

**Wednesday, September 30, 2020**

**SERIES: GROWING AND GOING**

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**TITLE: Everyone Plays Pt. 2**

God has you right where He wants you. That's right - God has placed you where you are, so that you can give Him glory and share His Good News in a way that's very natural to you: In everyday ways – in your workplace, at home with your neighbors, on the ball fields with your kids - even in your hobbies. For example, I'm a gardener. For the past 7 years, I've had a garden in our front yard, right by the sidewalk. One of the reasons it was put there was because it would be a meeting ground for everyday outreach – natural outreach. I am not just a gardener. I am a gardener of men. And you – you're a natural. You get to engage in outreach in your places - those places where you hang out and everybody knows your name.

Friend, as a Christian, you are called to everyday outreach and we are all naturals – doing outreach in everyday, natural ways – ways that make sense to your life! So let's go back to the Bible, and turn with me to Matthew Chapter 5. Here we encounter Jesus, giving His Sermon on The Mount - the greatest sermon ever given. He just wrapped up His list of "Blessed are the..." – The Beatitudes. Now, look at what Jesus says, beginning in verses 13-16 (ESV):

"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. <sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

You and I are salt. You and I are light. Notice, He doesn't say that you and I can *be* salt and light. He doesn't say we are *like* salt and light. No, He says we *are* salt. We *are* light. This is who we are. What is Jesus getting at by His holy name calling? He's telling us this reality about outreach: **We are influencers.** That's right, He's saying you are an influencer.

So where am I getting this? We have to think about this passage in context. In the ancient world, salt was used to preserve meat. They didn't have refrigerators or freezers. They had to pack meat with salt, and that salt would slow down the decaying process. You and I as outreach influencers - based on how we live – we will have an influence in the world around us. The world has been in chaos ever since sin showed up. Every generation has slipped into greater levels of moral decay. And our world, our culture today in the U.S., and in places around the world - this is no exception.

Christ said, look - you are salt. You have the ability to **slow down the decay of morality** where you are at. You can and will influence by the way you live. You can influence by the way you speak, in a way that stands up for truth – for justice – for grace – for hope – for peace – for what is right. That will influence in a positive way.

But guess what? Salt can become useless, and Jesus said useless salt is good for nothing, and should be thrown out and trampled on by foot. I know many Christians today who sit idly as their neighbors' lives just fall apart. I know Christians who sit silently as their family kills themselves with sin and addictions. I know some Christians who say, "If you can't beat them, join them." No longer, friends - You are salt! You are to influence up, and preserve morality and hope, where you are.

But salt doesn't just slow down the decay of morality - **Salt also creates a thirst.** Have you ever actually considered why some restaurants offer free peanuts? It's not just to add a freebie, because they like you so much. It's because it creates a thirst for one of their drinks.

Our world is so thirsty for hope – forgiveness – true, selfless love - For truth! Just like the Woman at the Well, to whom Jesus talked. She went looking for physical water, but realized and admitted she desired the water that quenches thirst forever. The world is dying for this. That's why everyone is neck-deep in religion and spiritualism, but they never find the answers they look for. They end up more confused, and thirstier than ever.

But I love what the Psalms say: "Taste and see the Lord is good." (Ps. 34:8) Have you tasted the Lord's goodness, or have you settled for just a scrap? Just enough grace, and you're good to go. C.S. Lewis nails our problem. He said, "**It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased.**" (C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory)

Have you settled for mud pies in your obeying all that Jesus has commanded? In your following God? If so, your salt has lost its saltiness. But if you are by the sea, enjoying the lobster rolls of God's goodness through following Him, people will want to join you. They are thirsty. Because you are a Christian, you are an influencer!

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: Let's bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney to talk more about seasoning our world with salt. Cara – how have you seen moms add salt to their world?

C: Well, I can tell you that I'm a mom and this is - I try to be there for my kids, navigating the teen years with them - being that voice to lean on. So I encourage them to tell me what's going on, so I can help them navigate it Biblically. I've also been a mentor to kids that live across the street, my friends' kids, and also encouraging other moms that might be in a different season - like maybe with littler kids. Because I know I gleaned a lot of wisdom from people who have already been through, you know, the teenager season, or whatever. So I think those are all good ways just to be an encouragement to others, for sure.

N: Well, what you really just described is finding everyday ways, right? I mean, you're not going out of your way to create this new niche. Instead, you're just simply doing the things that are natural to you. And that's what we would encourage every mom, everybody, to do - find the everyday ways to add salt in their world. And I know when you do that, God seems to bless it. Arnie, let's talk about you for a second, because I know you have traveled a lot. And so you've been next to people on planes, and in the airport. So how can a normal business person bring up the subject of the Gospel? That's got to be a challenge.

A: The easiest thing, believe it or not, for me is, when I wear one of my logo shirts. And Back to the Bible - wearing that logo shirt - is a little - you get a lot of - you attract people's comments. And I think the negative comments just aren't made. But I was flying from somewhere one time, and I had a gentleman who was very upset about his son, sitting next to me. Before the flight was over, he asked me to pray for his son, because I had my Back to the Bible shirt on. And then I get more conversation from my goTandem shirt, because people are always curious what it is. So I'm not a good conversation starter, so usually there's always something about me that I try to factor in. And then here at the ranch, I have kids that work with me. I just try to hang out, and kind of like, speak when I'm spoken to, you know - and give an opinion when I'm asked - but not otherwise.

N: Well it sounds like, again, it's everyday opportunities. Sometimes you are in a position to engage, because you notice something. But a lot of times, it's just you're present, and whether it's the logo on a shirt, or whether it's just you again, being available - God opens doors. And what you both described honestly, is being willing to walk through those doors when they're open. And so no matter who you are, where you're at, what you're doing - keep your eyes open for those God openings, walk through the door, and allow Him to do the rest.

A: And you know, Nat, you're too nice, because what you really need to say is - don't be stupid. Because I know there have been times - I'll never forget - in Mexico, we met this couple, and we were pretty sure he was dying of cancer, and I never really got the message out. And so we were at the airport at the same time, and Char says, you know, you could give him your email address, or your phone number. And I went, and I never found the guy. So I mean it respectfully, but don't be stupid. If the Holy Spirit is nudging you, it's not indigestion. It's you've got to listen. And you've got to act.

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We've been talking about being salt in a world that desperately needs seasoning. Well, Jesus also said you are the light of the world. How cool is that? You are to be used by God to show the way to that Living Water - the hope of Jesus Christ. In those everyday situations, you can be light. When your coworker says, "My husband left me this weekend; I don't know what to do" - that's your everyday chance to be light, and say "I am so sorry. Can I pray with you, and for you?" When your running buddy says, "The doctor says it's cancer", you can say, "I am so sorry. My God is the God who provides peace, no matter the diagnosis. Can I share with you a

story...?" When your neighbor comes over and says, "My mower broke; can I borrow yours?" That's your chance to say, "I'll do one better - let me mow it for you."

Friends, as Christians, you are called for outreach, you are naturals for outreach, and you are an influencer in outreach. But there's one more, and you don't even need to turn anywhere. The last reality of outreach is this: **We are all unique**. You are all unique, and that is a reason to celebrate.

Now, I'll explain this, and provide examples in a minute, but let me tell you what I am not emphasizing here. Today, most people are so obsessed with themselves: *My* unique purpose in life. *My* own look. *My* own desires. *My* own way of doing things. Me. Me. Me. Friend, your identity as a Christian is found in Christ, and Christ alone. That's it. We need to stop being so obsessed with our unique purpose in life. Remember, your identity, your purpose as a Christian, is to be a disciple-making disciple. That is your mission, and that is your purpose.

The church I pastored at had a good mission statement. It's mission statement was: "To introduce people to Jesus, to develop them into fully devoted followers, and to equip them to impact the city and world." That's just a more robust way of saying "disciple-making disciples" – a modern way with the Great Commission. No more struggling with why we are here, what we are to do. When we own our true purpose – wherever you are, whatever you do, wherever you are going - you are on a mission for everyday outreach, in unique, natural ways.

In the book *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (B. Hybels and M. Mittelberg), the authors lay out 6 different styles of outreach and evangelism. This is important to wrestle with, because often we feel we all should be a certain kind of evangelist. Some want to tell you there's only one way to do evangelism. They're wrong. There's only one Gospel, and it must be verbally shared. But how you get there, how you get to the moment of sharing the Gospel, isn't restricted to just one way. Write these down, and circle the one or two that are most like you.

First is the **confrontational style of Peter**. When Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter said, "You are the Christ!" There was no political answer, filled with many words and no meaning. He gave the answer, short and sweet. When they came to take Jesus away before His crucifixion, he was cutting off ears! And when asked about our faith, Peter said, "always be prepared to give an answer." So if you're inclined to just be out there, and ask people what they believe, and why they believe it, and then you make your case - go for it. God's gifted you that way. We need more boldness with the Gospel. That's great. If you're bold and to the point, you may have the confrontational style of Peter.

Second is the **intellectual style of Paul**. Paul was the apologist of apologists, at least as people think of Apologetics. Paul could be confrontational, but he was also a scholar, and presented reasonable arguments for Christ and the Gospel. He was gifted - he would tailor his message to fit the philosophers of his day. If you are inquisitive, a learner, and love to reason and debate - do it! We need you to engage the culture, because the culture is becoming more and more secular.

The third is the **testimonial approach of the blind man in John 9**. Jesus heals the man who was blind since birth. After being healed, he was confronted by a hostile group. He didn't debate - he simply told them what happened. People can't argue with the experience you have with God, and

the way He has intervened in your life. People love stories, and especially stories of hope. We need testimonies to be shared all the time.

Fourth is the **relational approach of Matthew**. After Matthew was called to leave his tax collector's booth by Jesus, he threw a Matthew Party. He intersected the lives of his friends – sinners and tax collectors - and the lives of his new teacher and disciples. If you just love to be around people in big social settings, or just love a good cup of coffee with a friend, why not lean into it? Why not use your style to branch out and bring friends from church, together with those who are far from God? This is totally natural and unique, and highly Biblical.

The fifth is the **invitational style of the woman at the well**. After she talked with Jesus about the Living Water, she went and invited the people she knew to come and meet Jesus themselves. We desire to be a culture of invitation. We need to invite people to see the difference Christ makes.

Last is the **service approach of Dorcas**. Acts 9:36 says that Dorcas was “always doing good and helping the poor.” Do you have a servant's heart? Do you love to help? My mother is always looking for an opportunity to serve someone in need. Make a meal, run an errand, do their hair, hang pictures - she does it. If you love to help others, do it!

The reality is, we need every style. No one is better than the other, because all will have Gospel intentionality—the desire and intent to share the lifesaving Gospel, when the Holy Spirit prompts us. When it comes to everyday outreach—*no one sits on the bench!* Everyone plays – each in their natural, influential, and unique ways. When we do this, we operate as the body of Christ, fulfilling our mission to become disciple-making disciples. When we all play, in our natural and unique ways, God is glorified, and lives are changed!

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N: Let's turn to my discussion partners, Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. I mentioned different styles of sharing the Gospel. I'd like to know which one works best for each of you and why.

C: I use all three. It just depends on the person I'm talking to. I'd have to say the most natural for me is probably the invitational, but I don't know. I use all three of them, just depending on the situation.

N: Well, so I mean, talk about that a little bit. Because the invitational style, is like the Woman at the Well, she said, “Hey, come and meet this Jesus; come with me and let's go experience this guy together”. So how do you actually do that? And give me maybe a story.

C: Yeah. I just ask them about their life, ask them questions. And if I find a hole where Jesus fits into it, I put them in it, you know? So I just try not to make it about me, and I've made that mistake. I've made that mistake, where I've made people projects, and they're not projects - they're people. So you just have to get to know them. You've got to invest some time in them.

N: So maybe a little bit the invitational, a little bit of the relational. That's really good. What about you Arnie?

A: I would say I'm like Cara - depends on the situation. The easiest, yet the hardest for me, is testimonial. You know, if somebody asks, you know, "What's your story; what's your trip?" - that's always the most challenging, because you don't want to make it all about you. But at the same time, you want to show how Jesus changed your life. So I like that one pretty well. I like the intellectual style - that's just certainly not me. I guess I like the Dorcas approach, if that's the right way of saying - Dorcas. [Yeah]. My kids would call me a dork, but Dorcas, is that the same thing? [Right.] It's just where you're out there. And you can't be a grumpy old man out there, barking at people, because that is not - that's the dork approach. But the Dorcas approach is being there with an open heart and showing you care.

N: What I think is so important about each one of these styles, is remembering that one style is not better than the other, but rather they are all used by God. So, you know, if you are more invitational, great - invite people to your Bible study, invite people to church. If you are a service minded person, like Dorcas - get out there; go and serve in the everyday opportunities that God has for you - just don't call them Dorcas - it can be offensive to some people. You know, for me, I tend to be confrontational. If there's something that needs to be addressed, let's address it. Don't wait until tomorrow. Let's talk about it now. But I also love that relational approach - You know, let's have a party; let's get the people together, and let's talk about this. Testimonial - maybe not so much for me. But again, when people hear about the life transformation that Jesus has done, what a powerful way to bring the focus - not on you - but on Christ, but also what He's doing in your life today. And intellectual - I'd like to think I'm intellectual - but you guys know the truth of that matter.

Let's talk about sharing the Gospel when hate comes our way, because I think the reality is, in today's culture of ideas, and in today's culture, it's getting harder and harder to be a Christian. The voices are getting louder, and we are experiencing more and more hate - hopefully because of our faith - not just because of our political posts, or something else. So how do we display the Gospel when hate comes our way?

C: I display it the same way I've always displayed it. It doesn't change. I think we just should expect hate to come our way. The closer we get to Jesus' return, the more hate we're going to experience. I mean, that's what we're told. That's what we should expect. However, I'm not looking for signs. Whether we die, or we're raptured, what difference does it make? We should be ready either way. So I don't know. I'd say nothing changes for me. You kind of taught us that, Nat, when you talked about Daniel, he didn't change anything. He did just the same as he always did, right?

N: Well, the Gospel message never changes. Right? [Right.] Yup. Arnie, any thoughts on this?

A: You know, in a hateful situation, it's the easiest one I know - it's pronounced hate - and then you kind of guard yourself up. It's that subtle hatred, before it dawns on you that somebody hates you, because of your faith. And that makes it much, much more tricky, because it catches you off guard. But these are very, very challenging times that we live in. [Yeah.]

C: Well too, you know, that's one thing I appreciate about horses - is that they give you body

language; you know, you can't be around a horse, and have your head in your phone, or else something could happen. Right? So it's reading body language. I mean, if you're going into a situation, and it's obvious that they don't want to hear the Gospel, then you're probably best just to leave it alone. And chances are, they've heard it already. They just don't want to hear it. You know? So I just use body language. Don't put yourself in a dangerous situation, unless you're there for a reason. I mean, the Holy Spirit, I think in those situations, is going to make it pretty clear, right?

N: Well, and when we talk about hate and people hating us, we want to make sure that we're being hated for the right reasons, and namely because of our faith, and by living an authentic faith, [It's not us they hate] Right. [Right]. They hate Jesus. And Jesus said, they hate you, because they hated Me, and they hated Me first - be prepared. But we've got to make sure that we're living in a way that is engaging, influential, but also authentic to who Christ has called us to be. And when we do that right, the reality is some people will hate us for it, but by no means, does that give us a reason to retreat. Well, we still love them, we still care for them, and we are still under obligation to share the Gospel with them, when God opens doors, and when He softens hearts. And so, as Cara said, we've got to be wise, but always be prepared to share that Gospel.