

Engaging the Living God

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How do we come to know God? Do we grasp God by reading books? Or by listening to others tell us who God is? Reading a book about someone isn't as instructive as interacting with that person firsthand. Someone can read all the books written about God, but never experience the living God who interacts with us humans. Our relationship is with an actual person, so our understanding of God ought to include a direct experience of Him. The various people in the Bible all had a direct experience of God. For God to be real to us, we need to experience Him in a real way. I believe God wants us to experience Him.

I want to know the living God, not the God confined to pages in a book. A book cannot contain God because His nature is unlimited. John 21:25 says, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." Besides, our relationship isn't with a book, but with a living God. The Bible points us to God, but the Bible shouldn't take the place of God. So how do we engage the living God, the One who right now is watching you read this article?

Starting with Trust

Here is a spiritual principle: *God reveals Himself in response to our trust in Him.* God doesn't stand on a street corner and say, "Here I am." He has no need to prove His existence to the skeptic. If we wait for God to show Himself, it won't happen. Rather, He waits for us to make the first move in His direction. We risk by choosing to trust God. In response, God makes Himself more real to us.

For the novice, it starts with an initial belief that God is real, often with no solid proof. Later, we understand that God expects us to fully entrust our lives to Him in light of His mercy and sovereignty. At that point, we take the scary step of entrusting our lives to a being we have never seen. For many people, God rewards that step of "faith" with an undeniable experience that validates their act of trusting.

This principle is repeated over and over in our lives. We entrust God with a specific situation, believing that God will work it out according to His wisdom. We place at risk our control over the outcome. By trusting, we risk failure, embarrassment, and loss. Nevertheless, we choose to trust God with the

outcome. In response to our trust, God intervenes and makes Himself real by how He answers. We experience God when He sustains us, encourages us, surprises us, or when He sends people who lend a hand or speak the words we need to hear. We glimpse God in those things. We learn about God's love for us. We learn that God hears us and helps us. We experience God in a way that's real, but it's in response to our decision to trust in Him.

Trusting Within Hardships

This principle is one theme in my book, *Four in the Garden*. Creator tries to impress upon Cherished, the protagonist, that every hardship is an opportunity to trust in Creator. By trusting, Cherished grows in his knowledge of Creator by experiencing Him within those hardships.

In 2004, I suffered a terrible back injury. I couldn't stand or sit because of excruciating pain. I spent most of my day in bed. At other times, I would lie on the sofa if I could manage the trip from the bedroom. On one occasion, my friend, John, visited me while I was lying on the couch. During that visit, I learned that he had been suffering from abdominal pain for three months. I felt compelled to pray for him and asked him to move closer so I could place my hand on his stomach. After a minute or two, I stopped praying and removed my hand. He said his pain was completely gone. He wept from gratitude and amazement. I wept with him.

The Rewards of Risk

Had I not risked to pray for John, God wouldn't have healed him that day. I was in tremendous pain during his visit. I could have focused on myself and not have considered offering to pray for him. But I stepped out in trust and faith, not knowing if God would heal him. God surprised both of us.

I suppose I could have been jealous because I was in greater need of healing than John, but I wasn't jealous at all. I had learned a few things about God from that event. I learned that God is compassionate. I learned that God heals. I needed to be reminded of those things right then. The greatest lesson I learned that day is that God can use me when I am at my lowest point. When I was disabled and in pain, God used me. When I was most in need of healing, God used me to heal. That is a profound lesson in giving, receiving and God's timing.

My healing wasn't instantaneous like John's. It came slowly, over the course of many months. But I took comfort in knowing God as a compassionate healer. So, by taking risks with God, God makes Himself real to us. We come to know God as He reveals Himself to us in response to our trust in Him. By faith, we step into the unknown, and He meets us there to make Himself known.

Getting Out of Our Boat

The story of Jesus walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33) seems to center more on Peter than on Jesus. Jesus' disciples were in a boat fighting rough weather at night when they saw Jesus walking on the water toward them. On seeing Jesus, Peter asked for permission to come out to Jesus on the water. Peter walked on the water for a short time, but started sinking when he became afraid. At that point, Jesus took hold of him to keep him from sinking and brought him into the boat (verse 31). His experience of Jesus was more dramatic than the other disciples because he took a risk and got out of the boat. Because of that event, all of them were convinced that Jesus was God's Son (verse 33). But Peter learned so much more. He learned firsthand that Jesus could empower him to do the impossible. Of more importance, he learned that Jesus would take hold of him if he ever found himself sinking or afraid.

If we play it safe and stay in our boat, we won't encounter God. To the degree we risk is the degree we experience God. God wants us to know Him, but He waits for us to get out of our safety zone and step toward Him in faith and trust. I challenge you to trust God more. If you take that risk, He will engage you and surprise you.

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