

Thursday, September 24, 2020

SERIES: GROWING AND GOING

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Leveling Up Your Outreach Pt. 1

I want to begin our time with a little bit of word association. I'm going to say a word, and I would actually like you to give me the associated word, and say it out loud. I know I can't hear you, but I still think this is a fun exercise.

Dog

Football

Angel

Light

Run

Cheese - I heard you say it. You thought about saying crackers, but you said wine -

Oh, let's throw out one more word: Evangelism.

What word did you associate with evangelism? Was it excitement? Was it outreach? Maybe it was service? Or was it fear? Was it pastor? Was it - I don't even have any idea what evangelism is? Well, let me tell you the words that come to my mind when I think of evangelism. I hear the word evangelism - "Game on!"

I happen to be a video gamer. Now, I know that might surprise you. But, when I have free time, which isn't very often, I enjoy relaxing, by playing a video game. Now chances are, you're a video gamer, and you didn't even know it. Now, you may not game on a computer, or an Xbox, or a PlayStation, or a Nintendo, but I bet you're playing games on your phone: Word games, strategy games, Candy Crush - even board games. But the reality is, most of us today are gamers, and we say "game on", because we do it, and we do it a lot.

Well, there's something that you and I have been called to do and do a lot of. Do you know what that is, friends? Yes, it is evangelism. It's outreach. Now before you tune out, or shut off this message, stick with me. Jesus' famous words live on today - His Great Commission - found in Matthew 28:19 (NASB), "[Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I commanded you.](#)" That is your mission today. That's my mission as a Christian.

People are so hung up on this idea of finding their unique mission in life. This is all well and good, but friends - as a Christian - you have a mission from the moment you make Jesus your

Lord and Savior. You have the mission of being a disciple-making disciple. You and I are called to everyday outreach. What does this have to do with saying, “game on”? What does this have to do with us playing video games? Well, I'm glad you asked.

We've been in a message series called *Growing and Going*. We've been talking a lot about growing in our faith so that we will go and make disciples. Now, as a former teaching and outreach pastor of a local church, I realize we have complicated outreach, and we have, unfortunately, distorted evangelism. We get hung up on the right words to say. We get so hung up on avoiding the wrong things to say, so we don't offend somebody. I think we have forgotten that outreach and evangelism are really enjoyable. In fact - I would say - it's fun. It's something that Jesus wants us to think of as “game on.”

So with that in mind, today we want to talk about “leveling up”. This is familiar territory for you gamers. If you've played games like Candy Crush, Clash of Clans, Call of Duty, Fallout, or many games like these, you'll be familiar with “leveling up”. You may have leveled up and not even known it. In some games, when you've done enough tasks, completed a level, you've battled enough, or even picked up a certain item, you level up. Well, that's what I want to help you do today: Level up – in other words, *grow* - in your outreach. I want to come alongside you, and level up your outreach and evangelism.

It's hard playing games as a *noob*, or as a low-level character. It is quite difficult to do effective outreach, when you feel unprepared or not at a high enough level. So, what if you're not an evangelist? If this is you, I would say good, because neither is 95% of other Christians. Now I just made up those statistics. I have no idea what percentage of people would consider themselves to have the gift of evangelism. But listen to what Paul said to Timothy:

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:5 (ESV), “*As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*” Did you notice what Paul just said? He said to do the work of an evangelist. He didn't say do the work, *because* you're an evangelist. He didn't say, because you have been gifted with this special spiritual gift; therefore you should do evangelism. No, he says, *do* the work of an evangelist. In other words, we are all called to evangelism - That is, sharing the Good News of what Jesus Christ did. Sharing the Good News of who Jesus Christ is. That's not just for the preacher. It's not just for the Bible teacher. It's not just for your pastoral staff. It is the privilege of every believer today.

DISCUSSION:

N: And here are two people who take that privilege to heart, Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole. Cara, people are often afraid to share the Gospel for various reasons, so please remind us again - who does the saving? Where does the power come from?

C: Jesus does the saving always; that's why He came. Okay - He came to save the lost - it's His reason -and we make that introduction. So we don't have the power. All we do is make the introduction.

N: Okay. So I'm going to challenge you. Do you think that we don't really believe that?

C: What? I believe it. What do you mean?

N: Well, I know you do, but I think a lot of people - there's a hesitancy in introducing people to Jesus, to sharing the Gospel. And so there's got to be a reason why. I mean, we know Romans one, it's very clear. We don't do the saving. [Right.] So where's the hesitancy come from?

C: Because people take Scripture, where you have to have an answer for what you believe, and they get really nervous about it. And you should have an answer why you believe it - and then all you have to do is tell them why you believe it - you know? And I mean, you don't have to have every answer to every question that they have, but you can help them find the answer. And then, some just don't have an answer. Sometimes you've just got to have faith - you just have to make the introduction - point them in the right direction - be available when they have questions. You can't just have them make that commitment to follow Jesus, and then dump them. You know, you hear that analogy: You don't have a baby, and then leave it at the hospital. You have to bring it home; you feed it; you nurture it. And then at some point, they have to be able to stand on their own with it. But we don't - we do not have the saving power. That pressure should not be on us at all. I think if you can just get to where you can make that introduction; give them the evidence when they're asking for that evidence. I mean, they have to make the choice, right? [Yeah, exactly.] I mean, I wish I did, because I'd save my kids. I mean, that's the biggest stressor on a Christian parent - is that you want to make sure you've equipped them enough, that they can stand on their own, but ultimately they have to make that choice.

N: Yeah. Well I think it could be the various reasons why we are hesitant in sharing the Gospel - you know - fear, doubt, uncertainty, trying to have all the answers. But I think that there's also another issue, and that could be the issue of patience. And so Arnie, I want to ask you, how do you view patience, in relation to the Gospel? How do those two work together?

A: Yes. You have to be patient, because your timeline doesn't coincide with the timeline of the Holy Spirit, especially in dealing with other people. But one thing that goes, when you talk about patience, is also hanging in there and standing by. So it's one thing to pray for someone; it's another thing to be standing by, and being available to that person - not as a judge, but there - if they do reach out, or if the Holy Spirit does start working in their lives - that you're there for them.

N: Yeah. It can be frustrating when we know the truth, and we have the hope inside of us, and we watch our friends, our family members, who just don't get it. And I know from talking to friends, from watching people, as you have - it can take them one year, five year, 10 years. I had one friend - told me recently - it took 50 years for their family member to respond to the Gospel. But finally they did. They never gave up. They kept praying, and they waited on God's timing. And that is hard. But we know from experience, and from Scripture, that God's timing is always best.

Now maybe you are warming up to this idea of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. I hope you are. But maybe you're still thinking how? We'll talk about that soon. But today is all about *leveling up*. To level up, we are going to ask 3 questions, and what we do with those questions will help us level up our outreach. And the best resource for teaching us about leveling up, is your Bible, so let's go back to the Bible, and turn to Matthew Chapter 22. We'll be bouncing around a bit, but we'll start with Matthew 22, beginning in verse 35.

In this section of Scripture, Jesus is in Jerusalem, and is being questioned by the religious leaders: the Pharisees and Sadducees. And this is when they bring in a lawyer to question him. Look at verses 35-38 (ESV):

“And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.”

Did you know that the Pharisees had classified over 600 laws? 613, to be exact - not just the original 10. Well, which is the most important? The religious leaders test Jesus with this question, and He quotes Exodus 6:5. He passes the test. He says the single greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. In other words, we are called to love God with every single ounce of who you are. If you can do this one thing, everything else will flow naturally.

So the first question you need to ask is, “**How much do I love God?**” This is the fundamental question, because **everyday outreach flows from loving God.**

When you love someone, you'll desire to KNOW someone. Intellectually know them? Of course. You'll want to study them: Gain an understanding of who they are; find out what motivates them; what they love; who they love; what their mission is. Well, the same is true of God.

You'll also PERSONALLY know them. This goes beyond knowing data and facts. You'll know them by spending time with them; you'll ask them questions; by listening to them; you'll talk with them; you'll walk with them. The same is true for God.

You'll want to know God. God is not a distant deity. He did not create the universe and walk away. No. God created the universe and all that is in it. He created man. The Bible tells us that He breathed life into his nostrils. That's personal and intimate. If I came and breathed into your nostrils, you'd deck me. But you'd admit - it's intimate and personal. God is a personal God. He is not an *it*. God is a person. He is alive, real, relational. You can know God like you know me or anyone else. You'll never be able to know all of God, but you can learn what He has revealed in Creation - we can learn about who He is in Scripture. You can learn about who He is, by examining how He works in your life, and in the lives of others. But one thing is clear, from Genesis to Revelation, you will see that God is a God of mission: A God of outreach. As you love Him more, you'll embrace and love His passion – His mission - more. His mission becomes your own, because, well, as a Christian, it is your own mission. Remember, that's what Matthew 28:19 – The Great Commission - teaches us.

So now, keep your finger in Matthew 22, and turn with me to Luke 15. In Luke 15, you will find 3 parables about lost things or people. I want to just briefly read the first parable to you, and you'll see the heart of God. Listen to Jesus' words in Luke 15, verses 1-7:

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

You see, God loves His creation. God so loved the world that He would send Jesus – His only begotten Son - so that people might be found and saved. [Romans 3:10-11](#) says, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God." The lost don't seek God. They don't desire to be found. But God is in the mission of seeking and saving the lost. This parable emphasizes this reality. God has gone out of His way to let us know He is here. God has gotten down on His knees, in the muck and mire of this world, through Jesus Christ, to seek and save the lost – the sinful – you and me. And this parable teaches us that when one person comes to saving faith in Jesus, Heaven erupts in celebration.

So I will ask that question again: "How much do you love God?" on a scale of 1-10; 1 being, "I'm honestly not that interested in knowing God. Honestly, I don't really love Him." And 10 being "I love him with all I've got. I hunger for Him, His word, His presence, His grace." On that scale of 1 to 10, where are you today? Honestly, if you were to give a subjective number today - how much do you love God? Now I'm going to tell you a little secret: The number doesn't matter, because regardless of the number, we should always be desiring to level up.

I don't know if you remember the movie *This is Spinal Tap* or not, but it's a mockumentary about a rock band. And there's this great scene, where the band member is talking about how everyone else's amplifiers only go to 10. But what if you need to go just a little bit louder? Well, their amp actually went to 11. What's my point? It doesn't matter what number you are. The question is, do you want to level up?

Because you are listening now, I know you want to level up. So, If you're going to level up, identify one thing you can do today that will raise your number by 1. What should you do? The first thing I would suggest is pray. Talk with God, and ask Him to put in you a desire to know Him, and love Him more. Do you think God won't answer that prayer? Of course, He will. Praying should always raise your level.

N: Now, Arnie and Cara are here, so let me toss a few questions their way. Cara, for someone who is listening and thinking, "What does it mean to love God – someone we can't see or touch?" How would you explain that to them?

C: Well, it means realizing that He loved me first. So when I tell God I love him, I say, "I love you too", because He loved me first. It means I have a purpose for my life. It means that I'm on the greatest adventure that I could ever imagine, and better. I mean, it's a thrill, and I don't need to see Him. I see Him in Creation. [Right.] I see things differently. I appreciate Creation a lot more. But I have this deep - I'm in love with Jesus -this passionate love that I have with Him - this relationship - I can always count on Him. He always has my best interest at heart. He knows what's around the bend. I mean, I can go on and on. I feel Him. [Right]. You know, I have a Helper in me, and I feel Him more in hard times.

N: And I think that's such a key component - is recognizing - well, you know, first of all, God is Spirit. So it's not like you can see Spirit walking around, but we see the evidence. We see God's evidence. Look around you - look at Creation. It is clear. His thumbprint is everywhere - from a human being - a baby that's born - to the trees; to the sky; to the universe. There is evidence galore of God's existence. But what about the touch? We are the hands and feet of Christ. We are the body of Christ. We actually do get to touch Him, and He touches us, through the body of Christ. And as you said, through the experiences of his Holy Spirit, living in you. So Arnie, I'm curious - from your perspective, why is our love for God so important to the mission of sharing Him with others? Because that really is a very practical way of being the hands and feet of Christ.

A: Oh, and it is critical - In that you share the love that you have in your own heart with others, so that their lives can actually be transformed. And without sharing that love, it almost makes it look like you don't have that love in your own life, if you don't share it.

N: Yeah. When we love God, we immediately love people more. And when we know God more, we want to let them experience that same love of Christ. So we would encourage you out there – Today, pursue God, take time, get in His Word, spend time talking to Him, and allow His love to pour out through you - so that you might impact other people - so they can see the difference that He is making in your life.