

Renaissance means rebirth or renewal. It is about looking at the same old story through different eyes. It is renaissance that couples seek when they renew their marriage vows. It is not that their marriage has gone bad, it's just that after years of being together they have come to see marriage differently than when they first said their vows. So they renew their vows because as we grow and change we confront old arrangements in fresh new ways.

That's my hope for this series, that we would renew our vows. That we would gain a fresh vision for how we can re-engage with Jesus and His mission in the world; that we would explore the question we should always keep asking, "What is God up to right here and right now?" "What is trying to happen here at Fellowship?" We're going to do that by revisiting the Gospels and looking again at the priorities in Jesus' life. The first thing I want you to notice is how Jesus engaged people. He was the most engaging, life-giving person who ever lived. Let's look at Mt. 9:9-13 and see if we can identify some of Jesus' **rules of engagement**.

Rule #1 - Engage intentionally. The text simply says that Jesus saw a man called Matthew sitting at a tax collector's booth. The reason these words are so matter-of-fact is that there is nothing unusual here. In Jesus' world you couldn't go anywhere without passing a tax collector's booth. Did Jesus target Matthew from previous encounters or was He just going around and asking everyone to follow Him? It's hard to say but this much is clear, Jesus was always "on mission." He woke up every day and rededicated Himself to the task of seeking the lost. One day His disciples found Him praying at dawn and pleaded with Him to return to where people were already lining up to receive healing. Jesus said, "No, that is not what I came out for." He knew His mission - to declare the Good News of the Kingdom, to demonstrate what the Kingdom was like, and to engage those who would be His messengers.

Matthew seems like an unlikely candidate for Jesus' inner circle. Because He was a tax collector he had no stroke with his own people. He was a Jew working for Rome. But Jesus saw something in Matthew. Was it a hunger for God, dissatisfaction with the system, a capacity for criticism? Many looked at Matthew and were repulsed by the thought that a Jew could stoop so low as to work for the Romans and handle "unclean" foreign money. Jesus looked at Matthew and thought, "He's perfect." He is "despised and rejected of men." Sound familiar? Sometimes, when everyone else writes you *off*, God writes you *in*. Jesus saw something that can only be discovered when we set aside our preconceived ideas and our prejudice and engage people.

Before my dad died with Alzheimers my two brothers and I, along with my son, traveled with my dad to our ancestral homeland in Hagerstown, Maryland. While we were there we decided to take my dad to an Orioles game at Camden Yards in Baltimore. We were walking through a rough part of the city and as we waited on a street corner for the light to change two rough-looking young men on tricked out bicycles pulled up next to us. Caps turned to the side over their do-rags, baggy clothes, lots of jewelry, fancy new basketball shoes; these were Gangstas on wheels. We glanced at them and then kept our eyes forward so as not to make eye contact. Then the guy in our group with Alzheimer's did the unthinkable, he turned and engaged them. My dad

said, “Hey, those look like the bikes I got these guys when they were kids.” To our surprise these two “Gangstas” broke into big smiles, solid gold smiles, and nodded politely as my dad described in detail what our bikes looked like. The “Gangstas” were real people, with real souls who appreciated being appreciated. It took a man with Alzheimers to look past their clothes and any preconceived notions of what they were to engage them. I won’t soon forget that day. It is a reminder that we never look into the eyes of a person who does not matter to God.

Jesus was charged with being a “friend of tax collectors and sinners.” And so He was. In Luke 19:6 another tax collector named Zaccheus “received Him gladly.” Jesus announced that He was going to Zack’s house. Every chance encounter was leveraged for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom. Notice what Jesus does next...

Rule #2 - Engage patiently. Jesus said, “Follow me,” and then went to Matthew’s house. **(Luke 5:27-29 says, “After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, “Follow Me.” And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him. And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them...)** Just like He did with another tax collector named Zaccheus, Jesus went to a place where the lost are most comfortable – in their own home. He didn’t take Matthew to the synagogue or to a Bible study in His home where he could be surrounded by religious people who already knew the answers to all the questions. He went to Matthew’s house, Matthew’s neighborhood.

And what does He do there? He EATS with Matthew’s network of friends. This is no small thing in middle-Eastern culture. One of my most memorable moments is sharing a meal with a Palestinian pastor in a Palestinian restaurant in the West Bank of Israel. I have never been treated more graciously in my life. I was probably never safer either. When someone in the middle-East invites you into their home to break bread you are favored in their eyes and you have their protection. They even have an expression to describe their relationship with you, “There is salt between us.” So when Jesus reclined at the table with “sinners” He was acknowledging a close association with them. Jesus was surfing the margins of society looking for those who were hungry for God. He went to them on their turf.

That is why I was so thrilled about Kids on the Go this summer...read Wakeem letter...

Rule #3 - Engage conversationally. His presence at the house of a tax collector who has all his rowdy friends over forces a question on the part of the religious leaders, “Why does he eat with these people?” (v. 11). “Tax collectors and sinners” was code for those who had no access to the “organized religion” religion of the day. These were people whose lifestyle was known to be offensive to the religious establishment. Their sins were public. Jesus was perfectly comfortable in THEIR presence because they delighted to be in His.

Their question allows Jesus an opportunity to describe His kingdom...9:12-13. Jesus has nothing to offer the self-satisfied, self-sufficient, self-disciplined, self-righteous, self-made man or

woman who hoist over their shoulders a tote bag of honors, diplomas, and good works, actually believing they have made it and have it made. The Pharisees had a completely different agenda than Jesus did. They were looking for converts of their own rigid, joyless, demanding, brand of ritualistic righteousness which God condemned in Hosea 6. Jesus declares His kingdom is for:

“The bedraggled, beat up and burned out, the wobbly and weak-kneed, the inconsistent and unsteady whose cheese is falling off their cracker. The poor, weak and sinful with hereditary faults and limited talents. The bent, the bruised, and the broken who feel their lives are a grave disappointment to God.” (adapted from Brennan Manning)

Life-giving conversations will never happen unless we are willing to engage people. Our conversion rate will never exceed our conversation rate.

Rule #4 - Engage for LIFE. The Pharisees drained the life out of people. Jesus gave life and He gave it abundantly. Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy; I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

I don't know why you're here today but I'm here for LIFE. As a church we ought to be able to shout from the roof tops, “**We're here for LIFE.**” Our presence in this community ought to bring LIFE. Our presence at Conrad High School ought to bring life to students. Our presence in the Biltmore Apartments ought to bring life to those residents. Can our REPP process start a viral outbreak of LIFE with our refugee friends, people who have come here to escape death and now live on the margins of this society? When you walk into your workplace tomorrow, will you bring LIFE to that place or will you allow the dead who have no relationship to Jesus, steal your joy, kill your dreams and destroy your hope? Jesus was a life-giver. Are you?

1. Engage somewhere. Start where you are. Identify your domain. Then look for broken people. That's what Jesus did.

2. Bless someone. Go to the Blessing Booth (North end of the Concourse) and share about someone you blessed this week. Look in the camera and tell what happened.

3. Say something. **Our conversion rate will never exceed our conversation rate.** We struggle with how to get the conversation started. We feel awkward, like when the newscaster pitches to the weatherman, “speaking of higher taxes, will we be seeing higher temperatures tomorrow John?” How effective would it be if we say, “Speaking of the weather, I wonder how the weather in heaven is today...or HELL. Wanna talk about it?” Just ask, “How can I pray for you? How can I help you? How can I ask God to bless you?”

It's simple, so simple we have made a cartoon to illustrate what I have just said. Take a look...

Joe Delaney was NFL Rookie of the Year in 1981. He was a star running back for the KC Chiefs and had a brilliant future ahead of him. He was fast. His speed (he once ran the 100 meters in 9.4 seconds) and his agility led to over 1,100 rushing yards in his first year in the league. After his

second season he was named to the Pro Bowl, which is the NFL All-Star team. That summer while he was home in Monroe, Louisiana, he was at Critter's Creek, a small amusement park, when he heard three children screaming for help. They had decided to cool off in a pond that had recently been dug for a water feature. They slipped into deep water and they couldn't swim. With no thought for his own life, Joe Delaney dove in to help. The problem was Joe Delaney couldn't swim either. He was able to save one of those kids. Tragically, the other two drowned. So did Joe Delaney.

There was only one thing more frightening to Joe Delaney than trying to swim. It was the prospect of three kids drowning and his not lifting a finger to save them. When He heard the cries of those kids he engaged. He exchanged his life for the life of a child. May God give us the heart of a Joe Delaney because he had the heart of God.

Words cannot even begin to express how thankful we are to all of you for your help...I counted heads and we had **70** people on that lawn Saturday night. WOW!!!...Many people wanted to know what church we go to and where it is so Scott was encouraged that people are seeing the church in action. We have come to where they are instead of asking them to come to us (church) and it seems to intrigue folks...I have had some pretty cool conversations the last few months what with KOG and then the cookout. Most people want to know why. Why are we doing this, what motivates us. One lady asked me point blank on Saturday night and I said, "Do you want the truth?" She said, "yes, I really do". I proceeded to keep it short and simply said, "Christ changed my heart and my husband's heart and we want to do whatever we can to share and show that love to all those around us. We want to love our neighbors". People are starting to see that it's Christ who is motivating us-- with no strings attached --and that excites us to no end.

One woman told me back in June on the phone that in all her years, she'd never heard of a church doing what we're doing, referring to KOG. She said that most churches want you to come to them, to their event, but was amazed that we were coming to the neighborhood.

I also cannot tell you how I get so excited that the kids that have come to these events wave and smile when I drive past them coming home from work. Scott and I know that by hosting these types of events that we are also building community where young people can feel safe and hopefully have a sense of pride about where they live. A few weeks ago one of the girls that attended KOG and that was there on Saturday rang our doorbell and asked to use our phone. She felt safe in coming to us, she sees us as someone who would help her and that is awesome.

I suppose if you want evidence of change, 70 people on our front lawn on Saturday night is a good place to start. People bringing their families and friends to someone's home they'd never met is a very cool thing. The people on the corner by us that NEVER come out or go to any neighborhood function who came by to meet us and eat dinner is evidence of change. God is working in our community and we cannot wait to start spending some one on one time with many of these families!

Thank you again for your tireless efforts and your willingness to serve our community and love our neighbors.

Steph & Scott Wakeem