

We are in the last week of our *Engaging Culture* series. We have been looking at how Scripture calls us to engage this splintered, dark, and hostile world with the love of Christ and with the invitation of the Gospel. If I were to define “biblical engagement”, it would be something like this.

Biblical engagement is:
Using godly resources
To live out and pass on a godly message
To bring others to a godly rescue.

And over the last six Sundays, including this one, we’ve looked at six different New Testament passages, had a speaker for our Men’s and Women’s gathering, thrown around a lot of ideas, themes, stories, and you may think it’s all good but still sit here and say “OK, Kurt. I want to engage. Where do I start?” How do we boil all of what we’ve learned the last six weeks down to its essence in order to take a first step of engagement not “one day”, but this week! That’s what I want to do this morning. We’re going to be in 2 Timothy where Paul is summarizing some instruction to Timothy and, as he does that, he also gives a wonderful summary of everything we’ve been talking about in this series. It’s there where we’ll find three essentials of engagement that we can incorporate today to begin our own engagement of this culture.

[2 Timothy 2:22-26] ²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. ²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

If you’ve been with us during this series, you likely hear some familiar themes...the Lord, the Gospel, our attitude and approach, that we are to engage **everyone**, and God’s sovereignty over it all. This is where we’ll find what’s essential in our engagement, and verse 22 gives us the first one by showing us how are we equipped to engage well. How do we get prepared?

Engagement Resources: A godly life with godly people. From the beginning we’ve said this whole pursuit was ultimately spiritual. That means **our spiritual condition and access to spiritual resources determine the effectiveness of our engagement**, and we have a lot of influence over both of those.

In V22, Paul uses two imperative verbs to define how we are to proceed: flee and pursue, the idea is to run away from one thing and run towards another. What are those things? All of us are on a spiritual continuum. At one extreme is willful disobedience (Paul tells Timothy to avoid youthful passions like impatience, argument, aggression, but it could include anything opposed to God). At the other end is living righteously in faithfulness to God (We are declared righteous through the work of Jesus. How we live, though, can be righteous or not.) And we move back and forth on this continuum throughout our lives. But where we are on it is not an accident. God’s grace may ultimately decide where we are, but we get to choose what direction we’re

moving. That's why Paul says we have to flee one extreme and pursue the other. *Phuego* (flee) means to run from danger. The sinful end of the continuum is dangerous, both to us and to those we engage, and he calls us to actively move away from it.

But here's the problem. Too many of us are either take sin too lightly, saying "It's not a big deal", and hang out on one end, or we're content with being static right in the middle, not fleeing or pursuing. "I may not a holy Bible beater, but I'm not as bad as most people." Either of those approaches compromise us spiritually, and **if we're compromised spiritually, we may do more harm than good if we decide to engage.**

It's like an athlete playing hurt. I had turf toe my freshman year in college. It wasn't a "big deal". It's just my big toe. Well, blocking 300 lb. men is difficult when fully healthy. My injured tiny toe made it even more so and me being on the field in that condition was hurting the team, so I was pulled out of the game.

Disobedience or spiritual indifference will do the same thing to us. **Our lack of spiritual health prevents us from having significant spiritual impact.** We may not think it's a big deal, but our engagement will suffer if we "play hurt", so God will be inclined to pull us off the field.

[2 Timothy 2:20-21] ²⁰ Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

When we are dirtied up by the stain of sin and disobedience, we're not very useful to God. That's why Paul says run from those dangerous things and pursue the other end, towards God, where you'll find spiritual resources like righteousness, faith, love, peace. We've seen these throughout the series. **If you want spiritual resources to engage the culture, pursue the source.** If I need to fill up the car, I go to the gas station. If I need to fill up the belly, I go to Braums. If I need to fill up my spirit, I go to the Holy Spirit. **When we pursue him in faith, obedience, and dependence, he gives us all we need to engage well.**

And notice we don't do this alone. Biblical engagement is a team sport. We pursue the Spirit with those who call on the Lord. That's us! Sometimes we need each other to pull us from one end of the continuum and push us towards the other. We will struggle to do this alone. It's why I challenged all of us to come home, to be with the family of God. We need you and you need us, and when we are fleeing and pursuing together, our engagement will be more effective.

Assess, confess, and address your spiritual condition. How is your relationship with God? Where are you on this continuum? Stagnant? Thriving? Far away? Wherever you are, God knows, and he wants to graciously talk to you about it and invite you to turn towards him, towards righteousness. I want to encourage you to pick one thing to do this fall to improve your relationship with God and stick with it. It could be putting God at the center by coming back to worship weekly, refusing to do life on your own and joining a Life Group, daily prayer and Bible reading, or maybe it needs to begin with you confessing how far off you've been and asking God to restore you, which he'll lovingly do. If you want some help with that, go to our Connecting

Center. They will take your info down and someone on our staff will connect with you this week to walk with you in whatever step God leads you to take. But do something, even imperfectly, and God will meet you in it.

So the first essential shows us how we get equipped for engagement. The second shows us what we ultimately have to offer through our engagement. **Engagement Substance: The person of Jesus through the posture of peace.**

We can engage in two different ways and offer two different things; through quarrels or through the truth in love. One makes much of us, the other makes much of Jesus. One has the potential to win an argument, the other has the potential to win a soul.

In V23, Paul tells us to have nothing to do with stupid controversies, the kind where unteachable people just want to argue and bicker and no one changes their mind. Man, I wish the Bible was relevant today! Ever get the sense God was thinking about 2,000 years later when he had Paul write this? Paul is referring to stupid theological debates, but we could apply it to anything that keeps us from engaging the true Word of God. We've lost the ability to have a civil exchange of ideas. We constantly talk past one another, get that dopamine hit, and no one is better off for it. Paul says we are to not get involved in such things. Why?

If we get a reputation for being quarrelsome in the everyday things, people get used to being our opponents, Jesus gets lost in the noise, and he becomes one more thing you're trying to win with. And as I've said now five times, **you can't win someone over whom you first intend to defeat.**

Evangelism is not winning an argument but bringing light into darkness – Hope to the hopeless. Remember, you're heralding grace to the dead. It should sound like good news. - Jon Moffitt

We've got to resist engaging in an argumentative way and instead express the truth in a way that honors and invites others. V24-25 sets the bar high. It says we are to be able to teach what is true and gently correct others when they say or believe something contrary. That doesn't mean you have to be able to get up front, but it does mean God wants you to be able to communicate the Gospel and have the maturity to stay engaged and correct when someone pushes back.

Now, some of you hear "correction" and think conflict and you don't really want anything to do with that. But remember, tone is everything, and **the right tone communicates you come in peace.** We begin with kindness. Kindness communicates value. It shows the person they are important to you and you want the best for them. We are to endure evil patiently...literally not get resentful of those who do us harm. Resentment builds walls between people and makes people enemies. And when it comes time for us to correct wrong thinking or beliefs, we are to do so with gentleness, because gentleness gives people permission to wrestle with the truth and communicates "I'm for you and I want you to have what I have." In the first week I told you of a family member whom I engaged quarrelsomely, and God called me on it. I changed my tone and, since then, our conversations have been different. We still disagree on things, but the tone I now communicate shows the care and hope I have for her. As you engage, ask two questions.

What is my motivation for engaging? Do you know how many terrible moments I've avoided in my marriage that I would have been responsible for by asking myself this question first? I want to get in the last word, make one more point, reiterate how I'm right (because it happens so infrequently!) Our engagement can be about us, or it can be about God and the other person. When our motives are right, God can use us. When they're wrong, damage can be done. Check your heart before you engage.

How would I respond if someone engaged me in the way I am engaging this person right now? How valued would you feel and how interested in Jesus would that type of engagement make you? Is the pursuit truth or triumph? **Jesus is the greatest thing you have to offer anyone.** And when you tell someone he is the center of our life, what you say, and how you say it, all say something about him. Don't give the person the opportunity to say "Well, if Jesus causes someone to act like that, I want nothing to do with him." Show the difference he makes by the tone of your engagement.

The third essential addresses why we engage. **Engagement Purpose: People**

We end where we began. **People aren't the enemy. They are the mission. Our engagement is not an exercise in conquest, but in rescue.** And God wants to use you for that purpose. For us to do this well, we have to constantly remember the condition of the unbeliever: captured by the snare of the devil, in bondage to sin and false beliefs, far apart from God, and ignorant of that reality. What gets translated "come to their senses" is a word that means to sober up. They are enslaved by their sinfulness and the enemy of their soul, and they're too spiritually drunk to tell.

We've got to keep going back here to be reminded we are in a spiritual battle and there are powerful forces at work. We also have to keep going back here to remember that we were in the same condition once. But God, by his grace, used someone to rescue us, and now he wants to use us to rescue others. When we remember who we once were, you'll start to see others like God sees them, your compassion will grow, and you'll be eager to engage.

Will it always end in rescue? No, but that part is not up to you. As Paul says in v26, perhaps God will grant them repentance, they will know the truth you have presented in your words and actions, and they will escape. You do your part. Let God ultimately rescue.

Engage one unbeliever this week. Could be a neighbor (Sent Home series from last year), could be a co-worker, could be serving refugees or others in Vickery Meadow. Go see Cheryl Read. Whoever it is, just engage one unbeliever. No agenda other than to get to know them and show them kindness. Perhaps God will use you to draw them to himself.

We close with communion, a picture of this engagement. In communion, we sit in the circle we're inviting others into. It's a circle of intimacy with God and with one another where God pours out his grace. It's a place of invitation, kindness, peace, love, where we receive what Jesus offers, the substance of our engagement, and turn around and offer it to others. And it's a moment to remember what Jesus did to engage us and to rescue us.