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Presentation Transcript
Need-based Evangelism and Natural Church Development
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Well, I thought about how to approach the topic of need-based evangelism. As I thought about it, I saw that it can be confusing for those from a Church of God background, because we have always thought of evangelism as something that somebody else does. Traditionally, our role in the church has been three-fold – pay, pray and obey. Right? But somebody else did the evangelism.

I was told, when I was a student at college, that I shouldn't try to explain the Bible to other people. I would just mess it up. It should be left to the spiritual giants. It's interesting, too, that even though that pay, pray and obey thing is *not* a biblical position, we cling tenaciously to it over the years, because – I think, because – the kind of people who have come into the Church of God were attracted to the church in the beginning because they didn't want to *do* much of anything, except pay, pray and obey. So it appealed to them to be in that kind of church. And I think, too, that because the big three are a traditional behavior now, the role has entrenched itself so that only *major* organizational upheaval can change it – or, on a personal level, maybe major internal repentance and realignment with God's will in the scriptures.

So I thought it might make *me* feel better – when facing such a daunting task – before talking directly about evangelism in the church – if I went through some scriptures to show what our role in the church ought to be according to the Bible. Then, in subsequent presentations on the topic, we'll discuss how to fulfill the true biblical role of a Christian in the church – that role that we vowed to fulfill when we were baptized and vowed to live our life in obedience to the head of the church, Jesus Christ – that role, rather than the closely held traditional role, dictated to us by men.

Okay, let's start with God's plan. What is He doing? Well, in Revelation 12:10, we learn something interesting. It says:

Rev. 12:10 – *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now have come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brethren – who accuses them before our God day and night – has been hurled down.*

So one of the things I learn from this scripture is, that God has a kingdom. Now that kingdom morphs periodically, doesn't it? At one time, it was just God and the angels. Then it included all the angels and God and the family of man was added at the Garden. Then later it was reduced to the descendants of Abraham. Then it was expanded again to include everybody – the church. And eventually, it's going to morph into something called the New Jerusalem. So it changes from time to time. It's a growing kingdom.

Let's learn something else. In Hebrews 2 – this is a very interesting scripture – it says:

Heb. 2:5 – *It is not to angels that He has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking, but there is a place where someone has testified, “What is man, that you are mindful of him – the son of man, that you care for him?” So what are we? You made him a little lower than the angels, and you crowned him honor and glory, and put everything under his feet. And putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet, at present, we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor, because He suffered death, so that, by the grace of God, He might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brethren.*

God has a kingdom and He is populating it with family members – many sons to glory. Those who are made holy are of the same family. And He's not ashamed to call us His brethren. So, there's a kingdom and it's going to be populated with family members. Hebrews 12, verse 23. Let's look at that scripture.

Heb. 12:23 – *To the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.*

So, He is the firstborn and He has a church. And that church – that group of people – have their names written in heaven. So he's populating it – populating His kingdom – with family members. And one of things He's using to do that is the church – the church, the body of Jesus Christ. With me so far? I mean, we could quote dozens of other scriptures for each of these points.

Galatians 4:26. The church has different names. One of the names for the church is Jerusalem Above.

Gal. 4:26 – *But the Jerusalem that is above is free and she is our mother. So, we grow in the church. That's where the growing takes place.*

Okay, let's think about what we've learned so far. We've learned that God has a kingdom and a plan to produce a family. The church in the plan is compared to a mother. Now let's look more at what that church is like. Let's look at the biblical model of the church.

The first thing that we can learn about it is, that the church is a *living* thing. In the Bible, it's called a tree in some places. It's called a body with members. It's even called yeast. Different kinds of plants – besides trees – grapevines, grain, plants, etc. And it's called a temple. But wait, a temple is not a living thing. Right? Well, this one *is*. In Ephesians 2, listen to what it says:

Eph. 2:19 - *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation – foundation is part of the temple, right? – the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone: in Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. In Him, you, too, are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.*

So this temple is made up of *living* things. It's made up of apostles. And it's made up of Jesus Christ. And it's made up of the saints. You know, we're called *lively stones*, or living stones – part of that temple. And since it's built on a perfectly strong foundation, it can rise endlessly, because there is no limit to the strength of the foundation. So it's not like any building you've ever seen – or I've ever seen.

What else can we learn about this church? It's composed of individual parts, depending on what analogy the Bible uses. If it's talking about the body, then the parts are the head, the arms, the legs, the feet, the eyes, etc. If it's talking about a living temple, then the parts are the apostles, the foundation, Jesus Christ, chief cornerstone, and us as the living stones that are part of the building that go up. If it's talking about plants, then the roots, the stalks, the branches, the head with the grain or the fruit, the kernel, the seed. So individual Christians are the body parts that have grown, or they're the seed or the fruit of the tree. So we all fit in this church as individuals, but we're all part of the same body.

Let's look at something else it tells us. Let's go to Mark 4:26. He said:

Mk. 4:26 – *This is what the kingdom of God is like. I mean, I don't know how many times I read that and just failed to learn what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself, the soil produces grain. Now notice what it says next. How does it grow? First the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. So just like babies grow in stages, and just like plants grow in stages, I think the church grows in stages, too – so do we, who are members of the church. There are growth stages that we go through.*

Okay, what have we learned so far? Well, we've seen out of the Bible that the way God is populating His kingdom is by the church. And the church is described as a living thing with living individual parts. And Christians are the fruit of the church – or the body members, the seeds, or the living stones. Okay, so that's something that is very important to know about the church. The church is a living thing. It's *organic*, not mechanical. It's not an organizational structure. It's more like.... I mean, what is yeast? What does that look like? Maybe more like an amoeba. We saw that movie by Ben Stein, *Expelled*, and

they had a picture of the inside of a cell – how they talked about *simple cells* – and how complex a cell is. Even the simplest cell is incredibly complex.

So let's take another closer look at the biblical *purpose* for the church. Remember the scripture about bringing many sons unto glory that we just read. That's part of the purpose. And where is that to happen? Well, we grow into a holy temple where God will one day live. We read that. So it's to produce members for God's family. Did you get that? Our purpose is to reproduce and create more parts for the body, more fruit for the tree, more kernels from the grain. That's the job of the church – to produce members of God's family, isn't it? So, wouldn't that be our work?

Let's go to Matthew 28, verse 16.

Mt. 28:16 – *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go, and when they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted. I can't imagine that.... And then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I am surely with you always to the very end of the age.*

Okay, so there it is. Once called to become a part of the body of Christ, our job is to help do the work of the church. What was the work of the church? Make disciples – to populate the kingdom of God.

Now, I know that that frightens us. We don't like it when people come to our door and try to cram the Bible down our throats – or their version of it. We see the cartoons about the guy standing on the soapbox down in Manhattan saying, "Repent, the world ends tomorrow" – the placards. We don't like it when people browbeat us or talk churchy talk and try to convert us. So it's really easy to say, "This is so boring. I don't want to hear about this anymore. It's not true. I'm called to pray and obey and somebody else is supposed to do the evangelizing, or whatever." But, if you'll bear with me for a minute, you're going to see that it is easy – a lot easier than you might think. But is that all? What is the other issue here?

Well, some churches say that the church's purpose is to nurture disciples. And I would go right back to ask you, "Why? What's the purpose of that? Is it so that they can be in the kingdom of God?" I've observed – since we began LifeResource Ministry – that people from our group really don't want to hear about their purpose and the work they are to do for God. They're not really interested in *church* growth. They're interested more in *personal* growth. The focus is more on what can I get from God? What new truth can I learn? What can I hear that is going to encourage me or edify *me*? What blessings can I get? How can I grow spiritually? That position is a spiritually infantile position, because we don't realize that the only way to grow spiritually is to *do* what we've been told to do to fulfill our destiny in Christ and become viable Christians, doing the work that God has given us to do. Spirituality is the by-product of doing those things. Doing the work is what produces the growth.

I'm reminded of a parable that I believe we've not fully understood. It's in Luke 12:16. He told them this parable.

Lk. 12:16 – *There was a rich man whose ground produced a good crop, and he thought to himself, "What should I do with all this?" He said, "I've got it! I will tear down my barns build bigger ones and I will store all my grains and my goods in these big barns. And then I'll sit back and say, 'Boy, you've got lots of good stuff here. Let's take it easy. Let's eat, drink and be merry.'"* Or let's pray, pay and obey. Let's just sit back. *But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared yourself?"* What is going to happen to your spiritual knowledge and your blessings and your spiritual growth.

V-21 – *This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself, but is not rich toward God. And then Jesus said to His disciples, "I tell you, do not worry about your life – what you will eat – about your body – what you will wear, because life is more than food and the body is more than clothing. Think about the ravens. They don't sow or reap. They have no storehouse or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds. Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"*

So, down to verse 32 then:

V-32 – *Don't be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out and treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

I should have started in verse 31:

V-31 – *But seek His kingdom and all this other stuff will be added to you, as well.*

I think that this is really a metaphor about chasing after spiritual growth for our own benefit. What good is spiritual growth if it's not used? Who is going to use your spiritual riches? Real nourishment comes from doing the work that God gives us to do.

How do I know that's true? Is there any scripture that actually says that? Well, let's go to John 4, and verse 31.

Jn. 4:31 – *His disciples urged Him, "Rabbi, eat something." But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you don't know anything about." How ironic for our discussion. Then His disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought Him food?" And He said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest?' I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest." There is lots of work to do out there. "Even now the reaper draws his wages and even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying, 'One sows and another*

reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you haven't worked for. Others have done the hard work and you have reaped the benefits of their labor. And that's all He's asking us to do. He's telling us that all we have to do is the cleanup. That should encourage us – that it is easier than we have thought. Jesus just said it!

So what else is there then? Well, there is one aspect that we need to look at here. Part of doing the church's work – which is what? What is the church's work again? Making disciples, yes – is to equip the saints so they can *do* that work. But being equipped isn't necessarily growing. Doing the work is what causes the growth. *My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.* Let's go to Ephesians 4, verse 11, and look at this.

Eph. 4:11 – *It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers....* For what purpose? So that people could consume spiritual growth upon themselves and become spiritual giants? No. *...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.* See, it's not about *us*. It's about *us contributing*. And why is it to be built up? What is the purpose again? To make disciples. In a healthy church, everything goes back to that. It all goes back to the focus – the tight focus – on the church's mission. That might not be your way of thinking about it, but, in the Bible, it's crystal clear. Verse 13...*to prepare a people for works of service so the body of Christ may be built up.* And notice what happens as a result of that:

V-13 – *Until we all reach unity in the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants. Very strong connection between doing the work and spiritual maturity. ...no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching, and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.* Who cares whether you keep the Passover on the night of the fourteenth or the daylight portion of it? I mean, we can fight and argue about that and be blown about by all kinds of arguing, but is that really what's important? No. No, it's not. *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the head – that is, Christ.* You know, all we have to do to find out the answers to those questions is wait. So why fuss about it? *From Him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.*

Let me ask you a question. Who in your congregation has the gift of evangelism? We don't even think about that, do we? We don't think about that. You'd think that a pastor, especially – who is responsible to equip the saints so that a church can grow – would know the answer to that question, wouldn't you? You'd think we'd be all over that. But no. We think it's his job to give sermons, and feed us spiritually and pamper us so that we don't have to do anything ourselves. We don't realize that nobody can make us grow. We all determine our own growth by how willing we are to do the church's work. God's waiting to help us, but He needs us to take that first step.

So how exactly does the church grow? What's that easy thing that we've been talking about? Mark 4:26. He said:

Mk. 4:26 – *This is what the kingdom of God is like. We've read this already. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. Well, scattering seed on the ground is easy. And watering and planting is easy. But causing the seed to sprout – to germinate – that's totally out of our control, isn't it? We can't do that. We call that a miracle. So, we don't know how that happens. So to us, in verse 28, it says:*

V-28 – *...all by itself the soil produces grain. So this process happens all by itself. ...the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it because the harvest is come.*

Let's break this down. What is this parable about? It's about church growth. This is what the kingdom of God is like. So church growth happens outside of our understanding and outside of our control. It's a miracle that God does in the minds of those He is calling. All we have to do is what we can – water and plant. We don't have to make the seed germinate. We can't do that. We can't turn somebody's mind on or off. But God does that. We don't have to. He does what we can't.

Let's notice something else in this analogy. For a plant to produce fruit, it has to be healthy. It *has* to be healthy. It needs soil to be healthy. It needs water to be healthy. If it's a tree, it needs pruning – you know, or a vine, it needs pruning. So our job is about the health of the plant. We can do that easy stuff. We can do the planting and the watering and the nurturing. If we extend that to real life, that means our job is to do all we can to be a healthy congregation and a spiritually healthy Christian – not so that we can be proud of ourselves for being spiritually healthy, but so that the work can be done.

Now what is the fruit of a healthy, let's say, apple tree? Well, you say, "Apples." But actually it's not. It's more apple trees. What are those apples for? They carry seeds around. Right? What is the fruit of a healthy grape vine? Grapes all have seeds in them, too, don't they? Not more grapes; more grape vines. What's the fruit of a healthy congregation? More congregations. Right? What's the fruit of a healthy Christian? More Christians.

So, let's think some more about how that happens – how that growth takes place. Since the church is an organism – we learned that, right? it's a living thing, so that means it's an organism – it's going to grow organically, rather than mechanically.

One of the biggest blessings of my life is to understand what an amazing thing that the church is. The good news about Jesus Christ continues to this very day to be spread through the whole earth. And, if we wanted to, none of us – not all of us together – could even stop it. It's so powerful! It's like plant growth that God has set in motion. It kind of reminds me of that – what do they call it? Cheap grass? Came from the steps of Russia and somebody brought it over here. I don't know how it got here. Now it's taken over the West. Nobody can stop it. It just spreads. It's an organism.

I learned this when I went to Missouri a few years ago to do some taping for the Church of God 7th Day. The man running the program had never heard of the church I came from – never heard of it. He drew a blank when I mentioned the name of it. And I didn't know much about what he believed either. For three days we sat around and we couldn't find anything to disagree about doctrinally. We believed exactly the same things! How did that happen? It happened all by itself. We didn't plant it. It wasn't structured. It wasn't mechanical. It was organic growth.

Let's look at another biblical example of how this works. In Acts 8, it says:

Acts 8:1 – *And Saul was there, giving approval to Stephen's death. And on that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all, except the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him, but Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.* Now here's the kicker.

V-4 – *Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria – who lived there? Gentiles – and proclaimed Christ there. And when the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.* Philip wasn't a minister and he was preaching to Gentiles, which was something they hadn't done before.

So, actually, Saul's effort to destroy the church caused it to grow – spread it. He thought he was stamping it out. He was just spreading it around. Persecution helps the church to grow. It cannot be killed.

I mentioned the Sabbatarian house church that was introduced into China in the fifties. Nobody knows how many there are, because all these little house churches have just divided over and over again. There is no structure. It's organic. They've sprung up. A lot of them don't even know about each other, because they're organically organized. In the eighties they began to export their faith from China to the U.S. mainland. They are under the radar, persecuted in China, and having to do this in a very unofficial and quiet way, and now they are starting to send it over here.

Did you notice after the fall of the Soviet Union how the Orthodox Church in Soviet Union sprang back into the public eye – after seventy years of persecution? How did that happen? Is it possible that Sunday keepers know more about that than we do? Surely we can't admit to that, can we? An Orthodox monk told me that they believe the church is contained in each member by the Holy Spirit, and that to kill the church, you'd have to kill every last member. Because if there was one left, he'd be talking to people. So the Holy Spirit is like the DNA of the church, he explained to me. The entire church is contained in each person. Now, is that an arrogant thing to think? Or would it be blasphemy to think anything else? Because that's the Holy Spirit there, right? The mind of Christ. Who's He? He's the head of the church. So He ought to know all about it, right?

So what does that mean for us today? What's our job? We said planting and watering, but what does that look like in 2009 in Albuquerque, New Mexico? Well, I don't consider

myself to have the gift of evangelism, but I believe that every Christian has the Holy Spirit and can testify to what Christ has done in their lives. And we can share the gospel. So, I'll give you an example.

I've been working with a fifteen-year-old girl recently, who's suffered a lot of abuse. She also was kind of forced into an abortion when she was fifteen. She recently told me that she couldn't get past the abortion, because she doesn't think she should be forgiven for murdering her own child. Now she earlier told me that her family wasn't religious. I was struggling with how am I going to talk about forgiveness to a child that doesn't even believe in it? So that's where I was, right? I've got a dilemma. So one day her other therapist called me up and told me that this girl was having hallucinations and had referred her to a psychiatrist for evaluation and medication. I thought, "Well, that's really weird. She doesn't seem that type to me." So when she came into see me, she mentioned about what the other therapist had done. So I asked her about the hallucinations. She said, "Well, I wasn't going to tell you, but I guess I will." See, the reason she's willing to do that is because of all the listening and the caring and the connecting that I've tried to do. She said, "I don't think it's a hallucination. I believe in evil spirits and I believe I have one in my bedroom. Do you believe me?" See, that was the issue. She didn't want me to think she was crazy. She wanted me to be on her side. So I said, "Well, I'm not yet sure you have one in your bedroom, so why don't you tell me more about that." I said, "I do believe in those things, though." So that really perked her up. She knew that there was a possibility I might be on her side in this thing. So she told me that her cat senses it, and that her brother has heard it, too. Okay, so do cats have hallucinations at the same time we do? No. So that kind of rules out a hallucination to me. So I said, "Okay, I agree with you." She was so relieved. She just wanted to know what to do. I said, "What do you think about this?" And she said, "Well, I know there's a place in the Bible where it says you could be in big trouble if you mess with them." And I said, "Like where it says, 'Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?'" She said, "Exactly!" She'd read that. She just couldn't remember it. And I said, "Well, okay. So what that means is, that you don't want to try to cast it out, because you don't have the power to do that – not unless you want to be chased down the street naked." She said, "I don't want that." I tease her a lot. So, I said, "What you want to do is to ask *God* to make it go away – and to keep asking until He does it. Sleep somewhere else until it leaves, so you don't feel that anymore. It's not your problem now. You can give it to Him." And I asked her if she had ever read about the Gadarene demoniac. She said, "No." So I gave her the scripture so that she could read it. And that would, I think, make her realize that God does do that. So, on the way out the door, this touch-me-not girl gave me a hug and thanked me for believing in her.

So I think a seed might have been planted there. I don't know for sure, but I think the seed is a trusting relationship about spiritual things. That's what I think the seed is. And I imagine I'll get to water that as time goes by. But, you know, I don't have to worry about anymore than that. I don't need to go out and meet new people. I don't need to pressure people. I don't need to be obnoxious about my religion. I only have to have a willingness to be straight with people and share what I know when they *need* it. That's why we call it *need*-based evangelism. If I started talking to her about demons and she didn't need that

help, it wouldn't have been helpful. So we need to be willing to do that with the people that we know, who have not yet converted to Christ.

How many people do you know? How many people do you know that are not church-going people? What have we got? I'm looking at five people here. And if I was sitting there, there would be six of us. There's probably a hundred people that we know – maybe more – that don't go to church, don't believe in God, aren't educated about those things. Do we have a field? Is the field white with harvest? It sure is. Do we have to worry about whether they actually wind up coming to church? No, we don't. Plant and water – that's all we have to do. He makes them grow – not us.

Okay, so that's how it would look in every Christian's life, but how is it going to look in the congregation? What else can the congregation do to *foster* that kind of activity? Well, that's what we're going to look at next time. We're going to check that out next time.

So, by way of closing, I want to mention that need-based evangelism is only *one* of eight aspects of the healthy congregation. So, even if a congregation were really good at evangelism, if they were totally weak in all of the other seven, it still wouldn't grow. So the Natural Church Development program isn't about evangelism. It's about church growth. It's about church health. It's about becoming spiritually healthy – not for ourselves, but – so that God can use us to do His work, which is to populate the kingdom of God. Only healthy congregations produce more congregations. And only healthy Christians produce more Christians. And that's one reason I really like the Natural Church Development program. It's not about artificial numbers growth. It's about spiritual health. And when that's in place, then the growth happens all by itself.