

Engaging With God, One Another & All

The whole Bible is a book about God engaging with people & the world... We see this in the interaction between God & Adam right at the beginning in Genesis chapter two & it's a theme that continues throughout Genesis & across the pages of Scripture – Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph... God engaging with people & people engaging with him! In a very real sense we wouldn't have the Scriptures if God had never engaged with people. If it wasn't for God's engagement with people what would be left in our Bible's? We see people engaging with personally & corporately & we get to listen in to people's raw engagement with God in the Psalms. This idea of engaging with God ranges from powerful life altering encounters with God to everyday participation with him in the world through love, obedience & faith.

Engaging with God – with who he is, with what he says, with what he's doing

As his people we are called to live our whole lives engaged with him & his purposes – every aspect of our lives is included in this. Last month in midweek we watched a message based on Isaiah 6 entitled stunned, seared & sent... Isaiah's powerful encounter affected his whole outlook on everything. It affected him not only in the moment of encounter but in his whole perspective, priority & practice after. This is the kind of engagement with God that we need... Not engagement that quickly wears off but engagement with God which radically redirects & affects every area of our lives - every conversation we have, every friendship we're in & everything we're involved in – with believers & unbelievers.

In the Bible we see people engaging with God in different ways. We've already thought of Isaiah's powerful encounter. However we could also think of Enoch who simply walked with God (Gen 5:21-24; Heb 11:5-6). That is all we really know about him. He walked with God for hundreds of years. Walking with God or walking in the Spirit, or as Colossians 2:6 puts it **“Therefore as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him...”** – it's an analogy used often in the Bible. It speaks of everyday engagement with God. It speaks of walking in step with his character, purpose & calling on our lives so that our everyday lives are increasingly directed by him & therefore increasingly reflect him more & more. Deut 10:12-13 says; **“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good.”** FOR YOUR GOOD – note that this is written to his people not one person! We have the Holy Spirit to empower us to do so! That is how committed God is to the good of his people!

Micah 6:8 tells us to walk humbly with our God. Jesus says in John 8:12 **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”** (Contrast walking in darkness with walking in the light of life in everyday terms...) Romans 6:4 tells us the purpose of our Christian lives is that we **“might walk in newness of life”** (read in context). Every step a fresh moment with

God, every step a step of progress with God – the easy steps & the hard ones. Walking – living everyday – in newness of life! This is what everyday engagement with God is! Romans 8:4 says we are those; **“who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”** Galatians 5:16 tells if we walk by the Spirit we will not gratify the desires of the flesh. This is what everyday engagement with God looks like.

As we walk with God we realise engaging with God includes times of encounter like Isaiah but it also includes times of wrestling. Wrestling with his Word - theology, wrestling with issues of justice & righteousness in the world – social action, wrestling with indwelling sin in our lives - sanctification, wrestling with powers & principalities – spiritual warfare! I believe God wants us to be a church that helps people wrestle well in all these ways.

We see Abraham wrestling with God in Genesis 18. He struggled with what God was about to do against Sodom & Gomorrah. God didn't shut him down but allowed space for him to process & wrestle it through. I love how in verse 23 it says; **“Then Abraham drew near and said...”** Abraham felt he could draw near & struggle through what God had just revealed. Can we be a church that reflects this – a church in which people feel they can draw to us & our God & struggle through some of the struggles & questions regarding God & faith. Allowing space for people to wrestle through difficult doctrines like God's judgement which clashes with the thinking of the world we all live in & which if we're honest sometimes clashes with us on an emotional level. This is part of engaging with God & it's one of the ways we grow in understanding who he is & what he's about.

I also think of Jacob wrestling with God & how God changed him through this encounter & I compare it to us wrestling with our weaknesses & sins & overcoming them in our lives. When we wrestle with God we not only learn about him we learn about ourselves. When we face the reality of who we are in light of the reality of who God is, that is when true change begins! Then there is the wrestling with powers & principalities with the word of God & prayer. In this case we partner with God in spiritual warfare. Different aspects of engaging with God: Walking, wrestling, partnering... these are things we do personally & corporately.... The idea of partnering leads me to what I want to focus on now.

Engaging with God also means engaging with one another & others

We cannot be fully engaged with God without being engaged with his church & his mission. Engagement with God overflows & overlaps with engagement with others. This is why worship, relationships, ministry & mission need to be overlapping interconnected realities in our lives... Christianity is not Jesus & me it is Jesus & us living for the glory of God & the eternal wellbeing of all. As we engage with God we quickly see that our engagement with God effects how we engage with one another & others. For part of our engaging with God is engaging in relationship, ministry & mission with others. I think these three areas need blended together more – friendship, ministry & mission – if they are to be most effective. Just like they were

blended together with Jesus & the twelve... Engaging with God means engaging with others – other Christians, other churches & other people who are not yet believers!

Not only does it mean we engage with others but our engagement with God also effects *how* we engage with others – how we engage with our family, our husband or wife, our friends, our enemies, our employer/employees & how we engage with one another. Our engagement with others reflects our engagement with God (or lack of). Our engagement with God is something that affects every aspect of our lives & every relationship we have. Our relationship with God effects everything thing we do & how we see every single person we know & encounter – believers & unbelievers, friends & enemies. We don't engage with God in isolation from other aspects of everyday life we engage with God in every aspect of everyday life. Our whole lives are meant to be spent engaged with God – for he is our life! As one tweet put it; *“There is nothing we do, night or day, in worship, work or play that cannot be done christianly.”*

Let's think about this regarding prayer. One of the things the early Celtic Christian's did was instead of writing prayers for morning devotions only, they wrote prayers to pray while doing everyday life. So as well as having prayers for personal devotions & corporate worship they also had prayers for planting seeds, herding cows; churning butter... you name it they had a prayer for. Their faith, their engagement with God, was prayer without ceasing – they aimed at uninterrupted engagement with God. They involved God in everything they did, practicing the presence of God! Engaging with God wasn't a slot in their day or week he was their day, their week – their whole life!

This doesn't mean we don't need quality time alone with God, we do! It simply means that our engagement with him doesn't get locked in the prayer closet or the worship service. It extends to every area of our lives, to every person we engage with, to everything we do, so that we walk through every moment of everyday with him. **“In all your ways acknowledge him, & he shall direct your steps.”** It is recognising that every moment can be a God moment. By acknowledging God (which includes the idea of submitting to his will in the Hebrew – see NIV) we are allowing him to direct the details of our day – our conversations, our work, our play, our worship, our relationships, our dealings – they are all done with our eyes on him, with our hearts towards him.

G. K. Chesterton highlights this regarding giving thanks to God. He writes; *“You say grace before meals. All right! But I say grace before the play and the opera, and grace before the concert and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing; and grace before I dip the pen in the ink.”* It is living with an awareness of his presence & Lordship, with the openness to the moving of his Spirit in us & around us in everyday life. It is when we live like this that we fulfil our role as the salt of the earth. For of course all this can only effect how we interact with others & live all of life. We are not only living prayerful & thankful lives before God we are also living

with an awareness that to be engaged with God is also to live everyday with a sense of his love, purpose, ministry & mission towards the world around us.

Jesus said in Matt 13:33; **“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took & hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”** This is why God has us in the world. This is why God has you in your job, family, community, hobby, friendship group... Because the leaven of the kingdom is within you that means the kingdom is also present in the dough of wherever you are. Therefore the big expectation Jesus gives through this little one verse parable is that the leaven will work right through the dough & transform everything around it. At first we might seem hidden in the dough of what’s around us but within we carry the powerful, unstoppable, transformative power of God’s spreading kingdom.

Our engagement with God should cause us to view everyone & everything through the expectation of the kingdom of heaven & that in turn effects how we engage with everyone & everything around us. We engage with others through the expectation of redemption, forgiveness & newness of life! Through the positive expectation of what God is up to in the world today & in our world today. Through the expectation that his kingdom is always breaking into hearts just like it did ours. We do not live in fear of the kingdom of darkness, but in expectation of the unstoppable kingdom of light. Alan Scott says; *“Much of modern discipleship has focussed upon making believers strong enough to survive culture rather than bold enough to transform culture.”* We are to carry into every area of our lives – this week & every week the expectancy, purpose & perspective of the Spirit of God. Expect things to go the way they did in the book of Acts because the same Spirit is in us & therefore we are walking into every day with an expectant God ***“who is able to do immeasurable more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church & in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever & ever! Amen”*** (Eph 3:20-21).

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you your church, workplace, school, family, friends, enemies & community through the eyes of his expectancy, of his greater purpose - & then live in light of the expectancy of the kingdom of heaven, in the expectancy of the Father’s heart for all. Let’s trade our limited expectation for his expectant heart... Viewing everyone - Christian brothers & sister, friends & family, our community, our school or workplace through the eyes of the expectant, redemptive, life-giving eyes of the empowering Holy Spirit! Not through the darkened lenses of condemnation, fear, envy, lust or un-forgiveness but through the bright & colourful lens of God’s amazing grace.

I think Acts 3 three gives us a picture of the expectancy of the Spirit taking hold of believers...