

Engage

INFLUENCING YOUR WORLD
~ LIKE JESUS ~

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 REGULAR BAPTIST
Press

Dedication

To the amazing women I have met through First Steps Bible studies, Life Designs, pregnancy resource centers, neighborhood Christmas gatherings, and more. You have shown me hunger for God's truth, made me defend my faith, challenged me in practical areas of life, and often given me a glimpse of the transforming power of God to change lives. I am blessed to call you friends.

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Engage: Influencing Your World like Jesus

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An Invitation to Engage

When I was a young pastor's wife, my desire to share the gospel seemed thwarted by the reality that almost everyone in my world was a Christian. It seemed difficult to build relationships with those who didn't share my ethical, moral, or spiritual views. But I realized by studying the Gospels that this was a solvable problem. Studying Jesus' life, I noticed His friend list included many colorful characters who were nothing like Him. The key seemed to be found in Luke 19:10. Jesus didn't just come to "save" the lost; He also came to seek them.

What a difference that concept made in my life as God challenged me to find ways to engage my world. Through neighborhood Bible studies, pregnancy resource centers, Christmas gatherings, Life Design (mini workshop) breakfasts, office Bible studies, and other activities (even indoor tennis), my life has been enriched by so many women outside the normal sphere of my small Christian circle. This study is not a how-to guide on forming relationships, but it is a challenge for you to learn from Jesus how to engage your world. We are each called to reach the world for Christ and make disciples, but . . . *we will never have impact without contact.*

This study is designed to do three things:

- help you evaluate your personal relationship with Jesus;
- help you observe how Jesus engaged His world; and
- motivate you to purposefully engage a wider variety of people to influence them for Christ.

An Introduction to Engage

*“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save
that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).*

WHILE STUDYING THE GOSPELS, I’ve noticed that Jesus beautifully illustrated how to establish and maintain healthy relationships. He spent hours each day interacting with a variety of people that He met in towns and villages. He noticed them, talked with them, and ate with them. He also maintained diversity in His friendships by caring as much for the social outcasts as He did for the Jewish elite. Those suffering physically boldly sought Him, yet He sought those who were ashamed to look Him in the eye and offered them hope and forgiveness. He ministered consistently to people around Him yet always took time to renew His strength through His Heavenly Father. Although Jesus left many needs unmet at His death, He was confident that He had finished the work God had given Him to do. Perhaps a closer look at Christ’s life will help to put our relationships into perspective and free us to minister more effectively to the needy world around us.

A Connected Generation with Few Real Relationships

Ours could be called “the anonymous generation,” because it’s so easy to live solitary lives in the middle of crowds. Waiting

in lines, sitting at the doctor's office, or even walking down the street could be a social event, but we often prefer to be engaged in our own private world. Phones, tablets, and earphones allow us to listen to music, read email, view social media, watch shows, or chat with friends while the world walks by us unnoticed. Even at family or church gatherings, it's not uncommon to see half the heads looking down at their screens instead of engaging people beside them. Perhaps we spend more time typing than talking because it is less intimidating than trying to connect with someone we don't know well or someone we might not see again. Regardless of the reason, too often we ignore the people who cross our path rather than really see them and engage them in conversation. And although it might be common, it poses a problem.

When we study Jesus' life on earth, we understand that He lived with a different ethos. His eyes were always open, seeing the people around Him. No one, whether hiding in a tree or concealed in a large crowd, seemed able to sneak by Jesus unnoticed. He walked with hands and heart extended to people of all walks of life, with the specific purpose of giving them hope, help, and healing. His methods were varied, but His ministry was always people centered. While His help was often tangible, His goal was always spiritual. Perhaps we need to rethink our relationships in view of Christ's perfect example.

The First Step in Relationships Is Seeing People

Jesus was a master at building relationships, because He was a master at noticing people. He observed them as they passed in and out of His life. In a boat, in a tree, in a crowd, or at a well, He was always scanning the scene for people who needed Him. Luke 19:10 states that Jesus' mission was to seek and to save those who were lost. Seeking people means we must notice them.

1. Look up the following verses and summarize the interactions Jesus had with various people.

Matthew 4:18–20, Simon and Andrew

Mark 10:17–22, a rich young ruler

Luke 7:2–6, a Roman centurion

Luke 7:11–15, a widow who lost her only son

John 4:4–10, a Samaritan woman

John 5:2, 5–9, a lame man

Consider the variety of this group. Jesus impacted people because He connected with them in a physical way and also in a spiritual way. For most of us, maintaining relationships is an integral part of our lives. But for us Christians, relationships take on greater significance because of the task Jesus has given us.

2. Read Matthew 5:14–16.

(a) What does Jesus say to His followers?

(b) What can a Christian do to shine her light before others?

When Jesus mentioned that a city set on a hill cannot be hidden, He didn't mean believers should live in a fortress, high above the sinful world below. Instead we need to let our lights shine before others so they will see our good works and glorify God. But this cannot happen without relationships.

3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18–20.

(a) What task did God assign believers after Jesus returned to Heaven?

(b) How should that assignment affect our relationships?

When mail carriers are given a letter to deliver, it's a crime for them to keep it for themselves. Their job is to deliver it to a certain person, which means seeking that person and delivering the letter, even if it is inconvenient or difficult. The gospel was entrusted to us in the same way: to share with others. While enjoying the comfort and blessing the gospel brings us, we often

forget that we are tasked with sharing the Good News with the world.

4. Right before Jesus ascended to Heaven (Acts 1:8), what did He say to all His followers?

Most of us find it much easier to sing the old song “People Need the Lord” than to witness for the Lord. We have several reasonable, if not convincing, arguments for why we hesitate to share the gospel. Even though it’s the best thing that ever happened to us, the words stick in our throats, sound forced, and make us feel insecure and unprepared. For some reason witnessing just doesn’t come naturally.

Maybe it is because we forget that we should simply be introducing two people to each other—our friends and our best friend, Jesus. Our friends initially have nothing in common with Jesus except us. But their need for Him should overshadow our timidity. Imagine introducing friends with smallpox to Edward Jenner, who developed the smallpox vaccine. They might find him boring until they discover he holds the key to healing their sickness. Jesus is the universal donor that can heal everyone’s sin, but He does not do so without their permission.

Or maybe it is because we have not taken the time to develop relationships with others around us to earn the privilege of sharing Christ with them. An important point to remember is that *there is no impact without contact!* If we want to make a difference in the world, we must force ourselves to engage in new relationships.

5. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:4–8, then describe how Paul and his missionary team carried out the task of sharing the gospel among the people of Thessalonica.

Paul understood the concept of sharing life with others as Jesus did. When Jesus was on earth, He spent time with many groups of people. He walked with them, talked with them, ate with them, and did life with them—regardless of whether they were sinners, outcasts, rebels, or lepers. When He met the disciples, He called them to travel with Him and go where He went. This might not be feasible in our culture, but certainly inviting people into our homes, picnicking with them in the backyard, or conversing over a cup of coffee would be sharing our lives with them.

6. How does 2 Corinthians 2:14–15 describe our impact for Christ on others?

Fragrance is interesting. It floats through the air, permeating everything around it. I have sometimes enjoyed wafts of lovely scents as I've walked by a fragrance counter or a candle store. On the other hand, I've also been assaulted by a different smell when passing a gymnasium after a basketball game. I am sure you have too. Depending on how we treat everyone, we can leave a positive or negative impression. But remember, no fragrance of our knowledge of God is left behind if we never get close enough for others to smell it.

Learning from Jesus

Studying how Jesus interacted with people in His world should make it easier for us to engage the people in ours. Have you ever stopped to think how many different relationships you experience? I am not referring only to the people who make your Christmas card list, but also the people with whom you rub shoulders daily and don't even know their names. Even if we wave to the mail carrier, greet the store salespeople with a friendly hello, and say hi to our neighbor walking her dog, these people usually remain anonymous to us. As society has become

increasingly impersonal, we have learned to simply ignore those around us if they are not already in our circle of friends or family.

7. List people you see regularly or occasionally that you have not taken time to get to know.

Name:

Relationship:

Role in your life:

Place you encounter the person:

Name:

Relationship:

Role in your life:

Place you encounter the person:

Name:

Relationship:

Role in your life:

Place you encounter the person:

Name:

Relationship:

Role in your life:

Place you encounter the person:

Name:

Relationship:

Role in your life:

Place you encounter the person:

Because our lives are to reflect Christ, each person we meet provides an opportunity to impact someone for His glory. And each interaction is planned by God for a purpose. I wonder how Jesus would have reacted to the people in my world. Would He wave impersonally to the mail carrier or get to know that person's name and needs? Would He glibly ask people, "How are you doing today?" Or would He stop to find out?

Think about It

Consider these two questions this week as you think about your relationships:

1. Should I merely seek to manage relationships with the people already connected with me, or should I be seeking relationships with others with the goal of impacting them with the gospel?
2. How many people do I walk past daily without looking them in the eyes, considering their needs, or reaching out in some way?

Action Steps

1. Pray daily for the nameless people God will put in your path this week, and ask Him to allow you to connect with one new person.
2. Keep a notebook and record the people God puts in your path in various settings this week.

Verse

Memorize and think about Luke 19:10: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”