: #1) They are obedient to Christ. #2) They are outward focused. We have a 3<sup>rd</sup> trait coming up, as we listen to Jesus' response to those "compassionate" Pharisees, who questioned him "mixing" with who they considered to be "the scum" of society. We pick this up in Matthew Chapter 9 at verse 12 (NLT):

**12 When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do." 13 Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."**

In these final verses, Jesus uses two images to help His disciples, and we understand who He came to call: the sick and the sinners. This was quite the slap in the face of the Pharisees, because they were workers of the law. They were the righteous elite. They didn't need a savior. And according to them, the tax collectors and sinners surely didn't deserve a savior.

But Jesus sets them in their place and shares the last trait of someone who wants to change their community: **They are humble.**

Jesus says the healthy – or at least the self-proclaimed healthy – don't need or want a doctor. Jesus says the pride-filled and self-righteous don't want a savior. They'd rather try and save themselves. The Apostle James wrote, **"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble"** (James 4:6). Jesus is saying the same thing.

If people don't see themselves for who they really are as sinners, then Jesus can't save them, because they don't want to be saved. It is the old adage: "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't force him to drink".

King David wrote, **"The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God"** (Psalm 51:17). God seeks humility and a repentant heart. When we are open to seeing ourselves rightly, God can work with us. But we need to be humble.

We are not more worthy than anyone else of salvation. Because it is by grace, we are saved. It's an undeserved gift. This means your Muslim neighbor up the street, your atheist coworker, that kid who constantly knocks the head off your garden gnome – they are on the same playing field as you. They are just people who need a Savior and a healer, just like you do.

When we tell people our story about how Jesus changed our lives, that shows humility. We were in trouble, and Jesus saved us. We have the obligation and the pleasure to tell and show others what Christ has done for us. Some of the time, that will happen at the church or a Bible study.

But I recognize that most of the time, sharing Jesus should happen out there, and not in here. Because *we* are the church. God wants us all, as Christians, to go out and bring the church to the world, when they can't or won't come here.

It reminds me of Al and Lyssa. Al and Lyssa met when they were volunteering at a local second-hand store. Al was from a non-Christian home and was indifferent to Christianity. Lyssa knew that God had saved her, and she now got to be part of his Gospel story. She first tried getting Al to come to church, but it wasn't appealing. So she invited him to her home for game night, and he jumped on the opportunity. That was Al's first experience with the Christian community. After doing some game nights, he finally came to church. He disappeared for a while, but then someone from game night invited him back again, and he returned. He became part of a Christian community filled with humble people, who were thankful to their Savior, for a life forever changed. Al began joining in more and more of their activities. He was no longer just Lyssa's friend. Instead, he was everyone's friend. He asked more and more questions about Jesus, and the difference Jesus made in their lives. He began to attend church and coming to Bible studies. Six months later, he was baptized. Amazing.

You see, there was nothing special about Lyssa. She was simply humble, both in her understanding of who she was, and her friends were in Christ. They were saved by a Savior. She was also humble in remembering, outreach isn't just inviting people to church. She realized that for many in our modern culture, they have no desire to come to church. That means we should invite people to where they will go to meet Jesus. Al's life is changed because of it. That's the beauty of being part of a Gospel community.

Isn't this what happened to you? Someone was obedient to Jesus' call. They were outward focused toward you. They displayed humility, and now you are part of this Christian community. Yes! We were once sinners and now saints. We were once enemies of God, and now adopted children of God. Because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, we are part of this Gospel community.

So, where do we go from here? What's next? Jesus spent time with sinners. He taught us that to reach and change our communities, we need to be obedient to His call. We need to be outward focused. And we need to be humble. So, what's next? Well, I'll let Jesus speak for himself. In verses 37-38, Jesus shares his heart and plea for us today.

**<sup>37</sup> He said to his disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields."**

The fields are ripe. The world is lost and broken and needs a Savior. We should desire to enter the fields. We must never forget that if our communities don't meet Jesus – our Savior - it means separation from God forever in Hell. The harvest is great. All you and I need to do is step up, and step out into your natural communities.

Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, authors of *Total Church*, put it this way, "Whether it is projects, cafes, events, or centers, we often assume we need to organize something. For many Christians, especially in smaller churches, this makes evangelism and social involvement seem beyond them. They do not have the resources of time or money required. But there are plenty of

opportunities we can join, attend, visit, and participate. Often this approach is more effective. We meet people on their territory rather than making them come to our territory. What this requires is gospel intentionality.” I say, Amen.

Jesus has commanded you and me to go and share the Good News. Now, he is asking you and me to go into our neighborhoods, our workplaces, to our spheres of influence, and into the fields. I am here today as one who is willing to go into the fields. If you are willing to enter the fields, will you say “I will”? It doesn’t matter if you’re alone. Say to God, “I will!”

If we do this, your community and your city will never be the same. Not because of us, but because of the all-powerful, life-changing name of Christ! Let’s enter the harvest, because the fields are ripe.

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N: So the traits of a soul winning believer include being obedient, being outward focused and being humble. Cara, being humble might mean not always looking buttoned up or perfect, not always having all the answers. How can that be attractive to a non-believer?

C: I think it's pretty much attractive to everyone. It's just being yourself. So God changes you from the inside, but your interests, talents, your uniqueness is you. So you just be you, and keep on keeping on, as they say, and I find that’s attractive. If they find out you love the Lord, which they should, I mean, people should know that about you, and if they run for the hills, it's not you that they're running from.

N: Yeah, I think that's a key component is just being a human being. Again, we are changed because of the blood of Christ, and we do become more and more changed into His image. And yet we know we want to be approachable, and want to engage with people where they're at. And so that's why we simply dress how we dress. And that's why we do things we do, so that we can engage with people. We don't want to come off pious, or as a religious leader, or anything else. We just want to be everyday people, because we are. But the difference is, God is changing us, as you said, on the inside.

Arnie, you got to know Warren Wiersbe personally. Tell us a little bit about his demeanor.

A: I loved Warren. He was a great guy, funny guy, always a wisecracker, you know. And he was always talking about all these heroes of the faith that he knew personally; just a great guy, great Bible teacher.

I know I've heard it said over and over: he's a pastor’s pastor, and a great teacher, but the one thing that amazed me about Warren, was he had these guys that were probably in their late teens that he mentored personally, up until just the very last few years of his life. He had relationships with these guys that he kept for years and years, helping them grow spiritually. So just a tremendous approachable, likable, humble guy, and pretty funny too.

N: That's exactly right. Yeah, I would have breakfast and lunch with Warren on occasion, and it was fascinating to watch him engage with people. I mean, honestly, I don't know if anyone would know who he was, or what his background was as a pastor, but he was just so caring,

funny, as you said, and engaging; you just thought of him as your grandpa, if nothing else. And he was just really engaging. And I think that is so key for us as believers.

So, King David talked about a broken spirit. What do you guys think? Does a broken spirit depend on your standing, your wealth, your knowledge? How do you recognize that broken spirit in people?

C: Well, I had a broken spirit that I recognized in myself: this broken, foul, disgusting mess. I fell on my knees before God, and asked Him to forgive me, once I realized I needed forgiveness. So seeing my absolute need for healing, and my need for that repentance, I think is that broken spirit. You know, I had all the standing and the wealth and all those things, but God doesn't care what's in my bank account, any of that - He just wanted my life. You know, I came to God with my broken spirit, you know, but my trouble in that Nat, was that I didn't think that I could be forgiven, because I knew I didn't deserve to be. I think we've got to process through that though. So don't believe that lie, that you're too far gone, and Jesus heals all, and He forgives all, and He's the only one that can save us from ourselves. We just have to recognize that; He wants our life.

A: Yeah. You know, a broken spirit is a tough thing. It's a tough thing to have for yourself to handle. And probably a tougher thing, is to see someone you love who has a broken spirit, whether it's due to death, you know, or whatever it is. It's tough when dealing with believers, Christ followers, who have a broken spirit - it takes a lot of patience, and a lot of time, and a lot of prayer to work through that with people. We're at an age, where you have instant fix, instant this, instant that, but getting over a death of a parent or of a child is a gruesome, tough process, that for some people takes years; and they would correct me and say, "You never get over it", but it would be, you know, getting through that.

N: One of the reasons why I like talking to you both, is you kind of cover both sides of the same coin -that broken heartedness, that broken spirit is essential for us to come to Christ. We have to recognize who we are, but also, as you said, Cara, we can't believe the lie that Christ can't save us. So we have to really do recognize our sinfulness and our need for Him. But on the flip side, Arnie, as you talked about, you know, as believers, you know, we've got to be careful not to live there, and to dwell there, because it can bring us so far down, that we feel like God can't change us.

I saw something kind of similar this weekend with one of my kids. We were getting ready for church; we're going back to church for the first time in a while, since churches have been shut down. One of our kids just had one of those mornings, where man, his tongue was on fire, as James talks about. And as I approached him and started talking to him in the car, you could see his spirit break, and I didn't want to see it break, but I did want to see it in a place of brokenness. And so that's real hard for us as believers, trying to know how to call out sin, encourage growth in Christ, but yet not break a person, where they feel like there's no hope and they can't grow. And I don't know if there's a magic formula for it, but I think it does cause us to pause and evaluate each and every conversation, so that we're bringing glory to Christ, but also helping fellow believers grow as well.