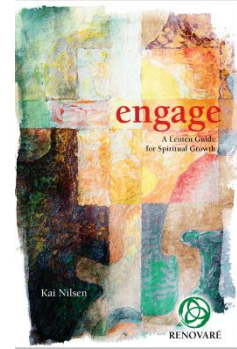


Engage: Celebrate

Session Two

This guide for small group discussion is based on the Renovaré resource, Engage, written, compiled and edited by Pastor Kai Nilsen with contributions from Keith Matthews, Kathie Nycklemoe and Eric Magnusson and the Renovaré team. Download Engage: A Lenten Guide for Spiritual Growth from Renovaré at: www.renovare.org/books/engage.



Opening Questions

- What is your favorite way to celebrate a holiday, event, milestone or good news? What is your favorite part of a celebration?
- What did you celebrate as a family when you were growing up? What did those celebrations say about what your family valued?
- What are some ideas or comments that you continued to think about after last week's gathering on the faith practice of "worship"? What gets in the way of living into this practice? What helps you to engage with this practice?

Introduction

Keith Matthews

Dallas Willard comments that the discipline of celebration is "one of the most important disciplines of engagement, yet most overlooked and misunderstood. We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world, in conjunction with our faith and confidence in God's greatness, beauty and goodness."

We remember the gift of our life and world, and seek to celebrate God's gracious action towards us and others. While this discipline might begin in private reflection, it typically involves others who know God and mutually celebrate with us. It involves eating and drinking, singing and dancing, and sharing of stories of God's action in our lives. Celebration recognizes that there is an appropriate and much needed time for this to be engaged in our lives. Many Christians find this hard to do, perhaps because it may seem self-indulgent, yet it IS important and necessary in our life with God. Let's celebrate!

What Does the Bible Say?

Let's begin with Jesus! Jesus's first miracle was at a wedding celebration in Cana (John 2). He seemed to create and enjoy meals often with religious leaders (Luke 7:36-50), disciples (Luke 22:8-20), large groups (Matthew 14:13-21), and small groups (Luke 24:13-32). There's just something about eating with others that brings about a climate for good celebration!

John 2:1-11 (NRSV)

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet." So they took it. When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

- What do you notice in this text today?
- We see again and again portraits of unabashed celebration and delight from God's people in the Scriptures... What makes it difficult for us to celebrate?
- What does "celebrate" mean in the context of a faith community? What does it include?

Supplement—

Look at Luke 19: 1-10 with Pastor Joel Vander Wal at the end of this session. This can be used individually or together as a group.

What Do Our Guides Say?

Richard Foster & Dallis Willard

Dallas Willard states, "Certainly this will seem far too hedonistic to many of us. But we dishonor God as much by fearing and avoiding pleasure as we do by dependence upon it or living for it. Celebration heartily done makes our deprivations and sorrows seem small, and we find in it great strength to do the will of our God because his goodness becomes so real to us." (Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p.180-181)

Richard Foster says, "Celebration is central to all the Spiritual Disciplines. Without a joyful spirit of festivity the Disciplines become dull... celebration brings joy into life, and joy makes us strong... God's normal means of bringing his joy is by redeeming and sanctifying the ordinary junctures of human life." (Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 191, 193).

- What are you drawn to in these quotes? Where do you feel yourself pushing back? What do you wonder about?

What Do Others Say?

Keith Matthews

I have served the church as a pastor and lay-leader for over forty years and I must say that I have not witnessed "celebration" as a discipline being practiced very well throughout my life. I've struggled myself with this practice, primarily because of my personal issues with hurry, busyness, and a myriad of distractions that preoccupy my life. Another barrier is more theological. It's the thought that "holy people don't indulge themselves in celebration." What a diversion this makes! It subverts the soul into a life with God that is scarce and withholding, not befitting the magnificence and generosity that his true character exudes. Yes, there is a time for celebration with God and others! (Ecclesiastes 3:4). You need not wait until you step into heaven. Together let's learn how to do this well on this side of eternity... then we will be prepared for an eternity of it!

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- What jumps out for you from this reading? What emotions does the reading (and the rest of the session) bring up for you?
- What are the distractions that pull you away from celebrating or make it challenging?
- "If I can't celebrate in this life, how will I do it in the next?" When you imagine a life with God, what do you picture? Is celebration part of that image?
- How do we balance celebration with the reality of suffering and difficulty all around us? Can celebration happen in the midst of suffering or alongside suffering? What could it look like to celebrate during a challenging time?
- Is celebration something set aside for a special time or can celebration be a faith practice that is part of daily or weekly life? What would it look like to bring the idea of celebration into your daily or weekly life?
- How are celebration and gratitude connected? What does gratitude add to celebration? What does celebration add to gratitude?
- How can you celebrate today? God IS good!

Faith Practice – What Can I Do?

A key component for practicing celebration is remembering . . . To cultivate “remembering” one must take time to slow down. Ponder your life, not what is wrong, but what is right. Where have you seen God at work in you, in your family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers, not just the big things, but little in-breakings of God’s grace? And celebrate! Here are some ideas:

- Consciously slow down. Go on a walk or hike, perhaps at a park, through your neighborhood, or a local walking trail. Reflect on God’s creation, its variety, its beauty, its intricacy, its wonder. And celebrate!
- Plan a dinner with a few close friends... go all out! Good food, conversation, and have some fun. Celebrate God’s goodness through mutual love and support. Share what they mean in your life (be specific). And celebrate!
- Share a family “communion” experience... bread, wine (or grape juice). Remind everyone that “this is a celebration meal”... Jesus’s presence will never leave us! And celebrate!
- Use the reflection guide at the end of this session or read the supplement, Celebration as a Spiritual Practice.

Closing Prayer - Read Psalm 150 responsively as a closing prayer.

One: Praise the LORD!

**All: Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty firmament!**

One: Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

**All: Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!**

One: Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!

**All: Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!**

One: Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!

All: Praise the LORD! Amen.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline*. HarperOne, 2018. www.harpercollins.com

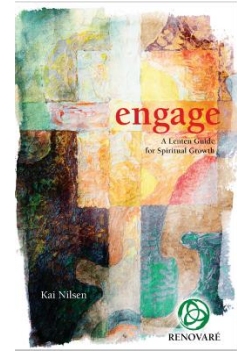
Nilsen, Kai, and Keith Matthews, Kathie Nycklemoe, Eric Magnusson & the Renovare Team. *Engage: A Lenten Guide for Spiritual Growth*. Renovare. 2014. www.renovare.org.

Scripture texts are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV), copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States.

Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. HarperOne, 1999. www.harpercollins.com and www.dwillard.org

Engage—Reflection Time

Before the next gathering, spend a few minutes quietly reflecting, journaling or writing a few notes on one or more of these reflection questions.



Faith Practice Questions: Celebrate

- What do you think about this practice?
- For you, what is the core intention or hope of this practice?
- What is helpful about the practice? What is challenging or difficult? What do you wonder about?
- What are various ways to do this practice, keeping in mind the purpose?

Insights for the Journey:

- How have you experienced God's presence this week?
- How has your connection with yourself, with others deepened because of your intentional work with this discipline?
- What about this discipline will you continue to build into your life?
- Ask God for continued guidance and encouragement as you make the journey of this season.

Engage—Supplement

Celebration as a Spiritual Practice

Pastor Joel Vander Wal - created as part of the Wednesday Bible Study



Parades are some of the loudest and most exciting times for a community to gather. In this story from Luke 19, Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem, along the way he walks through the town of Jericho and the crowds of people surround him. In that crowd, a chief tax collector is curious to learn more about his itinerant Rabbi, and runs on ahead climbing a tree to get a better look. When Jesus sees him, he calls him down, and commands the ancient practice of hospitality to be displayed. A chance to celebrate with a home cooked meal, an engaging conversation, and a transformed heart.

Luke 19: 1-10 (NRSV)

"[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'"

Questions to ponder:

- Who were some of the people you invited to the last celebration you hosted?
- In what way do celebrations develop and form community?
- How is this celebration that Jesus takes part in transformative? For whom is it a transformative experience?