

Tour 9 Themes

Tour 9 - Engagement - The Band of Brothers

Themes & Further Study

We come now to the end of our quest – and the beginning of our shared task.

Up to this point, each Tour has been designed to lead participants into a deeper experience of “gazing upon the face of God”: encountering Him in a new and profoundly personal way. As Dr. Tackett points out, we can revisit these Tours as often as we need to. Like Moses, we can go back to the Mountain or the Tent of Meeting whenever we want to refill our tanks and speak with the Lord “face to face.” But as we’ve said many times over the course of this journey, these divine encounters are not an end in themselves. They point towards something else. Like Isaiah’s vision in the Temple, they’re supposed to drive us to the place where we’re compelled to cry out, “Here am I, Lord! Send me!” Their purpose is to equip us for our work and help us to bear fruit in our encounters with other people. And those encounters, to an important extent, are meant to flow out of the relationships we share with one another as a “band of brothers.” That’s what this final Tour is all about.

Themes

When Moses came away from a meeting with the Lord, he had to veil his face so that the people would not see the divine glory fading from his countenance. Our position as Christians is very different. Unlike the saints of the Old Testament, we experience the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as a constant and permanent reality. Since the Day of Pentecost, all who trust in Jesus Christ have been filled to overflowing with the fullness of God’s Triune nature. Our job now is to let that fullness spill out over our brothers, sisters, and neighbors by loving others as we love ourselves.

“As ourselves” is the key phrase here. Until we understand what that’s all about, we won’t be able to love others in strict accordance with the mandate of the Royal Law. To arrive at this understanding, we’ll have to plug in the definition of *agape* that we nailed down in Tour 3: “A sacrificial zeal that steadfastly seeks the *shalom*, or true good, of others.”

Loving ourselves is a question of seeking our own true good. But we can’t do that until we understand what our true good is. Fortunately, Dr. Tackett has told us many times: human *shalom* consists in fruitfulness. In order to seek this true good effectively, we must do two things. First, figure out what fosters and promotes fruitfulness and cultivate it. That includes developing deep relationships, good physical and mental health, and a strong walk with the Lord. Second, pinpoint obstacles or hindrances to fruitfulness and eliminate them. That means getting rid of pride, fear, isolation, dependency, gloom, apathy, lack of vision, and a tendency to believe that “it’s all about me.” This in turn will entail learning how to say no to ourselves when it’s appropriate – something our culture doesn’t encourage us to do.

Where are we going to find the strength and determination to do all this? That question brings us to the conclusion of our journey and the central message of Tour 9: the importance of being part of a “band of brothers.” The ability to stay on track and love ourselves with true *agape* love is something

we derive from one another. “As iron sharpens iron,” says the Scripture, “so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17). This implies that we can only fulfill the Royal Law – “Love your neighbor as yourself” – as a body, a family, a group with a shared identity and a shared mission. When pride, depression, anxiety, doom, gloom, and a preoccupation with my own script prevent me from bearing fruit, it is my brothers and sisters who have the power and authority to set me straight again. 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.

Points to Watch For

During the course of this episode, Dr. Tackett cites more than thirty passages of Scripture that corroborate and flesh out the deeper meaning of Jesus’ “New Commandment:” “Love one another even as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Included on this list are such verses as John 15:12; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 4:7, 11, and 12; Romans 12:10 and 16; Ephesians 4:32; and Philippians 2:3.

Josiah’s rediscovery of the Torah scroll (2 Chronicles 34:14-19) is used to highlight the modern church’s desperate need to rediscover the Royal Law. “How could they ever have lost it?” asks Dr. Tackett. Indeed, how could we? It’s time for us, like the ancient king, to come a place of conviction and re-dedicate ourselves to the fulfillment of the Vision.

Another key biblical quotation comes from 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, where Paul writes:

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

The truth is that we are not adequate and never can be in and of ourselves. And yet, as these verses assure us, we may be certain of success and victory in the Lord’s service as long as we are marching in the train of His Triumphal Procession. For through the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the Fruit He produces in our lives (Galatians 5:22, 23), we have everything we need to carry out our mission. We exude His fragrance wherever we go. Besides, if we ask God to use us in this way, we know He will be zealous to answer.

In the end, we come back to the idea that captured our imagination all the way back in Tour 0: the concept of being a “Remnant of Hope” in a “Land of Nought.” In this world, we are surrounded by grieving, hurting, and dying people. Some of them live just next door or right across the street. Let’s pray that the Lord will stir us up to become the salt and light they so desperately need us to be. That’s what Jesus left us here to do.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Why did Jesus leave? Why are we still here? What is He calling us to do in His absence? Now that we’ve reached the end of The Engagement Project, are your answers to these questions any different than they were at the beginning of our quest?** (The answers are essentially the same as they were back in Tour 1. It was to our advantage that Jesus should ascend to the Father, so that we might be indwelt by the Holy Spirit [John 16:7] and equipped to do “greater works” than He did [John 14:12] – the work of turning the world upside down one

neighbor at a time. But by this stage in the journey, these ideas should have been filled out, enriched, and deepened by the content presented in the last eight videos. Open this up for discussion.)

2. **How does the biblical concept of “loving yourself” differ from contemporary culture’s ideas on the same subject? How will this scriptural understanding inform the way we approach the Royal Task?** (Biblical agape love focuses upon a quest for the true good [shalom] of the beloved. This suggests that loving myself will sometimes mean denying myself. If I want to be a fruitful vine, I have to be willing to be pruned. I need to learn how to say no to those things that hinder the fulfillment of my real purpose in this world. These ideas run directly counter to our culture’s understanding of self-love, which is essentially self-indulgence. Most of our contemporaries regard self-denial as a dangerous and unhealthy form of “repression.”)
3. **Dr. Tackett says that the indwelling Holy Spirit has already equipped us with everything we need in order to carry out the mission of the Royal Task. Our most important job, he adds, is to avoid quenching His power and presence. How does one “quench the Holy Spirit?” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). How can we keep ourselves from falling into that trap?** (To “quench” the Holy Spirit is to put up obstacles to the others-oriented work He is attempting to accomplish through us. This happens when we allow self to get in the way. A self-centered attitude can manifest itself in a number of different ways: through fear, through an obsession with our own “script”, through bondage to persistent sin, through isolation, dependency, anxiety, depression, apathy, and loss of the Meta-Narrative. Perhaps the biggest hindrance of all is pride, which can be understood as the source and the sum of all the others.)
4. **Why is it so crucial for an earnest disciple of Jesus to be part of a small “life group?” If you’re not part of a small group now, what do you think you can do to remedy the situation? If you are part of such a group, how can you and the other members help each other stay faithful to God’s calling?** (Deep relationships are formed only when people band together on a small scale. It’s impossible to share life in a profound and meaningful way with more than a handful of brothers and sisters. Even twelve disciples was too many for Jesus: He concentrated most of His attention on three men – Peter, James, and John. Within the context of intimate fellowship each member of the group can discern when the “fragrance” of the others is “off.” Transparent intimacy enables us to speak into one another’s lives with accuracy and authority. If you aren’t part of a small “life group,” ask the Lord to show you how you can fill this crucial need. If necessary, take the initiative to do a little research. Perhaps you can plug into a small group program sponsored by your local church.)
5. **What do you think Paul means when he says that we are “an aroma from death to death” for some people and “an aroma from life to life” for others?** (This is really just another way of saying that beauty is “in the eye of the beholder.” Our “fragrance” is determined by the steadiness and faithfulness of our walk with Christ and the fellowship we maintain with our brothers and sisters. How that is perceived by others is something we can’t control; to a great extent, it depends on who they are and where they stand in relation to the truth and reality of God. Some will find our aroma attractive, winsome, and life-giving; others may be “turned off.” As Jesus expressed it, some will “have ears to hear,” while others will not. Only God can grant the gift of repentance and belief. Our task is to be who we are in Him and to “hold forth the word of life” by manifesting the Fruit of the Spirit in everything we do.
6. **Near the end of this Tour, Dr. Tackett says that “the old way of engagement” doesn’t work anymore. What does he mean by this? What is “the old way of engagement?” What’s the “new way?” How can believers begin to put that new way into effect?** (The “old way”

consists in the formal religiosity of “doing church” or “playing at Christianity.” Most of our contemporaries find this approach increasingly unappealing. The “new way” is all about building life-to-life connections with other people. It’s a type of “evangelism” that relies primarily upon relationships. This is the approach most likely to touch hearts and change lives in a society marked by deep loneliness, alienation, and mutual distrust.)

7. What is God showing you specifically through this tour?