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Organic Outreach for Ordinary People

Sharing Good News Naturally

(Zondervan, Grand Rapids: 2009)

by Kevin G. Harney

A Book Review by Jack De Vries

My eldest daughter started me thinking about doing things organically. Long before grocery stores starting stocking heaps of organic food – eggs, meat, veggies – our daughter Jen cautioned us about the food we eat. “Is it all good for you dad?” she would ask. “What do you think all those pesticides, herbicides, and food additives are doing to your body?” So I started to read labels when I shopped for food, and more and more I chose to buy organic. It just made a lot of sense.

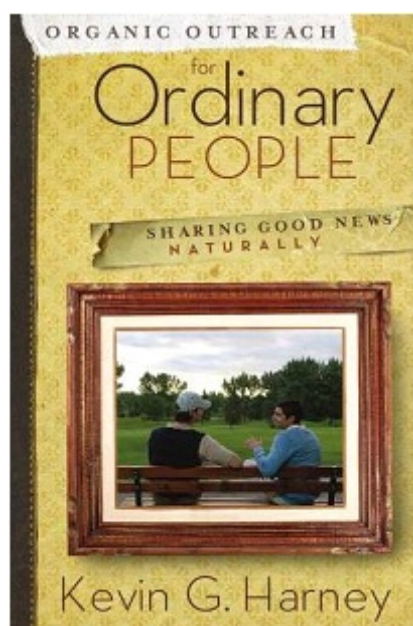
Kevin Harney’s book, *Organic Outreach*, also makes a lot of sense. Many people find it very difficult to share the good news of Jesus with others. They think that they have to be a Billy Graham, if not the apostle Paul, before they can engage in evangelism. Being a witness to the good news of Christ is best to be left to the clergy, or at least, to those who have the gift of being an evangelist (Ephesians 4:11). But Harney breaks through all the fears and misconceptions people have about sharing the good news of Jesus. As he writes: “The Spirit of God calls each of us to enter into the challenging and rewarding ministry of evangelism.... You really can reach out and

share the good news about Jesus naturally. Whether you’ve been talking about your favorite shampoo, that restaurant you love, or your favorite sports team, you’ve been practicing already. Now it’s time to learn how

to share your faith in a natural way. It’s time to begin organic outreach.” (15) Not only is Harney’s book an easy read, once you’ve finished it you will see that organic outreach makes a lot of sense. And you will be encouraged, as I was, to actually do it – yes, share the good news of Jesus naturally.

If you are looking for a book that gives you an evangelism program to follow or a particular system to use to share the good news, then *Organic Outreach* is not for you. This is no “Four

Spiritual Laws” or Kennedy’s *Evangelism Explosion* method of reaching out to the lost. Rather, as Harney admits, this book “is a collection of simple and biblical practices that Christians everywhere can incorporate into their lives.” (18) This is what I like about this book. It is packed full of personal stories, Biblical references, and practical ideas to share the gospel. It is divided into three sections: (1) Preparing the Soil; (2) Planting and Watering; and (3) Bearing Kingdom Fruit. These ideas expose the Biblical images and principles found throughout God’s Word. Reaching the lost is about sowing the seed of God’s Word (cf. Matthew 13: *The Parable of the Sower*). But as any farmer knows, if you are to plant seed, you must first prepare the soil. Then you must plant and water. Only then comes the harvest.



I like where Harney begins discussing effective outreach. It starts with love. People need to have a love for God and a love for people. This is what matters most to God as Jesus taught in the summary of the law found in Matthew 22:37-40. "Love must be our motivating factor.... Before anything else, organic outreach must be love-driven." (24) In this chapter on "The Law of Love", as in all the other chapters, the reader will find a number of, what Harney calls, "organic activities." These are practical suggestions of things we can do, where people will say, "I can do that!" There are also questions for personal reflection, group study, and a suggested prayer. I found myself at the end of each chapter reflecting on the ideas, meditating on the questions, and offering the prayer as a way to commit what I had learned to God in humble submission. These chapter reflections make this book a very practical and useful book for personal and group study.

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." - Paul (1 Corinthians 3:6)

In this first section of the book, "Preparing the Soil," besides the law of love, Harney highlights the importance of becoming grace bearers, embracing the Bible and truth, keeping the passion of outreach alive, and realizing that everyone of us as believers are called to be "salt and light." I especially appreciated Chapter 4: "The One-Degree Rule." In my work with churches and pastors I often refer to the need to "raise the bar." Using the image of a high jumper (my height in primary school helped me win a few ribbons in high jump competitions) I encourage believers to keep raising the bar – as Shirley Bassey used sing, "to love God more dearly, to follow him more nearly, day by day by day." Harney makes a similar point by using the image of temperature. If we as Christ-followers would raise our evangelistic temperature by just "one-degree" our effectiveness in outreach

would increase dramatically. Just one-degree; a good rule to follow, something everyone of us could do. Organic outreach!



In the second section, "Planting and Watering", you will find the typical outreach practices encouraged such as *praying for people and living incarnationally*, that is, allow people to *see* Christ in us. But what I found especially challenging in this section is the suggestion of *praying with people* who are not yet part of God's family. Since I read this book during my recent annual leave, I sought specific ways to put this idea into practice. Several times I had opportunity to do this. Once on a motorcycle trip I met a man and woman in a coffee shop. They were interested in my 2001 Indian; I saw this as an opportunity to share my faith organically. It was soon apparent that this couple had little knowledge about God and had gone through many broken relationships. Now living together as an unmarried couple, they were uncertain where life was heading. We talked about this for some time and then I offered to pray *with* them. After I prayed, they thanked me and waved as I headed for the open road. The other times were on a parking lot of a Lowes Hardware store and with a man on the phone who the doctors have given only a few weeks to live. Each time I prayed with these unbelievers God gave me the courage to take the risk. And I saw myself putting into practice the ideas of planting and watering. As I left these people I also prayed that God would give the growth (2 Corinthians 3:6). I also realised that this is something everyone of us could do - naturally.

The last section of the book, “Bearing Kingdom Fruit”, the reader will find helpful suggestions in how to engage in spiritual conversations. Some Christians just don’t know how to, as Peter writes, “give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (1 Peter 3:15) Rather than offer some “canned” gospel presentations, Harney suggests a number of ways to tell your story and share the good news with unbelievers. Since every believer is unique, if outreach is to be organic and natural, then the way we share our faith will also be unique. I resonated with Harney’s insistence that we don’t get any credit when someone comes to faith in Jesus: “We have our work to do – clearly and faithfully communicating the message of the gospel. But God and God alone can transform hearts.” (171) Amen and amen!

This is one book that ought to be in every pastor and church’s library. Christ commissions all Christ-followers to make disciples of unbelievers (Matthew 28) and as churches and church leaders we ought to prepare God’s people for action (Ephesians 4:11-13). *Organic Outreach* is a practical and biblical tool to help prepare ordinary Christians to reach out and share the good news of Jesus Christ. This book is also a great resource for small groups eager to learn ways to be more effective in reaching lost people for Christ. More resources can also be found on organic outreach at www.organicoutreach.org.



About the author:

Kevin Harney serves as the Lead Pastor at Shoreline Church and is responsible for Preaching, Visionary Leadership, and maintaining an Outreach Focus in the life of the church. Kevin is a native Californian who grew up in Orange County. Kevin and his wife

Sherry love to serve the local church as well as support the church around the U.S. and the world through

writing and speaking. They have published numerous books, small group guides, and curriculum resources. They are coauthors of *Church You Can Love and Loving the Church You've Found*, *the Old Testament Challenge*, and over fifty small group Bible study guides. Kevin and his wife Sherry were the guest speakers at the recent CRCA 2011 Recharge Ministry Conference held in June at the Collaroy Conference Centre, Sydney, NSW. Kevin is a graduate of Azusa Pacific University (B.A.), Fuller Theological Seminary (Master of Divinity), and Western Theological Seminary (Doctor of Ministry).

HERE ARE ELEVEN OUTREACH TRUTHS INVESTIGATED IN THE ORGANIC OUTREACH SERIES OF BOOKS, SEE IF ANY OF THESE SURPRISE YOU:

1. We don't have to spend all of our time trying to coax people to come to church...we can bring the church to them.
2. You are already exactly the right person to do outreach. You do not have to change who you are to share God's love.
3. People without faith, even atheists, are very open to prayer.
4. The most valuable outreach asset you have doesn't cost a dime: It's the people in your church.
5. There is not one way to share your faith, but many ... and one of them will feel natural for you.
6. Worry less about quality of the seed you throw, and focus more on the quantity of seed you throw. (Parable of the Seed-Sower: Luke 8; 1 Corinthians 5 - 6)
7. Sharing your faith can be as natural as talking about a great new restaurant or hair care product. As a matter of fact, it should be.
8. Prayer is the greatest outreach tool we have.
9. Doctrine matters to non-believers... sometimes more than it matters to Christians.
10. Christians are not too aggressive with sharing our faith... we are too reserved.
11. Christians don't have one testimony, but many stories to tell. A testimony is a simple story of God's power and presence in our lives and the world.