

# The Engagement Project

## 24-0310a - *Understanding Our Times*, Scott Reynolds

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These Sermon Notes by Scott Reynolds

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## Understanding Our Times

I thought I would talk today about some thoughts from the 7 Threats series we just concluded. Beginning with the importance of understanding the times in which we live. Because it is only when we understand our times that we can begin to know, with God's help, how we ought to answer each person.

Paul says in:

### **Colossians 4:5,6 (ESV)**

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Notice what Paul tells us when we answer an outsider:

- The 1<sup>st</sup> thing he says is that we are to be gracious, we answer with grace. Our attitude in how we answer is of first importance. We always seem to concentrate on what we should tell someone, not so much on how we should answer.
- Then Paul says "seasoned with salt." That is, seasoned with truth. This is interesting. When you season something with salt how do you do it? Do you pile it on? How much salt do you add? Do you know that an over abundance of salt can be fatal? Seasoning suggests a controlled application of salt. And we are to apply it in a gracious manner,...
- "so that you may know *HOW you OUGHT to ANSWER*." Notice we are to *ANSWER* someone. Answer suggests we first listen to someone and not just answer *everyone* all the same. But we listen to each *INDIVIDUAL person* and season our answer for that person with grace.

Paul says a lot in that little verse. And combining that with the wisdom of the sons of Issachar of 1 Chronicles 12:32, where we are told the sons of Issachar understood their times and knew what Israel ought to do, understanding our times will help us know how we ought to answer outsiders.

Mike mentioned last Sunday that we need to get out and start talking with others and possibly go door knocking. And he's right. If we don't do something, West Side as we know it, may not be around much longer.

And that's where I think Del Tackett and his worldview information and teachings can be of great help to us. I believe Del has a great understanding of our time. In the Seven Threats series he

identified the world's thinking and motivation. Del has developed a biblically based plan for engaging with those outsiders, the lost of our day and time. He calls his plan the Engagement Project. And just like in the Truth Project, where he shows how the scripture touches on every area of human endeavor so that through study we can uncover a biblical Christian worldview, Del shows us that God, through the scriptures, has also shown us, how we are to engage our neighbors. Del says, "We've tried it our way, and failed, let's do it now His way."

This morning I'd like mention...

## Some thoughts from the 7 Threats

to remind us of the world in our time. And then talk a little bit about the Engagement Project. Because we need to do something and God has planned works for us to do since before the creation! (Ephesians 2:10)

So now, on to some thoughts on the 7 Threats. It appears that we are living in a time of

### *The scoffer and the depraved mind.*

I like how Del merged the thoughts from Proverbs about the simple, the fool, and the scoffer with Paul's teaching in Romans about the three pronouncements (my term) that God has directed towards the one who rejects God, the one who regressively moves away from God and devolves into sexual immorality then to unnatural relations and finally given over to a depraved mind. Del paired the simple-minded with sexual immorality, the fool with unnatural relations, and the scoffer (who is the militant fool) with a depraved mind.

Do you remember how Del described these three?

- The **simple** say: "I'm OK, you're OK", Live and let live.
- The **fool** says: "There is no God, but if you think there are boundaries then you're not OK." The fool takes a stand.
- The **scoffer** is no longer satisfied in saying "There is no God." Now he wants to make you believe the same or he wants to punish you if you do believe there is a God.

It's interesting to note that these pronouncements are **an act of God** against those who move away from Him (the simple, the fool, and the scoffer). Since it was God who "gave them over to" sexual immorality, unnatural relations, and eventually a depraved mind, a logical assumption is then: that it is only God who can bring them back to their right mind. Continuing with this thought then: No manner of logical arguments from us, or for that matter, will-power on their part, is going to bring them back to their senses.

If we are going to reach outsiders (as scripture calls them) in today's world, then somehow we must invoke God on their behalf.

**As an aside here**, we learned from the 2<sup>nd</sup> threat: "The Rise of Homo Deus", where having rejected God, that man now begins to think that he is divine, especially his heart, "I have to do what my heart tells me..." and it's all about me.

Our culture has even impacted the body of Christ, *Meo Christianity*. If you haven't studied the scriptures to learn what the bible has to say about government, law, ethics, family, history, science, and so forth then chances are you have probably been influenced by our culture and hold many of its views, especially in areas where we might think it is not "essential for salvation." Not just in our time have Christians been influenced by their culture but Paul thought it necessary to tell the church in Rome...

**Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by **the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God,...

We must learn to think differently from the world. God through Paul also tells the Romans to whom we must conform...

**Romans 8:29 (ESV)**

...be conformed to the image of his Son,...

It is important for us to develop a biblical Christian worldview before we can be of any help to one another and to outsiders.

When God is considered we see there is a plan, a creation, there is design. When you reject God, you are left with chance and chaos. And so "In the beginning" then becomes when *matter just appears*, like *magic*.

With God we have a purpose, we are meaningful, our significance is from Him. Those without God, who reject Him, they say "we're just an accident", a meaningless mistake. What an uplifting philosophy.

When you take God out of the picture all that is left is you (and you're not God).

**Psalms 33:6,9 (ESV)**

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
and by the breath of his mouth all their host...

<sup>9</sup> For he spoke, and it came to be;  
he commanded, and it stood firm.

He merely speaks and it happens!

**But with God out of the picture, now it's up to you, as the song says:**

*You gotta be bad, You gotta be bold  
You gotta be wiser, You gotta be hard  
You gotta be tough, You gotta be stronger  
You gotta be cool, You gotta be calm  
You gotta stay together*

And so now it's **all about me** and we have ...

- The Rise of Homo Deus & Meo Christianity, as was mentioned earlier

**And even in the song "You Gotta Be" they recognize:**

*Time asks no questions, it goes on without you  
Leaving you behind if you can't stand the pace  
The world keeps on spinning, Can't stop it if you try to  
The best part is danger staring you in the face, whoa*

The rest of the seven threats we looked at, which we'll only mention, were:

- The Loss of the Noble Male & the Rise of Malevolent Compassion
- The Consolidation of Massive Earthly Power
- The Rise of a Demonic Worldview & the National Rift
- America: Addicted and Soft, Dependent & Lost
- The Attack Upon the Biblical Family

[We have] seen as we've gone through these [seven threats] more and more evidence of each of these threats [as] they're playing out around us in our world today, in our times.

It should be sufficiently clear that our world is hurting. It surely seems that our culture has been given over to a depraved mind. And how do we engage those who are in such a state?

## ***The Engagement Project was developed to do just that.***

The Engagement project like the Truth Project is divided into tours (lessons or episodes, if you will), beginning with tour 0: In the Land of Nought, a Remnant of Hope and going through tour 9: The Band of Brothers. It is based on the King's command and the tours are designed to discover and implement His command.

I'm going to finish up with a description of each of the tours. I'm suggesting that as a church we ought to study these lessons and put them into practice so that we can engage outsiders, our neighbors, with grace, wisdom, and truth.

In the tours Del speaks of the meta-narrative of God. I don't know if you're like me, but I had to look up what a meta-narrative is. The dictionary definition is:

### **metanarrative**

noun

- a narrative account that experiments with or explores the idea of storytelling, often by drawing attention to its own artificiality: Don Quixote is a work of fiction but also a metanarrative.
- an overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences: traditional religions provide stories that deliver a metanarrative about how we should live our lives.

So to us **the meta-narrative of God** is what the bible provides for us. It is THE overarching account of events and circumstances that provides THE pattern & structure for OUR beliefs and gives MEANING to our experiences.

This is significant because the humanist flatly rejects ALL META-NARRATIVES. They say so in their documents.

## So On to the Tours

### **Tour 0**

In the Land of Nought, a Remnant of Hope — Nought - No Ought, no boundaries

What is God’s “Meta-Narrative” and where do we fit into it? This introductory Tour is designed to help participants get a handle on this very basic question regarding the purpose of the Christian life. As Dr. Tackett explains, there are five major “epochs” in history: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Engagement, and Restoration. As Jesus’ followers, we inhabit the fourth of these—Engagement—in which it is our task to bring the light of God’s kingdom to bear upon an increasingly dark world.

### **Tour 1**

Creation: The Endgame

Tour 1 takes us back to the very beginning—the epoch of Creation—where we start to gain a sense of our place in the broader sweep of the Meta-Narrative. God’s purpose in creating, says Dr. Tackett, was to promote fruitfulness. He designed this world and everything in it in such a way that His creatures, and mankind in particular, might play an active participatory role in the creative process. The goal or “endgame” of His plan is the proliferation & cultivation of flourishing, abundant life.

### **Tour 2**

Fall: The River of Death

The second epoch of history, that of the Fall, saw God’s original plan frustrated and turned back upon itself. At this stage of the game a villain entered the picture with a counter-narrative. Once adopted, this counter-narrative introduced a new default setting into the fabric of creation. A tipping point was passed beyond which the flow from life to life became an irresistible current of death leading to death. Life, fruitfulness, and goodness were all put at a disadvantage and the world began running backwards.

### **Tour 3**

Redemption: The Heart of God

It’s during this third Tour that we get our first glimpse of the object of our Quest: the Crown Jewel of the Divine Nature, which is love. Obviously, God could not simply allow the world to continue on its downstream course to destruction. The big question was what He was going to do about the problem and how? He could have wiped the slate clean and started over again at Square One; but love, which is the very heart of His nature, made this impossible. Instead of annihilation, God chose the course of redemption. Rather than letting out a roar of destruction, He breathed out a promise of grace.

## Tour 4

### Engagement: The Royal Task

Three Guiding Questions have directed our steps up to this point: Why did Jesus leave? Why does God send? And What is God's Endgame? In Tour 4 we begin to take a serious look at the last of these. The epoch of Engagement is the era in which we are given a job. Now is the time and today is the day when the King's messenger comes knocking at the door bearing orders from our Sovereign in his hand. This is when we begin to fulfill the Royal Task: the task of sharing His redeeming love with the world by seeking the shalom of our neighbor.

## Tour 5

### The Vision: Engaging With Grace

Tours 5, 6, and 7 focus on the practical aspects of the assignment Christ has given us as His Remnant of Hope in the Epoch of Engagement. During the course of this first installment we'll talk about what it means to fulfill our task with grace and sensitivity. We'll consider how to subject our speech, actions, and behavior to the **rubric** of an overarching Mission Statement, "the Royal Vision," which we'll articulate in the following terms: We will build real relationships with those providentially in our Jerusalem, through prayer and action, with grace and wisdom and truth, being attractively winsome, tearing down walls, building up trust, doing the work of the kingdom.

### rubric

#### noun

a heading on a document.

- a direction in a liturgical book as to how a church service should be conducted.
- a statement of purpose or function: *art for a purpose, not for its own sake, was his rubric.*
- a category: *such ideas fall naturally under the rubric of postmodernism.*

## Tour 6

### The Vision: Engaging With Wisdom

The second part of our practical training as agents of the Royal Law focuses on the challenge of turning head-knowledge into heart-knowledge. When it comes to loving our neighbors as Jesus has loved us, wisdom is a question of practical know-how. It's a matter of learning to engage uniquely with unique individuals. It involves discernment and a willingness to listen and learn so that we can customize our words, actions, and responses to fit the requirements of each new situation. Tour 6 is designed to show us how this works in the context of real life.

## Tour 7, This evening we'll be watching excerpts from Tour 7

### The Vision: Engaging With Truth

Tour 7, the third part of our discussion of practical strategies, reminds us that, biblically speaking, Love and Truth are always inextricably intertwined. We cannot have the one without the other. "Love" without Truth is sentimental and mushy; "Truth" without Love is impersonal and harsh. But when God's Word is communicated from heart to heart within a context of trust, deep relationship, and sacrificial zeal for the shalom of the recipient, lives can be changed in miraculous ways. That's what true evangelism is all about.

## Tour 8

### The Engagement: The Royal Sacrifice

We now return to the all-important question of motivation. What is it that drives the Christian to move out into the world, engage the people of his Jerusalem, and seek the shalom of his neighbor? Why take on such a formidable assignment? The answer takes us back to the object of our Quest: it's all wrapped up in the sacrificial agape love of God, the Crown Jewel of the Divine Nature. Tour 8 attempts to plumb the depths of this love through a detailed examination of the great Self-Sacrifice of Jesus Himself.

## Tour 9

### The Engagement: The Band of Brothers

This last Tour underscores the importance of Christian fellowship and camaraderie: not just the camaraderie of a conversation on the church patio during "coffee hour," but the deep interpersonal bonds that are formed within the context of a shared task. The key idea here is that we can only fulfill the Royal Law as a body, a family, a group with a common identity and mission. This is why Dr. Tackett believes it is so crucial for every Christian to be part of a small "life group"—a group of dedicated disciples who are committed to go the distance together come what may.

I'll finish up with Del Tackett as he closed out the 7 Threats series this way...

## So let me close with these two verses,

### 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (NIV)

*And the Lord's servant **must not be quarrelsome** but must **be kind** to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. <sup>25</sup> Opponents must be **gently instructed**, in the hope that **God will grant them repentance** leading them to a **knowledge of the truth**, <sup>26</sup> and that **they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil**, who has **taken them captive to do his will**.*

What a great passage from God's word for us. That our mission [in a] world of increasingly **skeptic people, lost people, lonely people, hostile people, people [with] depraved minds** that cannot respond to our logic that we must first of all [begin] to build that relationship with [them]. This means we are going to have to get rid of the notion that "bigger is better" and we have to **concentrate on building a relationship** with a **fewer number of people** that we might then have the opportunity to begin to deal with them as we read in Colossians,

### Colossians 4:5-6 (NASB)

*Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.*

And that will be the case if we concentrate on doing what the Lord has asked us to do. To build those relationships with people in the culture around us. And to pray for them diligently that God is going to begin to allow them to come to their senses. **He is the one who allows them to escape** from the "trap of the devil." **He's the one who will grant them repentance.** We need to call on God to do that. So this is actually a time where we might even say that **this could be our finest hour.**

You know with the post-COVID scare, we now live in a culture so radically different, but I can guarantee it is a culture that's filled with all kinds of fears. Whether we're afraid of the glaciers melting, we're afraid of viruses, we're afraid of so many things And we're isolated and we increasingly don't have relationships with anybody, true relationships. We have a lot of likes, we have a lot of follows, but we don't have true relationships. In fact, I would hazard a guess that the vast majority of our culture doesn't even know what it's like to have a true trusting relationship with someone who has no agenda other than to love them. And, of course, that is what God is calling us to do.

And we are now extending the invitation to anyone who is subject to it, if you will come while we stand and sing.