

Monday, September 28, 2020

SERIES: GROWING AND GOING

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TITLE: Leveling Up Your Outreach Pt. 2

Last week I mentioned being a big video gamer and talked about what it means to “level up” or “up your game”. Well, if you're going to level up when it comes to sharing the Gospel, one of the biggest things you can do is to **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, or “up your game”.

The second thing I'd do is **get into His word**. If you were dating someone, you'd want to spend a lot of time getting to know them. You'd read all their posts on FaceBook. You'd probably engage in and retweet their tweets. You'd “heart” their pics on Instagram.

I remember when dating my wife – and that was back in the days when we actually passed notes to each other - I was hungry for every note that she would write. I remember receiving that note, and I would open it carefully, and then smell it. And I would read that note from top to bottom. Most of the time, that note wasn't “ooey-gooney” love. It was just the mundane download of daily information. My wife would tell me what she was doing; where she was at; who she was with. And then it would say how much she looked forward to seeing me that night. I would engage, devour, long for that note!

You see, this should be the same for us with God – in fact, the Bible has been described as God's love letter. I don't know if that really does it justice, but in a sense, that's right. When we love God, we'll do the equivalent with His Word. We'll study it; underline it; share it; heart it! My suggestion is to read one chapter, of one of the 4 Gospels, until you are done. Grab the book of John and see, hear, and taste how much God loves you and the lost. See how much He has done for you. Walk intimately with our Savior and let Him increase your love for Him.

Maybe if that sounds too intimidating, maybe just use Back to the Bible's app - goTandem. Allow us to send you daily Scripture to move you closer to Jesus today than you were yesterday. But don't leave God's Word unopened - open it, and begin to love Him more today.

When we truly love God, I mean really love God, this results in loving His mission of reaching the lost – those people who are far from God. This is the first way to level up your outreach. **Everyday outreach flows from loving God.** Tweet that, FaceBook it, tattoo it, but put it somewhere you'll remember. **Everyday outreach flows from loving God.**

So let's turn back to Matthew 22. Start at verse 37 (ESV): **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 foremost commandment.** Then, look at what Jesus says

beginning in verse 39. Jesus said, “³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” You see, though God gave Moses 10 commandments on Mount Sinai, Jesus teaches us these two, which summarize all the laws. Loving God will flow into loving others.

So here’s another question to ask yourself to help you level up your outreach: **How much do you love people who are far from God?** If you love God with all you’ve got, you will naturally begin to love people who are far from God. You will begin to see people as Jesus saw people.

Listen to the account of Jesus as He approached Jerusalem before his execution: “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.’”(Luke 19:41-44; NIV)

Do you see how Jesus saw people? It said it right at the beginning. It says He approached Jerusalem, and He saw the city, and He wept. Jesus wept for the city. His heart broke for the lost. He desired His creation to be reconciled, and it caused Him sorrow, because instead of reconciliation, He was rejected by the very people who should have embraced Him.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Jesus did not come to be a social reformer. Jesus did not come to be a social justice advocate. He actually did not come to make sick people well. Jesus Christ came so that dead people – spiritually dead people - would be made alive. When He saw their brokenness and their enmity with God, it broke His heart. He wept.

So now I have to ask you, how much do you love those who are far from God? When you are passing through a grocery store, do you stop and observe the people next to you? Does it break your heart to know and see so many lost people? What about when you’re at school, or at work? When you hear the conversations in the hall or in your cubicle, does it break your heart? Does it make you sad to know they are far from God? It did Jesus. What about you?

Like Jesus, because we love God, and desire to love people, we must be willing to gain the reputation of Christ. Luke 7:34 (ESV) says this of Jesus’ reputation: “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”

Jesus wasn’t actually a glutton and a drunkard. He spent time, not with the religious leaders, except when He wanted to correct them. Jesus spent so much time with the lost – those far from God - that He was known as a friend of sinners. He went to where the sinners were. He never expected them to come to Him.

For many believers today - our reputation is probably, “friend of Christians” or “friend of people who are like us”. But love, *true love* doesn’t know these kinds of limitations or barriers. Now, does loving people who are far from God mean blind acceptance? No, not at all. Yes, we must extend grace continually and often. But also remember what Jesus did with the sinners He spent time with: He would love the sinner and deal with the sin. Jesus’ words to the woman caught in

adultery were, “Go and sin no more.” Love extends grace, and through salvation, sin can be dealt with.

I love how Matt Chandler’s church puts it: “Come as you are, but don’t stay that way.” That’s it, isn’t it? That’s the Good News! People don’t need to clean up – they can’t clean up - for the Gospel to work. The Gospel cleans them – us - up from the inside out. It’s truly love if we engage in everyday outreach with Gospel intentionality. Friends, the world is lost. And without Christ, it’s Hell. It’s not enough just to engage. In other words, we can’t just rely on our actions and our service. No, you and I must engage in everyday outreach with Gospel intentionality. The result of living on mission is souls saved and lives changed.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let me bring Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney in for a few moments. It's one thing to lovingly share the Gospel message. Where do you go with a person after you do that?

A: So, my style - and I'm not saying it's good, bad or indifferent; it's just what comes natural to me - is usually, when I share the Gospel, I'm listening to what a person has to say, and where they are. And then, I will try to add a little helpful thing. But one of the things I've been trying is, at the end of a conversation, I will tell the person that I'll be praying for them. And I actually do that. I don't say it, and then not do that. But that's where I always try to go is - if we're in a deep conversation, it's usually with somebody who, there's an aspect of their life that's not working correctly. And it's a perfect time to share the Gospel, to share the light, but also to let someone know that you care enough to pray about them and mean it.

N: That's excellent advice. What about you, Cara?

C: Well, you need to walk alongside them. I mean, you have a new brother and sister in Christ, and you can't just walk away. What I like to do is, everybody's different in how they process and look at things. If someone would glean more from Apologetics, I'm going to point them to that direction - send them books, show them things on YouTube, or get them hooked up with people who provide that type of evidence - podcasts, Back to the Bible app, those types of things. Because they need things to stay in the Word. You know, I always say, you can go down a rabbit hole with this stuff, so get them started, and then they can explore some things.

N: Yeah. It really doesn't matter. I mean, I hope you hear what I'm saying. It doesn't matter whether they respond favorably to the Gospel, or they say *no*. And I don't mean that because I don't want them to get saved. I do. But what I'm hearing from you guys, and I would agree with, is you keep on in the relationship, you keep caring about them. You still invest in their lives. You still spend time with them. You pray for them, but you don't just throw them the Gospel and walk away. Regardless whether they say, “Yes, I believe and I'll follow Jesus,” or they say, “Nope, not today. Not for me”, we still walk with them. We still pray for them. And we still invest in them, because we care about them, just like God cares for them. One of the things I begin to do with people between those meetings, is I encourage them, check out goTandem - what a great way for them to get exposed to the Bible in unique ways, at a time that they would like for them to grow in their spiritual journey. And I just think what a great tool to put in their

hands. And I'm proud to say it comes from Back to the Bible. So regardless of what stage they're in, in their spiritual journey, keep walking with them, keep praying for them. And as Cara said, keep giving them resources to see them grow in their walk with Christ.

Reaching out to others for the sake of Christ is so important. However, you may be thinking, "But I don't like my neighbor." Or, "I don't like my co-worker...my cousin...that jerk kid who tramples my flowers." The question is, should you engage in outreach with them? You might be shocked by my response, but I would tell you to *stay away* from that person until you do love them.

Scripture teaches, and it's clear from the culture, that the Gospel is offensive. If you do outreach out of obligation, spiritual pride - to get another notch on your belt - or to get people in the seats at your church, it will likely fail. Remember, without love, it's nothing. We should all strive to never add more offense to the Gospel, by doing outreach to someone you don't like or love - otherwise I truly believe it will do just this - add more offense to the Gospel.

Do you want to level up your outreach? Do you want to level up your love for people far from God? First, **Pray** this prayer: "God help me love people - and if there's a person you need to love, say his or her name to God - help me love them as *you* do. Change my heart. Give me eyes to see them as you do. Give me a heart that breaks for them."

Second, remember that scale we used last week? Well, let's use it again. On a scale of 1-10, **what is your outreach temperature right now?** I know this is subjective, it's ok. Is it 1 - you don't have a heart for the lost? You don't have a desire to spend time with those who are far from God? Is it a 5? Or is it a 10 - You spend all your time praying and hanging with non-believers? Here's the thing: The number has nothing to do with the person next to you, and how well you compare. For yourself, what is your number right now? And here is the key question: **What is one thing you can and will do to raise your temperature by one degree?** What can you do? You can pray that God would raise your temperature. You can schedule coffee or dinner with someone. You can do an act of kindness motivated by love. Take a moment and write down one thing you'll do to raise your temperature.

So I have to ask you: Are you feeling like you're leveling up? I hope so, because I am. But there's one more question you and I should ask to level up our outreach. And that question is, "How much do you love each other as Christians?"

Now I know this may seem like an odd question when we are talking about outreach, and leveling up for outreach, but it's really not. Because we, as the church - we as brothers and sisters in Christ - we are to be working together in introducing people to Jesus Christ.

Listen to Paul's words in Philippians, chapter 1:3-5 (ESV). "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." In your Bible, I would encourage you to circle or underline the words *partnership in the gospel*, or highlight it in

your Bible app. But you see, we are in partnership in outreach. It's not a one-player game. It's a tag team. It's team effort. And what do good teams do when they play on a team?

Paul gives us the answer in 1 Thessalonians 5:11. He says, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing." If you turned there, underline "encourage one another" and then in the margin, write the word "accountability". When a team works together, they should be accountable. When we love each other, we'll hold each other accountable in our partnership in the Gospel. Why? Because love desires growth. No person who has a child or a baby desires the child to stay small or an infant. They want their child to grow and develop. If they realize their baby isn't growing, they consult a doctor and do what the doctor prescribes to see the child grow. The same is true for us as brothers and sisters in Christ. Because we should love each other, we should desire to hold each other accountable in reaching the lost together.

So today, if you want to level up your love for each other as Christians, what can you do? First, **Pray**. Pray for each other. Pray that, as Romans 1 declares, *we would not be ashamed of the Gospel*. Pray for boldness with outreach.

20th Century evangelist and pastor **R.A. Torrey** said this, "Our greatest need today is a deep, thoroughgoing, Spirit-wrought, God-sent revival. Such revivals as far as man's agency always comes in one way-by prayer." This is why we pray first and foremost.

Second, you know what I'm going to ask you. Do you remember that question I asked you about your ranking on a scale from one to 10? Here's what I'd like you to do. I would like you to share this scale with someone you know personally, who will hold you accountable in your outreach. Who is one person who will ask you - maybe once a week; maybe once a month - on a scale of 1 to 10, what is your outreach temperature, and what can you do to raise it by 1 degree? It could be someone from your church. It could be a person from your life group. It could be something your life group does together. It could be a spouse. It could be just a friend. But from this day on, commit to periodically checking in on each other, because remember, we are in partnership together in the Gospel!

Everyday outreach will only happen when we love God with all we've got. It is my hope and prayer you love Him more and more. When we love God, the natural result will be a love for those far from God, and for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Everyday outreach, friend? To that, I say, "Game on!"

N: All right. Let's add a little practical perspective to this. Let me turn once again to Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. There's a lot of hateful banter being thrown around right now, due to the upcoming elections, disagreements on COVID-19 and social unrest. So let me just ask – how do you get past those uncomfortable topics and love people – even the most unlovable people?

C: Well, our goal is not to win souls to Trump or Biden. So our goal is to point souls to Jesus. So I focus on that. Jesus changes a person's heart, and then they might change their belief on that. So again, I always say you can't expect nonbelievers to act like believers. So I think it's important to also say you can have your opinions and your belief on COVID-19 or whatever, and still follow Jesus. The idea that Christians - we may turn someone away from Jesus because we may

or may not disagree - I think it's just ludicrous. I think those comments come from people who disagree with you, and then they invoke the name of Jesus, as a way to try to shut you down, make you feel less than, and it indicates that they really don't have any information that backs up their opposing belief - but, you know, always be respectful. You may be wrong or you may be right, but you can be respectful either way as a Christian. I think though, feel free to express yourself, because this is America and we're free to do that.

N: Well, and I think your point is well taken, and I think, right - that non-believers think and act like non-believers - they don't have the Holy Spirit living in them. Their heart has not been reformed. They have not been reborn. So why would they think or believe any other way? So I think before we get so frustrated with them, because they don't think the way we think, we need to keep praying for them and keep pursuing them with everyday outreach - with that Gospel intentionality - looking for unique opportunities to share the testimony of God's goodness, our own testimony, and the Gospel, and allow God to shape the heart, because you're right: It doesn't do us any good, spiritually speaking, to try to just convince them to one party or the other. But one thing I would say, and encourage our listeners to consider, is every decision in life - political, financial, emotional, spiritual, you name it - we need to put that through the grid of Scripture. We need to go back to the Bible to see what God has said. So often we run off of what we want, what we desire, what a political platform says, to drive our theology. But in fact, our theology should be driving every decision we make, politics included. So I think that's a good place for us to start, but again, remember that people will behave based on who they are in their heart. Arnie, I don't want to leave you out of this discussion. So what do you think about approaching people who would appear to be unlovable?

A: Yeah, especially when it comes to politics, I just make it a habit, with the exception of my wife, not to talk politics. So I listen a lot, and on both sides - and it's interesting to me though, on both sides, especially when it comes as Christ followers - that oftentimes the Biblical point of view is forgotten. And we did a bunch of research on the racial inequity in society, and how to solve it and all of that. And what really came up is, we've got to get back to Scripture - what the Scripture says about equality, and all of that. And yet that just doesn't seem so popular today with either side - it's more, this demand, that demand - and oftentimes the Biblical view is just kind of left out. So you'll see strong believers siding with people who don't take the Bible seriously, in the name of racial equality and all of that. And I'm just not sure - the whole problem stems from getting away from the Bible - so I'm not sure joining forces, as Christ followers, with groups that disregard the Bible, or hold it lightly, is a very good solution.

N: Well, I think the Bible is pretty clear about being *unequally yoked*, right? And so I think we need to be really careful with who we link arms with, because even though on the surface maybe our initiative or our goal may be the same, maybe - you better believe that the intentions and the motivations may be considerably different in that process. So again, I don't think we can press it hard enough. We as believers need to go back to the Bible, continuing to turn to the Bible, to see what God says. So again, all these issues - injustice, inequity, pro-life, whatever it is, social justice - we need to pause and just say, "Hold on, hold on, hold on. What does the Word of God

say about this?" And from that point, then we can begin to make wise decisions for all areas of our lives - who we partner with, who we vote for, and how we live. You know, as we're talking about this, I kind of think about this idea of a "lone ranger". And I think at times we kind of want to be "The Lone Ranger" in our faith, but Paul talks about a partnership. He talks about a partnership in the Gospel with our Christian brothers and sisters. Why do you think this is so important today? And how can we really be intentional about this?

C: There's not a lot of people in Scripture battling alone. And you notice too, that a lot of the disciples are going out in twos. So I fought alongside Christian women, that when one of us grew weary, the other one stepped up. And even in marriage, I always told Dan, only one of us is allowed to be crazy at a time. So, you know, we're made for community with other believers for a reason. And I think it's always good to have at least one other person in your life that's going to hold you accountable.

A: Yeah, I agree. A hundred percent. The "lone ranger-ism" in anything is not good. And having checks and balances, people that you hold accountable in there, people that hold you accountable, and you as well - I think it's just critical.

N: Yeah. As the body of Christ, I really do believe we go better together, and it's true. We can live alone, but I don't know if we can really thrive alone. So we would encourage you - find people who are committed in their faith - people who are serious about God's Word - and link arms with them, so that we might see a movement; so we might see the Gospel spread in rapid numbers. I think we have forgotten to pray for revival in the church, and we've forgotten to pray for revival in America, or wherever you're listening. So we encourage you - Don't just go it alone. Look for people who love God and love His Word - link arms with them - and go together, and make an impact on your city and in the world.