

What does it mean to 'engage with Scripture'?

The "Bible in the Life of the Church" initiative has as part of its aim 'to motivate a deeper engagement with the Bible across the Communion'. But what does it is 'engagement with Scripture' – just another name for reading the Bible or Bible Study? Or is it something more intentional and profound in both the activity of engagement and what might result from it?

Phil Towner, Dean of the [NIDA Institute for Biblical Scholarship](#) the research, scholarship and service arm of American Bible Society has sought to define, in a comprehensive way, what engagement with Scripture is and what might result from such activity. What follows is based on Phil's work for which this project is profoundly thankful. BILC has added some questions at the end of this paper to offer a focus for further discussion on what it means to 'engage with Scripture'

So what is Engagement with Scripture?

It is an identity-forming, learning experience, which is:

- rooted in the Scriptures
- involving the whole person,
- in which the Word of God, mediated in culture, restores, renews and equips people-in-community,
- enabling them to embody Christ authentically in the world as His agents of reconciliation and social transformation.

Commentary:

Engagement is a learning process aimed at leading people into a holistic experience of growth and change that brings together theory, action and behaviour.

Engagement has as its ultimate goal nurturing and enriching the experiential and relational knowledge of God within a community of faith and full participation within that community.

Engagement involves the whole person: the heart (the emotional and the empathetic); the mind (volition, values, commitments and intellect); the imagination, the soul, and the body (the senses and connectivity to the material world).

Engagement's fundamental ingredient is God's communication of love and redemption, and of His design that human beings are created to live in relationship with Him. This Word was communicated through Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate (John 1:1-5), and in the Scriptures. Yet the Word of God is also communicated through multiple other channels and technologies, such as liturgy, iconography, art, dance, poetry, music and hymnody, architecture, stained glass windows and observance of the Stations of the Cross.



Engagement must recognize the cultural location and context of people, as well as the fact that human existence is, by divine definition, existence within culture. Just as through incarnation the Son of God entered fully into human culture and history (John 1; Phil 2:5-7; 1 John 1)

Engagement's goals express the Scripture-based descriptions of the Spirit's work, applying the benefits of Christ's redemptive death (Romans 6; 1 Pet 2:24) and powerful resurrection, to situations of human brokenness thereby generating healing, producing newness of life, renewed thinking, value shift, truth-telling and truth-living and training for service (2 Cor 5:16-21), which includes an appreciation for God's creation and our responsibility to protect it (Gen 1:28; 2:15; Mic 6:8; Rev 20–21). The Spirit produces such effects in people continuously through the nourishment of the Word of God, worship, life in community, and service on behalf of others (Romans 8; Ephesians 4:20-24).

Engagement understands that God created humankind not only to be in relationship with Him but also with one another so seeks to employ approaches that foster individuals-in-community (Acts 2:44-47; Eph 4:1-16; 1 Corinthians 12).

Engagement aims to facilitate meaningful encounters with the Word of God through which Christians-in-community and in society become the embodiment of Christ (Gal 4:19 "that Christ be formed in you"). It understands that to become "the embodiment of Christ" means to live as agents of God's redemption in the world. In the face of human brokenness, engagement equips people to be God's instruments of reconciliation and healing (of all kinds) and of the transformation of social structures and values.

Questions for further discussion:

1. From your experience of engaging with Scripture, which parts of this definition are important for you? Why have they been important?
2. Are there aspects of engaging with Scripture that you would wish to add to this definition?
3. How might you describe what it means to 'engage with Scripture' in one shorter sentence?

