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SERIES: GROWING AND GOING

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TITLE: Everyone Plays Pt. 1

This marks my 10th season of coaching flag football. I never thought I would be a coach. I never played football; I never coached football as a young adult. The only football I've ever played was a handful of tackle games with some friends, and a lot of Madden and NCAA Football on the Xbox. There are two reasons why I coach. The first is obvious: I want to be with my kids. I realize that my time of having intimate influence over my children diminishes each day. So to participate in the things that they enjoy brings me a lot of happiness. But the second reason is what we've been talking about. And that's outreach.

The past couple of days, we've been talking about how to “level up” our outreach. We've learned that outreach flows out of our love for God, because when we love God more, we develop a heart for the things that God loves. God loves His creation so much that even though mankind declared war against God, He sent Jesus to seek and save the lost. This is why loving God more matters. We saw that when Jesus approached Jerusalem before His very crucifixion— He wept. Why did He weep? Was it because He was about to suffer a painful death? No! The text tells us he looked over Jerusalem, and He wept because His people and His creation had rejected Him. So when we are going to level up our outreach, we have to increase our love for God, which naturally increases our love for others, and that propels us out into everyday outreach.

And again, this is the other reason why I coach. I coach so that I can be with kids who are far from God *and their* parents. Yesterday I talked about Gospel intentionality. Well, by coaching with Gospel intentionality, I've had the opportunity to make a long term impact in people's lives! So today, we want to talk about this idea - that **everyone plays** when it comes to outreach.

This idea, that everyone plays, actually came from my coaching experience. One of the expectations of the YMCA Youth Sports is that everyone plays. It doesn't matter if it's their first year or their third year. It doesn't matter if they want to play, or if their parents are making them play. Everyone plays. As a coach, this is both good and bad. It's good, because your talent pool – as shallow as it can be with third graders – it increases. On the flip side, if they're not the next Aaron Rodgers, they still get to play.

Well, our first game, I experienced the joy of everyone plays. It was my first game coaching. Thirty seconds to call a play and snap the ball, and that seems like a long time on paper, but when you're in the huddle, and rotating kids left and right - whew. Everyone plays, right. One series a kid is a running back. The next series, they're a wide receiver running slants and outs. I think naked mole rats would have looked more organized running the plays - only kidding - we

lost that game, but we learned a lot. As a coach, I learned a couple of things: 1) the idea that everyone plays is incredibly valuable, because when you're on a team, everyone matters to accomplishing the goal. 2) The idea that everyone plays allows the opportunity to find your sweet spot on the team.

As the season progressed, sure we won a few games, but what was really cool is, I saw each player find their preferred positions and watched them excel in them. "Everyone plays" is not just a youth sports philosophy - it's been the philosophy of outreach for the church since the very beginning. Today we're going to search the Scriptures and discover 4 realities of outreach. So let's turn back to the Bible and begin in 2 Timothy Chapter 4, verse 5:

Paul, as he writes his partner in the ministry Timothy:

"⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Tim 4:5, ESV). In the previous verses, Paul lays out a sad indictment for the culture, and honestly, a portrait of Christians who will pick and choose what they choose to believe, and who they want to listen to. Here's what I want to zoom in on – not that the other elements aren't important. They all are, but look at what Paul says, "do the work of an evangelist." Underline that or highlight that.

You and I, as Christ-followers, are called to do the work of an evangelist. Perhaps you are sitting there, asking this question: Wasn't this letter written to a certain person, Timothy, at a certain time, for a certain purpose? Yes. Doesn't this mean his task of being an evangelist only applies to him? No! It applies to everyone who is a Christian. Here's the first reality: **We are all called to everyday outreach.**

You don't believe me? You want more proof? Remember the words of Jesus: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matt. 28:19-20, NASB) This is the Great Commission. Before returning to Heaven, Jesus said, "go and make disciples of all nations." A better translation is "*while going,*" *make disciples of all nations*. This is very important. Now I know what you may be thinking. You may be thinking, "No comma, Nat. He said, *go and make disciples*." The main command in that verse is to *make disciples*. And if you do a little bit of research, you will find that a better translation truly is "*while going*", *make disciples*. You don't have to go anywhere. Instead it's "while you go" ...

DISCUSSION:

N: Let's turn to Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney for a moment. So Arnie, Cara, the idea of "while going" pretty much eliminates any bench sitters. Talk about why people should *want* to get in the game and share the Gospel.

A: I remember when, as a new believer working in ministries, I started doing some - I think you call it - pulpit supply. I was speaking at this one group, and it was their missions time. And I took the stand: *as you're already going* doesn't mean sending money overseas, and you not doing something yourself. And that got kind of a strange kind of reception, because I think a lot of people still don't get the Scripture - that it's *as you're already going*. [Yup.] It's not anything

different. And it's not evangelism, it's discipleship, which is relationships. So it's quite a bit different today. And you're right. There are no bench sitters, for people that are obedient to God's calling, and we all have different positions for sure. But we all have to be in the game, or in the battle.

N: Exactly right, exactly right. Cara, what do you think?

C: Well, I told you earlier about our tour bus driver Beamon, and how he changed my life. He had an eighth grade education. You know, the world I think, would tell him he's not worthy, educated enough, to have any value, but Beamon knows Jesus, and Him crucified - so if you know the Gospel, you have enough. God orchestrated Beamon's life in this new job, *while going*, and it changed the trajectory of many lives. I mean, people think that they have to have a doctorate in theology, or be a missionary in a jungle somewhere, to reach the lost. But I can tell you, it's not true. I think they're lies that just keep you from getting into the game. In fact, I can tell you, you have all the information there is to know Biblically. And if you keep that to yourselves, what good are you? You know, the lost are right where you are. So while you're going, living your life, you've got to just be as salty as you can. Go and tell others about Jesus - you have a sphere of influence. You're that important; God says so. So tell others.

N: Yeah. You know, God has you right where He wants you. And that may sound like I'm just trying to make you feel good, but it's true. It doesn't matter if you're retired, if you're a stay-at-home mom, if you're a server, you work in a bank, you work in a ministry. Those things don't matter. God has you right where He wants you. He's given you exactly what you need to be effective in everyday outreach. Why? How? Simply this - God is the One who does the saving. He's given you His Word, the Gospel, and He's given you a story. So now, while going, wherever you are, invest in the lives. As Arnie said, disciple, be in relationship with people, let them see the difference Christ has made, let them see and taste the saltiness of Christ in you, and allow Him to do the heavy lifting.

Jesus had intended his disciples to live a life of intentionality – of making disciples in everyday opportunities. Each day as they went to the market, as they went to the synagogue, as they went to fish, as they went to cook their fish, they were to engage in everyday outreach.

We've thought about this passage so long as that idea of “go”. And we often think of this as going across seas, and doing international mission work. Now that may be true for you today. You may be listening overseas, because you are an overseas missionary. I applaud you. And I guarantee if you're effective, you're living life with Gospel intentionality. But the majority of Christians today, and for 2000 years, have not been called to go into long-distance missions.

Instead, most of us are called to live lives with Gospel intentionality now. I've used that term a couple of times – Gospel intentionality. So what do I mean? We are called to approach every opportunity, whether it's going to the grocery store, going to a restaurant, going golfing, taking the kids to ballet, working at your job, or whatever else you do – we are called to have eyes to see, and ears to hear the lost - looking and listening for everyday ways, to let people see that you

really believe what you believe, and *always being prepared to give an answer for the hope that is in you*. That is what First Peter 3:15 says. Every day, wherever we are going, we are to be ready for the opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. That is Gospel intentionality.

Does that mean when someone asks you if you would like a refill on your soda, your response should be, “Do you know Jesus Christ?” That’s not what I’m suggesting. Does that mean whenever you order a pizza, when they ask, “Is there anything else?” you ask for a side of Jesus? That’s not what we’re saying. We’re not trying to cram Jesus and the Gospel into every conversation. Instead, what we are doing is looking for every day, organic ways to live a life reflective of our Salvation. You see, we want to be prepared to share the Gospel, the Good News, the verbal or written Gospel of Jesus Christ. Why? Because that is the power of Salvation for all who believe, according to Romans 1!

So in the Great Commission, Jesus is telling us to make disciples. We are to be disciple-making disciples: Teaching those disciples to obey all that Christ taught and what is taught in Scripture. We, too, are to obey His teaching, primarily out of our love for Him, and also to be an example – a disciple. But the key to this, is the idea of “while going.” Most likely, Jesus isn’t calling you to sell your stuff, quit your job, and move to another city, another state, or another country to share the Good News. He might, but chances are, that’s not in the cards for you today. But I can tell you, what is in the cards, is daily, as you go, *make disciples*. Share the Gospel - Teaching and discipling. Every Christian is called to everyday outreach.

Turn with me to Mark 1. We’ll read briefly verses 16-20. This is a familiar passage and children’s song. Jesus has just begun his preaching ministry in Galilee. And Mark tells us his message was, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (v.15, ESV).

And this is where we pick it up in Mark 1:16-20: “Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him.¹⁹ And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John, his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets.²⁰ And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.”

Jesus comes across four fishermen who were busy in their work, and Jesus calls out to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Their response is a bit puzzling, and we won’t unpack it. But here’s what I want us to see. If you have your Bible in front of you, circle the phrase “they were fishermen”. And then underline the phrase of Jesus “fishers of men.” Why is this important? It’s important because it’s the heart of everyday outreach. You see, the second reality of outreach is that **we are all naturals**. We are all naturals.

Jesus took ordinary – everyday – people, with everyday jobs, and translated them into outreach opportunities. Were they disciples of Christ? Of course! They walked with Him. They listened to Him. They served Him and did what He asked – sometimes with disagreement and confusion. But – this is key - they never stopped being fishermen.

Write in the margin of your Bible the references Luke 5:4-7 and John 21:3-7. In these passages, you see Simon and other disciples after Jesus – He has called them and they go - they are still fishing for fish. They may have had a new calling for their lives - to be disciple-making disciples - but they also were called to do it in natural – everyday - ways.

Again, the majority of you listening won't be called into full-time vocational ministry. That means you have the easiest jobs when it comes to doing the work of an evangelist. I'm not saying it won't come at a cost, but you get to do evangelism - do outreach - exactly where you are. You get to do it, doing what you are paid to do. Today, if you are a banker, you are a banker of men, and an evangelist of men - and by men, I do mean people. If you are a restaurant server, you are a restaurant server, and an evangelist of people. If you are a stay-at-home mom, you are a stay-at-home mom, and an evangelist of people.

You see, whatever it is you do vocationally, whatever it is you do with your free time, wherever you go - remember - while going, share the Gospel, engage in everyday outreach. Why? Because you are a natural. You get to engage in outreach in everyday ways – again - in your workplace, in your neighborhood, or wherever you go. You are a natural. God has you right where He wants you.

N: Let's talk a little more about this with Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Cara, what words of encouragement do you have for any moms listening today? Who are they likely to reach and influence?

C: It reminds me - your question - there's a homeless shelter, Nat, in Chicago, whose goal is to get people - people living on the streets - back on solid ground. They have this sign over their front door - that reads: "Your Mother's Prayers Have Followed You". And that made me tear up a little bit because I know what it's like to fight for my kids. God created women with this special kind of tenacity, that I don't think - God has not given to men. It's called stubbornness, right? And sometimes that'll get us into trouble. But if you pair that with Jesus, I think it keeps us in the game, with this never-ending hope, that even when everybody else seems to fold, we stick it out. I think that's why sometimes women, we feel alone in our convictions and our struggles. But for moms listening, keep praying for your kids, because it works. Those prayers do follow them. And your tenacious faith influences your kids. And know too that other women are struggling. So as women who follow Jesus, we have this hope that surpasses all human understanding, and we can't keep that hope from other people. So other moms, I think we influence them. So take a day a month, or make a date with another mom, because she needs it.

N: I think we often run in seasons, and we need to keep that in mind, because there may be some young moms today who are listening, and they're like, "You don't understand. I've got these little kids, and I don't have time to connect," and yet, but it's a season. It's a season. And in a couple of years, you're going to be in a different season, like you are right now with, you know, kids in their teens. And then you're going to be moving up to, you know, kids in high school, and then empty nesters. So every season, there are unique opportunities, but as Cara said, keep praying for your kids, keep investing in them, and then just keep your eyes and ears open for the

opportunities around you, whatever season you're in. Arnie, I want to pick your brain a little bit. As people age - and I'm not saying that you are - you know, you don't age - but other people do. And they sometimes find that they're not in the middle of the fray, but they still play a very important role in outreach, don't they?

A: So the first part of the problem is, not being in the middle of the fray. And, you know, I came to know the Lord when I was 47. I had retired at 45, and the pastor that was mentoring me at the time, he said, "You know, Arnie, retirement isn't in the Bible. It's not Biblical." So here, I'm all on fire for Jesus. And it's like, "I'm doing something wrong. What?" But as I've gotten older now, as I'm approaching 70, I can really see that you take yourself out of - you're not in the middle of the fray - because you've taken yourself out. And I think that is the worst thing you possibly can do as a Christ follower. But I hear it all the time from my generation, especially from guys, well, they're just tired. They just - they fought the good fight. You know, oftentimes they'll say the Scripture about, *well done, thy good and faithful servant*. They're talking about themselves. And it's like, "Whoa", you've got the most to offer people now, because you've lived through this with Jesus. You've got the most to share, and it's like, you've taken yourself out. And I've seen over and over time, when people retire, and they spend the good life, what they start doing, is not only stop focusing on Jesus, they start drinking maybe too much, or worse - they start focusing on their health, and that's all they talk about. Then nobody wants to be around them. And they've done taken themselves out of the battle, and then they become crabby, because you've got aches and pains. And let me tell you, and it just goes on, and it's like, Satan, he doesn't even have to do anything. He can just sit back and let you do his work for him. So it's, to me, the best time to share is now, whether you're a mom, or an old guy, or in between - now is the time. That's why God's kept you here.

N: Right. Again, God has you exactly where He wants you. And as you were talking about that, it reminded me - One of the gentlemen I loved having coffee, or lunch, or breakfast with, was Warren Wiersbe. Because there's a guy, who for all intents and purposes, could have sat on the sidelines. I mean, that dude ran hard for a long time. And yet every meal I was with him, he was engaging in outreach: The server, the hostess, the host - It didn't matter. He was engaging with them - sincerely, relationally, not scripted. And he would invest in these people, and he could have easily said, "Nah, I'm done." But he didn't. He found a place where God was using him in a different role, but I think, in some ways, a more effective role, especially in the realm of outreach. Let me just close up our time by talking about today's culture. Because in today's culture, you'll find a lot of people coming home, shutting the garage door, and sometimes you don't see them again until the next day, when they pull out of the garage again. So give us some suggestions for getting to know those kinds of people.

C: Well, I think they're difficult to reach, and I know that, because I was one of them. Some of them truly want to be left alone. Some are introverts that just want you to initiate the first "Hello". So I guess the only way to know that, is to truly try - So, you know, saying hello, walking over there. If they're not out in their yard, maybe a May Day basket - you know, I know it's cheesy, but just to initiate some of the hello first, Christmas treat, or something. But some people just want to be left alone. I know - I was one of them. It wasn't until I came to know the

Lord that I realized I needed other believers in my life, because that's what the Bible said I needed. And then, when somebody would ask me to coffee, which they initiated first, then I would accept - and I'll be honest, you know, 50/50 on that. Some of them, I have lifelong relationships with now. Some of them are weird. So you kind of have to realize, there's going to be a risk in there. One of the craziest things I ever did – introvert - is that I was at a place taking tap dance lessons, which is totally weird, right? But [Hey, I took them too; who knew?] some girl says to me, “Don't you have kids at this school?” And I said, “Yes”. She says, “What are you doing?” And I said, “Tap dancing”. And then I said, because I was convicted that I needed to know other people, I said, “Would you like to tap dance with me?” And Nat, she said, “Yes”. [Oh my goodness]. And it was the weirdest thing, but this girl and I are best friends now. And she loves Jesus, and we have done some - there's been some crazy stuff in our life, that we were able to weather together. So you - sometimes you get burned and sometimes it works out, but you've got to initiate that conversation.

N: Sometimes you're dancing through life. Arnie, would you want to do tap dancing with me?

A: No, no, no. Actually I don't dance, and I'm too old to start.

N: Well, okay, fine. But I know you've got some insight on how to engage with people, right?

A: I think the best thing you can do is to be friendly, be nice, especially as you get older. You know, you don't have that point to prove - you don't have to tell the waitress how crummy she is. I mean, they all have all of this stuff. Why not take the challenge of your latter years, and just be a friendly person that shares Jesus when there's an opportunity, and waits for the right opportunity. I mean, that to me seems to be the best challenge.

N: Yeah. I think one of the things we can really do better as Christians, is to carry ourselves in a way that's attractive to other people. I'm not saying physically attractive. I'm saying how we carry ourselves. Are we engaging? Are we joyful? Are we happy? Are we approachable? Are we engaging with other people in the things that are interesting to them? Because so often we, as a church, we as Christians, are known for what we're against, rather than what we're for. And though it is true, God has given us some very clear lines on things that He is for and against, I think we can carry ourselves in a way that brings excitement, and that brings interest to the body of Christ, and to God's Word. So we would encourage you: Don't sit on the sidelines. Get out there, keep going, but do so in the right posture, and look for opportunities for God to use you today.