Commitment to Others

BE ONE
Essential Engagement

BETHANY CHURCH

Commitment to Others
Essential Engagement: Commitment to Others

Over the next few weeks we will learn about the two parts of Essential Engagement:

1. Commitment to Others
2. Commitment to Mission

Next Steps:
1. Watch Essential Engagement videos: click on the BE ONE ESSENTIALS page at bethanychurch.com
2. Read Essential Engagement Study Guide
3. Discuss in a group or one-to-one
4. Come to church next Sunday
In the very first chapters of the Bible, we are introduced to the importance of relationships. God does not just create one person. He creates a family, men and women who reproduce children in their image, so that together they reflect the image of God. It was a good plan. In fact, God says His creation is “very good”. Genesis 1:31

As we learned in our Essential Truths series, however, sin tore this good plan apart, introducing brokenness into our human relationships. Fear, hurt, injustice, adultery, murder, lust, greed – all emerges from the life of sin into which we are all born.

Nevertheless, God has not given up on His good plan. He sent His Son to die on a cross so that our relationship with God could be restored, and because of that salvation, our relationships with others can also be restored. In Christ, through the power of His Spirit, we can overcome the brokenness that sin has introduced.

To discover these restored relationships, however, we must act. We must carry the mercy and grace of our loving God into a broken and discouraged world. We must engage with others. We must become part of the loving transformation that God desires for all His people. In this session, therefore, we examine our motivation to engage with others, and, in the following session, we discuss concrete ways to engage effectively with one another, as God intends.

1. Learning to Love

**A Loving Commandment**

First, then, let's discuss our motivation to engage, and we begin with our Lord, Himself. Jesus does not leave us any wiggle room when it comes to loving others. It is the second of His two great commandments. He says:

“...(Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-40

The apostle John goes even further when he states categorically:

“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.” 1 John 3:10

The line is clear. If we don't love others, then we are not His children. Quite a sobering statement, don't you think?

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1 Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of the Bible in this document are taken from The New International Version (2011); Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
Loving Actions

So, let’s assume that we take this command seriously, and we truly want to obey it. How then do we actually love others? What is a true, biblical understanding of love?

Consider this well-known passage from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.
1 Corinthians 13:4-8

In this passage, we find that love is primarily an action word. While our culture tends to view love as an emotion or a feeling, Biblical love emphasizes actions and deeds. We show our love by what we do. The apostle John says this clearly:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” 1 John 3:16-18

The force of this command cannot be avoided. We cannot speak of loving others while we ignore them, lie to them or hurt them. By God’s grace, as we become more devoted followers of Jesus, we learn to turn our loving intentions and words into loving decisions and deeds.

Loving Transformation

If we are willing, then, to take up this challenge and command to love, we can expect real change to occur. God’s love is a powerful love that flows through us. The apostle Peter says:

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”
1 Peter 4:8.

Love covers sins because it is strong enough to free us from our own fears and selfishness. It frees us to forgive. It frees us to worship God fully and serve others faithfully. This sort of strong, transforming love is a staple of God’s kingdom. Recall the words of Jesus:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus changed the world through His sacrifice of love, and He calls us to follow His lead. We are to learn the art and discipline of selfless living, so that we can introduce a self-centered world to the only God who can heal them.
2. Learning to Encourage

1. Our Need to Encourage

And the world definitely needs to hear this loving message. In a culture that constantly seeks to wear us out and beat us down, we must demonstrate our love concretely by encouraging one another. The writer to the Hebrews says:

“See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”


Note that encouragement is an urgent need. We need it “daily”. We need it “Today!” Later, this same writer continues his instruction:

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Hebrews 10:24-25

Notice that the writer instructs us to meet together as a means of encouragement. This is what we do on Sundays and on other days when we gather to worship. Worshipping together encourages us by focusing our hearts and minds on the truths expressed in singing, prayer, preaching and fellowship. This regular gathering is essential for our spiritual health. We need this weekly, spiritual injection of hope and truth to inoculate us against the discouragement and lies that permeate our culture. On Sundays, we pack the house with cheerleaders, as we all encourage one another to victory in Jesus.

2. Our Opportunities to Encourage

In addition to these large meetings of encouragement, we must also encourage one another on a more personal level. In more intimate settings, we can open up our stories to encourage others in their story. In these conversions, God's Spirit uses our experiences to encourage others. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

God never wanted the suffering that we must face. Suffering is a result of sin, the brokenness and rebelliousness in our world. But God is stronger than our suffering. He can redeem our suffering, just as He used the suffering of Christ to heal us. By sharing our journey through our version of suffering, we encourage others who are walking through their own painful journeys. We are living evidence that God can heal our pain and can take us from despair into joy.

And often we will find that our willingness to open up about this journey will actually contribute to our own healing. As God uses us to help others, we develop a stronger trust in His ability to heal, strengthen and comfort us.
3. Learning to Serve

1. The Glory of Serving

To love and encourage effectively, then, we must learn to serve. Serving, however, is not easily learned in our culture. We tend to celebrate and honor leaders, while we are tempted to look down on servants. And yet, the Bible constantly praises the heart of a servant. Jesus Himself models this value. Consider these words from the apostle Paul:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Philippians 2:3-8

Jesus, who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords demonstrates the fact that strong people can serve. In fact, Jesus turns this entire culture upside down. Those who lead must lead by serving, and only those who serve can truly lead. It is only by serving that we have a share in the glory of Christ.

On one occasion, Jesus must set His disciples straight on this point. The Gospel of Luke tells us that:

“A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.’” Luke 22:24-27

From this passage we see a fundamental principle in God’s kingdom. Authority in this kingdom is given for one and only purpose, to serve one another.

2. The Honor of Serving

From the very beginning of my time as pastor, I have tried to sign every email with the same closing: “In His Service, Dirk”. I don’t copy and paste this phrase. I type it every time. I do this on purpose, to remind myself every time that it is a privilege and an honor to serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There is no higher calling. And this same Lord and King has called me to serve His people, and that too is an honor.

In the final days of Jesus’s ministry here on earth, He deliberately took the low place of a servant and washed the feet of His disciples. When He had finished this service, He explained His actions:

“When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ‘You call me “Teacher” and “Lord,” and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one
another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” John 13:12-17

Here is the final motivation to serve. You will be blessed if you serve. God honors those who serve.

Conclusion

These, then, are the primary motivations that inspire our Commitment to Others. Based on Christ’s command and His example, we must learn to love, encourage and serve. In our next session, then, we will discuss some practical suggestions for completing this part of our Essential Engagement. Until then, we pray that God will lead you even deeper in your relationship with Him. For more information, please visit us at bethanychurch.com.
Welcome to another session in our Essential Engagement series. In this series, we are learning that discipleship is not just about “me and Jesus.” It must always be about “us and Jesus”.

In our last session, we introduced the Commitment to Others that Jesus requires. We discussed our motivation for this commitment, our call to love, encourage and serve others. In this session, then, we will build on this foundation. We offer some practical guidelines for engaging in this essential Commitment to Others.

1. A Commitment to Church

One Spiritual Organism

We begin with our commitment to fellow-believers, whom scriptures call the “body of Christ.” The Apostle Paul uses this phrase when he compares the church to our physical, human body. He says:

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

As in our society, Paul’s culture was radically divided by religion, nationality, gender, social status and many other factors. God seeks to break down these walls of division, especially among His people. We who follow Him must model the spiritual unity that He desires for the world.

Paul’s image of the body points to the vital unity of this spiritual organism. While we have many differences among us, we are united by One Holy Spirit, one Divine Spiritual Breath breathing through us as His Spiritual Body. With this Divine Breath flowing through us, then, our differences no longer divide us. In fact, they make us stronger, like the different parts of our body make us stronger. Expanding his analogy, Paul says:

“...God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” 1 Corinthians 12:24-26

The bottom line is that we all need one another in this body. Together, as we each do our part, the body is stronger and more effective in the world.

A United, Physical Witness

On a spiritual level, then, God is working to unite a diverse people to do His work throughout the world. We call this spiritually united, but diverse people, “the church”. For us to be an effective witness, however, we cannot just be a

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church in theory. The church must take on flesh. This diverse people must assume an organized, physical form. This spiritual organism must embrace real people with real bodies, living in particular places and particular times. In these organized, local communities of real people, scattered throughout the world, God's spiritual organism becomes a transforming, physical force in our world.

Sometimes you hear people say that they are “spiritual”, but they don't believe in ‘organized religion’. On one level, I get their point. Organized religion has not always acted as faithfully as it should. We churches too often demonstrate the fact that we are not perfect. Our local church bodies certainly have their share of blemishes and flaws.

God, in His power, grace and mercy, however, has chosen to work through imperfect bodies, imperfect people and imperfect organizations to achieve His perfect objectives. Recall what Paul says to the church of Corinth:

“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.’” 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, see Jeremiah 9:23-24.

God is revealing His perfect, healing plan to a broken world though us, as broken and imperfect as we are, as living witness to His transforming power and glory.

So, then, we need to engage boldly and decisively with this imperfect, organized group of people, if we are going to do God's work. We must pool the time, talent and treasure that God has entrusted to each of us to do His work together. That is God's will and His way.

Let me ask you, then, what imperfect group of people are you engaged with. What local church do you belong to? Here at Bethany Church, we offer Church Membership Classes as a concrete step for this level of engagement. We invite you to become part of the physical force of real change in our local communities. Become a member. Engage with us. That's where all the fun is!

2. A Commitment to Family

1. A Parent's Responsibility

As we meet together, then, as a local body of Christ, we immediately encounter multiple generations. Our essential commitment to others requires our commitment to these generations. We call this a commitment to family.

In the Law of Moses, we read this commandment for God's people:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them
on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Like everything else the LORD gives to us, our children belong to Him as well. They are entrusted to us to raise them up in “the training and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4) Note the way in which God wants our home life to be a learning environment for these children. Everything we do -- sitting, walking, lying down and getting up -- should be a model for our children as to how they ought to live. We are therefore instructed to saturate our home with reminders of God's truth, binding these truths to the modern equivalent of our door posts. (I am not sure what this might look like, but it probably has something to do with cell phones!)

The Church’s Responsibility

While parents, then, occupy the primary role of mentoring generations, other members of the church must likewise play a role. We live in a broken world where fathers and mothers are not always able to be the role models that God intends them to be. Some have passed away, and some, for all sorts of reasons, are no longer in the picture. And some, unfortunately, are simply not up to the challenge.

Throughout the scriptures, therefore, God shows a special concern for those who must live without a nurturing parent. In the language of the Bible, these children are often called the “fatherless”, but clearly all those without a loving parent in the picture are in mind.

King David, for example, writes:

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing....” Psalm 68:5-6

The New Testament continues this theme. The Apostle James writes:

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” James 1:27

God’s repeated concern for those without loving parents must be reflected in our larger family of God. Even those of us without children of our own can and must be engaged in this ministry of God in one way or another.

At Bethany Church we offer several ways to participate in this commitment to families. A few of these ways include:

• Growing Spiritually as a Parent
• Serving in our Children’s Ministries
• Serving in our Student Ministries
• Serving as a foster or adoptive parent
• Serving as a Mentor
• Praying faithfully for families

Since this commitment to families lies so close to the heart of God, every disciple must consider prayerfully how to engage in this essential ministry of Christ’s body.
3. A Commitment to Care

There is one more area of commitment that we must mention. In our previous session, we emphasized the fact that our love must take the form of action. As a local body of Christ, we must provide concrete ways to meet the needs of those who live among and around us. As we engage in these loving actions, we should keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. Discerning Real Need

First, we must discern real need, and minister to that need effectively. Paul reminds the church of Galatia to:

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”
Galatians 6:2

In our last session, we referred to the Great Commandment that Jesus Himself gives, telling us that all the Law and Prophets hang on the commands to love God and others as we love ourselves. (Matthew 22:37-40) The church must fight the self-serving, self-interested and self-obsessed forces in our culture. We must come alongside those who are hurting and share their burdens.

And, yet, because our culture is so broken, we must discern real from imagined need. Here we remember the instructions of Paul:

For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.’ 2 Thessalonians 3:10

In other words, we must take care of one another without indulging one another. We must meet real need without enabling destructive behaviors. By working together, we can effectively pool our resources to make a real difference where real need exists.

2. Having Tough Conversations

This responsibility to discern real from imagined need raises another practical guideline in caring for one another. Sometimes this care requires tough conversations. When Paul tells the church at Galatia to “bear one another’s burdens’, he is making this very point. Look at the entire passage in context:

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load.” Galatians 6:1-5

Sometimes we have the unfortunate responsibility to challenge someone who is crossing lines that can damage themselves or others. In those instances, we must act, but, as Paul warns, we must do so “gently” and with humility. We must admit that we could just as easily be on the other side of these conversations.
Jesus gives us some instructions on how to have these tough conversations. He says:

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” Matthew 18:15-17

Here we learn that there is a progression in the way we have these conversations. We begin by challenging someone individually, and then, we take others with us. In fact, if the situation requires it, sometimes we bring another person with us during the first conversation, especially if safety or angry responses are concerns. If situations cannot be handled in these private conversations, however, we pursue the matter farther by getting a church leader involved. Depending on the situation, we can get a Ministry Leader, a Pastor or an Elder to assist us in the process.

If none of this works, however, we must regard them now as we would anyone else outside the church, as someone to be loved, encouraged, and challenged to enter Christ’s family the way that we all enter it, by bowing our knee to the one Lord and Savior, who is Head of this body.

**Grieving and Celebrating Together**

Our last commitment to care, then, emerges from this sincere desire to be united under this one Lord, grieving and celebrating together as His family. Paul tells the church in Rome to:

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” Romans 12:15

By walking with others as they grieve the losses in their life, we share God’s comfort with them. As Paul reminds the Corinthians:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

At Bethany Church, we offer a variety of caring opportunities to engage in this work of comfort, ministries like:

- Celebrate Recovery
- DivorceCare
- GriefShare
- Stephen Ministry
- and several others

We invite everyone to prayerfully consider whether they can join the call to encourage one another through one of these ministries.

Because, in the end, we believe that God wants us to rejoice and celebrate with one another. Paul even makes it a command for the church at Philippi. He says:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Philippians 4:4
He also tells the church at Ephesus:

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 5:18-20

Paul doesn't believe the world ought to have all the fun. We don't have to get drunk to have a party! We celebrate here, every week. Our joy is evident to everyone who attends. Every Sunday we come together to celebrate what God is doing in and through us. So, let me encourage you. Come on Sunday! Don't miss the party!

Conclusion

These then are a few practical suggestions for keeping our Commitment to Others. Our Essential Engagement requires a commitment to church, to families and to care. But God also requires that we engage outside the church, to those who have not yet found or returned to their Heavenly Father. Our Essential Engagement there also requires a Commitment to Mission, and we will address this topic in our next session. Until then, however, we pray that God will lead you even deeper in your relationship with Him. For more information, please visit us at bethanychurch.com.
Commitment to Others Discussion Guide

PART 1

Opening

Why are quality relationships so difficult to maintain in today's culture?

Going Deeper

1. Learning to Love

✓ A Loving Commandment
  • Read Matthew 22:37-40. How is our love for God and our love for one another inter-related?

✓ Loving Actions
  • If 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 describes “true love,” how good a “lover” are you, based on God’s definition?

✓ Loving Transformation
  • What is the most effective way to forgive someone who has sinned against you?
  • What freedom and power comes to us when we forgive someone else?

2. Learning to Encourage

✓ Our Need to Encourage
  • Why is it necessary to encourage one another?
  • Read Hebrews 10:24-25. Why must we meet together on a regular basis?

✓ Our Opportunities to Encourage
  • How can the challenges in our own life function as opportunities to encourage others?
  • Share a time in your life when you were able to encourage someone else, and when someone else encouraged you.

3. Learning to Serve

✓ The Glory of Serving
  • Read Philippians 2:3-8. How does Jesus transform our culture’s view of servants?

✓ The Honor of Serving
  • Read John 13:12-17. What does Jesus’ example of foot washing teach us about serving one another?

Next Steps

• Write a paragraph describing how you can be a better “lover” according to God’s definition of love.

• Encourage at least three different people this week, and record those acts in a journal.
Opening

What are the primary reasons why people avoid becoming a part of a local church body?

Going Deeper

1. A Commitment to Church
   - One Spiritual Organism
     - Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-14. How does Paul use the breath in our human bodies to illustrate the role of the Holy Spirit in the church?
     - Read 1 Corinthians 12:15-26. How does God ensure that our diverse spiritual body remains united?
   - A United, Physical Witness
     - Why is it important to join a local, organized group of believers?

2. A Commitment to Family
   - A Parent’s Responsibility
     - Why are families so important in God’s plan?
     - What do parents need most in order to raise their children in accordance with God’s will?
   - The Church’s Responsibility
     - How do we as a church respond to all the different forms of family that we find in today’s culture?

3. A Commitment to Care
   - Discerning the Real Need
     - Read Galatians 6:2 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10. How do we find a balance between ministering to genuine need and encouraging others to take responsibility for their own well-being?
   - Having Tough Conversations
     - What are the consequences for failing to have tough conversations when they become necessary?
     - What scriptural guidelines are we given for having these conversations in a God-honoring way?
   - Grieving and Celebrating Together
     - Why is it necessary to grieve our losses together?
     - Why is it necessary to celebrate together?

Next Steps

• Write a paragraph describing why it is important for you to be a part of a local body of believers.
• What concrete steps can you take to support other families in their effort to raise their children well?
• Don’t forget this week to “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” Romans 12:15