



Immanuel: God With Us

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As some of you know, our model of healing is based on an integrative understanding of the human being – that is, we can speak of mind, body, and spirit, as if they are separate parts within us, but we are actually whole, unified beings, and what affects us in one “part” affects all the others. Healing a wound in the mind will change the chemistry of the brain. Caring for the brain and body can strengthen the mind and spirit.

Because of this integrative model of healing, we have found it very useful to study the process of healing from a number of different starting points. Karl, with his medical and scientific background, has studied research works from neurology and cognitive psychology, as well as other areas of psychology, and of course, psychiatry. We have also read numerous works coming from the spiritual or psychotherapeutic angles. Each of these sources we have tried to evaluate through the Christian world view given to us in the Scriptures, and then to pick and choose what resonates with Truth. And **from** each of these sources, the Lord has given us significant insights about how He designed human beings to work, and how healing works.

Today, we want to do something which is not unusual in the church generally, but is somewhat unusual for us. We more often start from a **clinical** or **scientific** or **practical** place, and teach about how we can cooperate with God’s working there. **Today**, however, we want to start from **the Bible** – unpack some truth we find there, and then see something of where this particular Truth impacts our healing journeys. We also hope, to illuminate and lift up the **role** and **function** of truth such as might be presented in a sermon, of all things, in moving us toward deep transformative healing.

We will do that by presenting a case study example in which this Biblical truth, which I’m about to present to you, played a significant part. So let’s begin.

We want to focus in on “Immanuel,” the name which means “God With Us.” Given the nature of what we do – which is so focused on inviting Jesus’ presence into the painful places of our hearts, you can understand why we’d have a special interest in this Biblical topic!

Really, you can make a good case that the whole Bible is about “God with us.” It’s stories of God coming to people, of people living with God, or by contrast, without Him; It’s God’s interactions with individuals, families, tribes, and nations.

We learn about “God with Us” from lots of examples in the Old Testament. When God calls to Moses through the burning bush, and summons him to go to Pharaoh to demand the release of the Hebrew people, Moses says, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” And God replies – before He offers Moses any other help, such as Aaron, or a miraculous transforming rod – God says, “I will be with you...” (Ex 3:11-12). All Moses really needed to succeed was for God to be with him.

Later in history, King Jehoshaphat of Judah wins an impossible battle against his enemies, and

his army doesn't have to fight at all. As one of the Lord's prophets at that time said to him: “Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you.” (2 Ch 20:17) And there are many more examples of God being with people, and the difference His presence made. But don't worry, we're not going to try to survey the entire Bible here this afternoon.

Let's go back to our focus, the name “Immanuel,” God with us.

To me it's as if the Holy Spirit is sending up a flare and saying, look here, so you don't miss something really important about the nature of God being with you.

The first appearance in the Bible of the name Immanuel is in Isaiah chapter 7.



For the sake of time, I put some of the text on the screen, but I'm not going to read the whole text here aloud. For your information, and individual study later, I refer you to Isaiah, chapter 7 through 8:10.

Here's the situation: *That* Immanuel is a baby boy, whose birth is a sign from God to King Ahaz of Judah. It's about 735 B.C.

Ahaz had inherited a pretty bad situation, and currently had two other nations – Israel, the northern kingdom of God's people, and Aram (also sometimes called Syria) – threatening him with their armies. And they weren't just threatening his kingdom generally, which would be bad enough, of course, they were threatening him personally. They wanted someone who would go along with their plan of revolt against Assyria, the big power of the day, who was making them pay heavy tribute.

Isaiah had already revealed that the kings of Israel and Aram wanted to depose Ahaz, who was of the house and lineage of David, and put in someone else's son as king.

In this first Immanuel appearance, God gives a very understandably worried government ruler the reassurance of His presence. There is a lot of debate as to exactly *who* this child is. Of course, you may be thinking, “We all know that that text is a messianic prophesy – it refers to Jesus.” And while I would agree with that, and we'll get to that later, this prophesy, like many, appears to have both an immediate meaning, in the life and times of those to whom it was originally spoken, and a future meaning.

So, looking at the immediate context of what this word from the Lord might have meant to Isaiah and Ahaz, many scholars agree that “Immanuel” here is probably Ahaz's own child – a royal child, born to Ahaz's own young wife in his household. And by the time the child Immanuel is born and is old enough to eat curds and honey, God says, the kings of Israel and Aram will be dead, and the threat from them gone.

And what about this Immanuel, God With Us?

He is only a baby, but he is an evidence of God's faithful presence with the house of David. God had promised to establish David's house and his kingdom forever – you can read all about that in the books of 1st and 2nd Samuel. But it sure wasn't looking good for Ahaz and the house of David

at that point. However, God himself chooses this sign, and tells Ahaz that He is still there, still faithful. Though Ahaz doesn't see the big picture, **if he could really receive** this sign of Immanuel, he could **rest** in the **knowledge** that God is there, and His plans will ultimately be carried out.

Of course, Ahaz might have liked it better if God's sign was a great deliverer to arise out of the east, whose name shall be called “He who blows your enemies to smithereens and makes you number one in the popularity polls.” After all, though history showed the prophesy was true about the threat from Israel and Aram disappearing, Judah still suffered greatly.

In chapter 8, interestingly, there is a further prophesy mentioning Immanuel. Isaiah reports that God addresses Immanuel, telling how the nation of Assyria would eventually devastate Judah because they rejoiced not in the Lord but in the power of other nations – and **yet**, God also reveals that Judah's enemies' plans would ultimately fail.

And why? Because “God is with us.” And that phrase “God is with us,” there in Isaiah 8:10, is the Hebrew “immanuel,” but not as a proper name, just as the phrase itself.

So we see a picture of God reaching out with His presence to Judah – to the house of David – trying to help them understand the situation in which they found themselves, or have gotten themselves stuck in, and assuring them that His presence also guarantees His faithfulness to fulfill His promises. But, by the time of the next Immanuel appearance, we might call it, there was no king of the house of David who was ruling Judah or Israel or anything.

The next (and only other) appearance of the name Immanuel in the Bible is recorded by Matthew.

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, ‘God with us.’” (Matt 1:23)

Here Matthew is essentially quoting from Isaiah 7:14. Matthew knows of the account of the sign of Immanuel which God gave to Ahaz and the house of David through the prophet Isaiah, and he recognizes in it a further prophetic meaning. The young woman Isaiah prophesied about foreshadowed not just any young woman, but the virgin Mary, who would conceive a child, and that child would be called “Immanuel” because he really was God, With Them.

And so when it looked like the first Immanuel reassurance of God's faithfulness to David – and all that that meant, of establishing a Kingdom which glorified God – had lost its power, like an expired warrantee, it emerges in a new form, quietly, seen only by a few at first, but becomes much bigger and ever so much better and broader and more all-encompassing than Ahaz or Isaiah or even old David himself could ever have imagined.

God himself takes on human form, and Joseph and Mary, both of the house of David, witness His beginning as a little baby. So much more than a sign – this time God didn't send a messenger with wise counsel, or even one who could accurately foretell coming political events. **He came himself.**

Paul describes it in his letter to the church at Philippi, saying that Jesus,

*“being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,*

being made in human likeness.” (Philippians 2:6-7)

And we all know the story of this Immanuel appearance – the familiar Christmas story – God incarnate, God in the flesh, shook up Mary and Joseph’s plans. They said “Yes” to God having really no idea where it would all lead, and yet... I think that very same attitude of heart... the one that is listening for God, knows that God is both love and truth, and therefore is willing to surrender to God, guaranteed that in the end, they would say “It was all worth it.”

I can imagine them thinking, towards the end of their lives: “We had no idea what was going to happen – of the heights of glory, and the depths of grief we would experience – but it was all worth it. How blessed are we that God drew us in to his plan at the time of his walking this very Earth. After all, He didn’t have to come. But our Jesus, our Immanuel, *chose* to go where we *had* to go.”

Unfortunately, or so it seems at first glance, this second Immanuel didn’t seem to have the power program that some of the heroes of the faith in the Old Testament had. I mean, he did miracles and all, but Moses did that – and Moses also had all the people following him. In fact, when some rebelled, the ground opened up and swallowed them. Needless to say, the re-offending rate was very low.

Jesus, by contrast, had big crowds like him sometimes, but then they turned on him, and instead of a miraculously won battle, like Jehoshaphat’s, he got beaten, spat upon, publically made a mockery of, and then crucified. And even his resurrection was (and is) doubted by many.

And yet the Spirit is saying that *this man* is “Immanuel,” God with us. And how important is this God-with-Us concept to God? God says, “My *name* is ‘God with us’.”

And there is a kind of power that this Immanuel, Jesus, has that none of the previous men and women, those heroes of the faith who walked with God had. **He has the power to always be with us.**

The very last words that Matthew records of Jesus are: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” His claim is clear: He is *still* God With Us. But what does “Immanuel” mean now? ...and if He is with us always, why doesn’t it always feel like that?

Personally, I’m still waiting for the day when I have one of the grand and glorious experiences of God appearing to me – or perhaps He sends an angel – I believe other people who’ve said they’ve had them. I’m also not one who has had dramatic emotional visions, even on the inner “screen” of my mind, *showing* me Immanuel in my life. But Immanuel has still come to me, and made himself known to me.

One experience happened during our visit to Hawaii at the end of 2004 (we were actually asked to speak at a conference there! Isn’t God good?). It happened while we were taking a hike in the rain forest. Under other circumstances, this hike would have been a great joy to us. We both really enjoy nature study, and, fortunately for me, I get to bring along my walking encyclopedia of nature information – Karl – when I hike, so we get to appreciate many of the treasures of God’s creation which may go hidden to less-informed eyes.

Unfortunately, Karl was still getting over some sort of flu bug, and wasn’t completely back to his usual self – but he still wanted to go do something rather than keep lying around. Also, after we

were a mile or so out, it turned out to be very rainy. These things were, well, a bit of a damper, but wouldn't have been too bad, had the trail been what we expected when we looked at the map on the sign at the beginning. There was a loop that looked to be several miles long, which eventually wound its way back to the starting place. That looked like a good option, so we had set out.

The first part of the trail was actually almost a paved sidewalk, and it was only drizzling. Eventually we came to the end of the paved part, and the trail plunged into the jungle in earnest. It was clearly marked, but was rocky and getting increasingly muddy and slick due to the now steadily increasing rain. And the mosquitos (some of God's most amazing creatures!) still found ways to bite us, between rain drops, despite the fact that we were coated with DEET. We held our hands over the tops of our binoculars, to keep them from getting water inside.

The rain was now constant, varying alternately between quite heavy, and torrential downpour. At this point, we were already looking forward to getting to the end of the trail, and back to our car, back to our lodging, and being warm and dry!

When we estimated that we were about three-quarters of the way around the loop of the trail, we suddenly had to make an abrupt halt. We had come to an impassable river. Perhaps there was supposed to be some kind of bridge. Or perhaps in a different, drier season of the year, one could walk across it on protruding stones. It wasn't that wide – maybe 20 feet – but too wide to jump across, and much too rough to risk wading across. I'd call it “white water” except that it was brown with mud; it looked like it was at flood stage, and it was moving very fast. And it was impossible to tell how deep it was. After a few moments of disheartening assessment, we turned around. There was nothing to do but go back.

So we turned around and began slogging our way back.

We've been out about two hours by now, and it crossed our minds that dark comes very suddenly in the tropics, and we really wanted to be out of the jungle while it was still light. Well, we came to a trail sign (not the original one, but one we had passed on the outbound journey) and discovered from that, that there were actually two routes back from that point. The second one looked a bit shorter than the one on which we'd come first (how many have fallen for **that?**), so we decided to head back on that one.

As we were squishing our way over this trail, which turned out to be more low-lying and much muddier than the other, a thought came to mind. I remembered two other walks that Karl and I had taken, in which we'd been caught in the rain. Both of those walks had been at home in Evanston. We were doing our usual exercise by walking from our house to the lake, up around Northwestern University's lagoon, and back again.

The first time, we were only a mile from home, and it was quite a warm day, when the downpour hit. We were quickly soaked, but Karl said, “We'll be fine. It's warm, and we'll be home soon.”

The second time it happened, we were more like two and a half miles from home, and it was a cooler day. The storm was also rougher. The rain was torrential, the wind was so strong that trees were bending over alarmingly, and the rain was stinging against our faces, because it was blowing almost completely horizontally, as opposed to falling *down*. Again, though, Karl's assessment was we should just keep going, rather than try to find some place to run for cover. Although it was cooler, we were generating enough heat of our own because of our fast pace,

and because we were carrying weights, and so if we didn't tarry, but kept up the pace straight for home, we'd be fine.

And sure enough, we were.

Well, the way I most frequently experience Immanuel is having a sense in my spirit, an impression perhaps, that feels like it is not just me. And it feels like it has the aroma of love and truth to it, rather than fear or condemnation – interestingly, even if it is an impression of conviction of something I'm doing wrong. In that way, the Lord had spoken to me about those two previous walks in the rain. It wasn't with audible words or any dramatic visions, but was a sense in my spirit, that there was a meaning, a message the Lord had for us, beyond just the obvious “We got caught in the rain and got all wet.”

And the message had been something like this: “This walk is like your life is now, and will be, even more so in the future. You don't have control of storms that hit you sometimes, and you'll get soaked, and be uncomfortable. It won't be what you had been expecting or wanting. Sometimes, the storms around you, and that you walk through, will at first be frightening. But I am with you. Nothing has gone wrong. Stick together, keep walking, and you'll be fine.”

The feeling was **not** that the storm was an illusion, but that its damage would not be permanent, so long as we stayed together and kept going. And that word had been a comfort to me at that time, because shortly thereafter we did go through some stressful times – “storms” in some relationships, hard things happening that were out of our control and definitely made us uncomfortable – and yet I knew that God was with us... that nothing had gone wrong in the cosmos – He was not asleep on the job, and forgetting to protect us. I was much less afraid than I might have been. And we stayed together, and we kept on going, and we were fine.

So, back to the rain forest. Immanuel was there too: The thought of those previous rainy hikes, and the word of the Lord about them came to me, and I shared it with Karl. The impression in my spirit now was: “The setting here makes it more intense (obstacles forced us to change our planned route, we really could get lost and have to spend the night in the jungle, we were muddy and getting bitten by mosquitoes, it would be easier to get injured, Karl might get sicker...), but that previous word applies here too. Stay together, keep at it. You'll be fine.” I could feel a sense of hope and of relief. Oh yes, that's right. God is with us. He's not asleep on the job. In fact, He's actually using this situation to speak to us. OK, I'm listening.

Let me summarize here what happened after that –

Believe it or not, we came to **another** dead end to the trail, because of a huge fallen tree; and I don't mean just a log on the path... I mean the whole crown of an immense tree completely obliterated seeing anything beyond that point ahead on the trail, and also for some distance to either side of the trail. So, unless we wanted to turn around **again**, we had to go off the trail to try to get around it. After a bit of searching, we thought we had found the trail coming out on the other side of the fallen tree, but after following it for a while, it faded and then disappeared. We realized that we had mistaken some animal path for the official trail, and knew that we would quickly become completely lost unless we turned around and backtracked the entire journey.

And then, to our amazement, I caught a glimpse of the paved trail – maybe 25 feet ahead – barely visible through the jungle. Somehow we had stumbled into a huge shortcut, moments before deciding to turn around and backtrack over miles of muddy, narrow, winding jungle trail.

Oh what a relief! It wasn't too long after that, that we got back to the road, our parked car, and the place we were staying, and hot baths! And we were fine.

In this case, Immanuel – God being with us – **didn't actually change** the physical circumstances of the rain and the mud and the mosquitos and our scratched feet, but **how I was experiencing** this situation was different. I wasn't scared and miserable anymore. I had that deep down joy-feeling that, “Wow, God actually knows what's happening with me... He cares... and He's here with me.”

It would be great, wouldn't it, if we could always have that sense of Immanuel's presence with us? I mean, that is the truth, according to Scripture, that He “will never leave us or forsake us.”

It's not that it isn't true... but a BIG problem is that often we can't **see** that he's there. The very good news is, that if we **KNOW** and choose to cooperate with the truth of Immanuel – that God is with us, then the things that are blocking our sight can get exposed. And it's much easier to deal with something you can see!

Don't assume God **isn't** with you just because you **feel** like He isn't. But **don't settle** for not feeling it. It's quite likely that some part of your life experience is invisibly, without your knowing it or choosing it, narrowing your vision so that you cannot see Immanuel. So stop and ask the Lord “*What part of my own story* is getting exposed by the fact that I feel like You are absent?” And then ask God to be Immanuel specifically in that part of your own story.

This happened to Karl after we got back from our visit to Hawaii – both having very strong feelings that seemed to say, there is no Immanuel, God is not with you, and the exposing of a part of his own story, and the healing of it, so that he could perceive the Truth of Immanuel, God with him.

A day or two before we left on our trip, we discovered that the moon roof of our car leaked, and there was a small pond in the foot wells. I'm no mechanic, but when I was out doing errands the day before we left, and I heard what sounded like waves lapping against the shore – *inside the car* – I thought “I don't think I should be hearing that.”

Well, Karl bailed and siphoned and sponged out as much as he could before we left, but then the car sat for the two weeks we were gone. When we returned it wouldn't start. Karl checked fuses, the battery, anything he could think of. Finally, we had it towed to the nearby dealer. We suspected that something was wrong with the anti-theft feature of the car – because the remote keys didn't work to open the locks, and even though the battery was fine, the engine didn't crank at all. The starter was completely immobilized. We braced ourselves for the mechanic to tell us that there would need to be some sort of reprogramming of that system that would cost \$500 – who knows.

What actually happened after the mechanics looked at the car, was that they said there was still standing water in the **space underneath the carpet** on the floor of the car. And the **reason** there is so much space **under the carpet** of this car is that the major wiring harness of the car is located there. Under the carpet. In the standing water. And **all** the computer components that **interact** with that wiring harness – all of them had been in standing water by now for **at least three weeks**. “Insurance companies usually total cars when this happens,” the mechanic said, “so I'd recommend that you call your insurance company, get a settlement from them, and start looking for a new car.”

Well, since we only carry liability insurance, we asked “What would it take to fix it?”

Between labor and parts, the mechanic estimated \$7,000.

Shocked hardly begins to explain how we felt. Our roof leaked, and now we should total the car? We had saved up for a long time to get this car, what Consumer Reports rated so highly on reliability and usability, etc. We had been planning for it to be with us for a very long time.

We had the car towed *again*, this time away from the dealer, and to the kind haven of our friend’s garage, and Karl began the painstaking process of taking out nearly everything in the driving compartment and drying it out. It seemed the logical first thing to try, but it wasn’t at all reassuring that the car could be fixed. As Karl saw the hundreds of different color wires, grouped into wrapped cables this thick, and the computer board in a black box that had been completely submerged, and all the many different numbered electrical relays under the dash, he was overwhelmed.

Now let me remind you, as it says in 1st Peter: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (5:8) And our enemy hates that our Immanuel God is with us – and he works hard to keep us from knowing his presence. Note that our enemy **can’t** keep Immanuel **from** us, but he can do a lot to keep us from **knowing** Immanuel is with us. In our experience, it’s not just a simple matter of recognizing “Oh, Jesus is with me.” There’s usually a battle.

For Karl, the battle went like this: Begin trying something to fix the car. Some mixture of feelings of hopelessness, despair, being abandoned and unprotected, being harassed and thwarted, and being vulnerable and unable to protect himself, flooded his mind. In the past, he remained stuck right there, even if he kept working on the problem, and felt bitter and angry, spewing words I won’t repeat, on top of the hopelessness and despair and abandonment and all. This time, however, we had been discussing the Immanuel concept in the Word together, because I was preparing a sermon on it – so something different than before happened. This time, Karl recognized “I do have all these feelings, but they’re not lining up with the truth. The truth is Immanuel, Jesus is with me, and will get me through this somehow, whether or not I can fix the car myself. So even though in my emotions, I want to swear and yell at you, God, for not protecting us from this happening, I choose to recognize the truth that You are here, that you love me, that You do want to help me. I unchoose my accusing You, and I invite you to be here. Would you be with me here, Jesus, *in* all these feelings? ...And what part of *my own story* are these emotions really talking about, anyway?”

And Immanuel responded.

Over and over again throughout the two-week period of working on the car, as Karl held in one hand the truth of Immanuel, and in the other the reality of his overwhelming feelings, he recognized more and more parts of his own story in them.

Like when he was dyslexic in Kindergarten and First Grade and couldn’t learn to read as fast as the other kids... or when he was only two years old and was sent away for several weeks because his mother had mono, and was pregnant... or when he faced aggressive or violent kids in the neighborhood as a child, and was unable to protect himself.

Karl was able to recognize and acknowledge the true roots of his feelings in these memories, and

then he asked Jesus to be Immanuel there, inside those painful places in his heart. And each time, he experienced a piece of healing, and something that had blocked his ability to perceive Immanuel in the present was removed.

By the end of the week, even **before** the happy ending to the story of the car repair, Karl was able to feel and experience Immanuel in a whole new way. In fact, we are convinced – and you can check with Karl on this if you want – that it was **because** he came to the place of being able to perceive Immanuel, God with him, that he was able to think clearly as he analyzed the problem, and to **feel** the subtle prompts of the Spirit here and there, guiding him, in response to our **fervent** prayers (believe me!) that the car would be “resurrected.”

And in the end – it’s much too long a story to tell you all the details of here – but Karl did fix the car. Everything worked but the horn... and later on, he fixed that too! It took a fair amount of his time, but the total out-of-pocket costs in parts and the official service manual for the car, was only \$125.

You may be wondering how this whole car drama was affecting me. Actually, I experienced another Immanuel appearance around it, so I was doing fine.

Remember how I said that on that rain forest hike we were holding our hands over our binoculars to try to keep the water out? Well it didn’t work. Surprise, surprise. After we got back from the hike, we discovered that there was water in the eye-pieces of both of our binoculars.

You can’t see through the water beaded up inside there on the lenses, and you can’t very well use binoculars you can’t see through, so they were spoiled. But, thankfully, Karl found he was able to remove the little screws that held on the eye pieces, and then carefully place each one on the top of a lamp, where they got a gentle heating from the light bulb, and over the course of about three or four days, the water evaporated and cleared the lenses. So we didn’t have them to use for most of the trip, but they did get fixed.

Well, when Karl was going through his journey of being overwhelmed with the car, and before there had been any hopeful signs of it recovering, once again I sensed the Lord impressing a message in my spirit. It was another part of the whole getting-caught-in-the-rain-it’ll-be-OK word. Just like the binoculars that got spoiled but fixed, the car would get fixed. Karl would fix it, perhaps with a mechanic’s help, perhaps not, but either way it wouldn’t cost \$7,000, and it wouldn’t have to be totaled.

So because in this case I didn’t have other feelings – no other parts of my story were making noise in my heart and blocking my perception of Immanuel, I could hear him, and I felt reassured. It’s going to be OK. This also made it much easier for me to be of help to Karl – if I had been getting overwhelmed by deep-rooted painful emotions too, I wouldn’t have been much help for him in praying for his healing along the way.

So, as we asked earlier, **what does it mean**, what does it **look like** to experience Immanuel **now**? What does “God With Us” mean, as the challenges of life happen?

Sometimes when we experience Immanuel, we simply understand our situation differently, and we know that **if we are suffering, we are not alone**, and **it is not without meaning or importance**. We are part of something bigger, because Immanuel is there. Where He goes is important. Where He goes is special.

Our little story is part of **The Big Story** – the story of God and His love and His work and His redemption of humanity. We know we’ll be OK in some way.

And Immanuel’s presence touches the painful places of feeling confused, because He brings Light and Truth; of feeling lost, because He brings direction; of feeling abandoned, because He is with us, and we are no longer alone; of feeling shame and worthlessness, because we know we are **worth** His time and attention.

And brothers and sisters, when we **know** things like that, our spiritual eyes and ears are much more open to cooperate with any **other** kind of helpful action the Lord may want to **DO** for us and with us about our circumstances. I could understand, if you’re going through a rough time, if you said, “The only kind of *Immanuel* I want in my situation is one that is going to **DO** something!” But know this: Immanuel’s presence always does something. Many times when we experience Immanuel, that is the key to God’s *intervening to change* the situation we’re in – to deliver us or redirect us or otherwise help us in a tangible way.

How important is it that we learn to experience and walk in the truth of Immanuel, that “God with Us”?

Well, if you’re concerned about founding your Christian faith on the Bible, then consider again that the whole Bible is trying to tell us that our lives were meant to be lived *with God*, and that life *with God* is possible... and not life with an abstract set of principles far away, but life with **God** as revealed most clearly in Jesus – *the Immanuel*.

In fact, a distinguished group of scholars, including Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, even go so far as to say, in the introduction to a study Bible they prepared, that “the unity of the Bible is discovered in the development of life ‘with God’ as a reality on earth, centered in the person of Jesus. We might call this the *Immanuel Principle* of life.” [From the introduction to the Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible]

And this Immanuel, unlike the first one, who was only a prophetic sign, **this Immanuel has the power, by the Holy Spirit, to be with us always**. And he has promised to be with us always.

I want you to know that no matter what it **is** or what it **was** – no matter what you’re going through right now – Jesus wants to be your Immanuel in the midst of it. Whether like King Ahaz you are overwhelmed with political instability or some threatening physical circumstance; or whether like Joseph, your plans get changed without your permission, and you don’t know what to do, and either way, many people will criticize and judge; or like many people with whom Karl and I have prayed for healing, hard things or even *unspeakable evils* happened to them when they were young, powerless, and unable to protect themselves – wherever you find yourself, past, present, or future – Immanuel. God is with you.

Perhaps I shouldn’t be, but I’m still amazed when even the most horrible events, that of course twist and poison our souls, are brought to peace when people know Immanuel there. It’s not something any human being can do. It’s the presence of God. There is no pit, no terror so great that Immanuel would not meet you. He’s **not afraid** of getting his hands dirty. Though Immanuel is not here bodily, as *one* person, as when he was born to Mary and Joseph, He is still **choosing to go** where we *have to go*. And His **presence**, after all is said and done, brings **freedom, transformation, and new possibilities**.

For the present, for the past, for the future, Immanuel is enough. He is enough.

“Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel has come to you, O Israel”

Let’s have a brief time of waiting on the Lord in prayerful listening – and then I’ll give you an idea of what’s up next, after a short break.

Let’s pray:

- we ask that the eyes of our hearts might be opened, so that we can perceive Immanuel in the now
- we ask for the strength and the support needed to perceive Immanuel in the past – especially in those memories that seemed to teach us that God isn’t there, isn’t enough, or doesn’t care
- we ask for the vision to see Immanuel in the future, charting our course by His Light and His Truth

Before we take a short break, let me just say a few words about some of our future plans.

People have been experiencing Jesus’ presence in big and small ways for millennia – ever since He walked the earth. That’s not new! And there are many wonderful and classic resources that can help one grow in “practicing the presence” of Jesus, and hearing the Lord speak. By all means, read Brother Lawrence, read Dallas Willard’s *Hearing God*, read Henry Blackaby’s *Experiencing God*, or any number of other good sources. We have no desire or motivation to try to reinvent the wheel, or rewrite teaching which is already more than adequately covered elsewhere.

What we have noticed, however, is that despite the abundance of good resources, not everyone is perceiving the reality of Immanuel – and especially in those places and times when they need Him the most. Even people like Karl and I, who availed ourselves of many of those other good resources, found ourselves often coming up dry when it came to actually experiencing Jesus’ tangible presence and tenderness. We trudged on, doing our best, and at times even went from conference to conference earnestly seeking that unmistakable touch from the Heavenly Father – but we just didn’t seem to be able to experience God the way many others did. We’ve both spent a lot of time in that place, and we know we weren’t the only ones with difficulty receiving.

I’m glad to say that finally, that pattern and experience has changed and continues to change for the better for both of us. The path that God has had us on has led to the integration of training and experience in Theophostic^{®1}-based prayer ministry, understanding of critical issues of brain development, implicit memory, emotional capacity, and the tasks of maturity as described in the LIFE Model², along with foundational Biblical truths. We have **not** seen other resources which bring together the unique insights that have grown out of this fertile soil. So we’re in the process of putting together what we’ve learned into what we’re calling the “Immanuel Series” in hopes that more folks will be able to experience Jesus’ Immanuel presence, and know all the benefits that go with that.

In “Immanuel, Emotional Healing & Capacity, Parts I & II,” Karl describes a common problem in healing, in which a person’s progress is blocked because his brain-mind-spirit circuits “blow a fuse” when he tries to feel the pain in his traumatic memories. This so-called “capacity” problem

¹Theophostic is a trademark of Dr. Ed Smith and Alathia, Inc.

²See www.lifemodel.org

is a common reason for folks getting stuck in emotional healing, even in a Theophostic[®]-based healing process. Karl gives specific tools for helping people perceive Jesus’ presence and receive profoundly from Him, so that their capacity problems are overcome, and their healing moves forward. There’s also a segment of a live session included which illustrates a number of the points described.

In the live ministry session “Eileen: ‘Immanuel Intervention’ (intermediate),” Karl uses what we’ve been learning to help a woman named Eileen connect deeply with Jesus. As a direct result of perceiving Jesus’ presence, and receiving from Him, Eileen is able to move through a painful childhood memory, past where she had previously been stuck, and receive truth and healing there.

The lectures Karl will be presenting today, describe in detail what we’re calling the “pernicious blockage” – that is, a tangle of issues which is painful, and spiritually and emotionally dangerous if left unaddressed, particularly because it blocks people from experiencing Jesus’ Immanuel presence. We’re glad to tell the story of how God got *Karl* past this pernicious blockage, and give principles which can help others as well. I’m sure when you hear about it, you’ll recognize it in people you know, or *hmm*, maybe even yourself.

Over the next year we plan to release several additional resources to the Immanuel Series: more case study examples, very specific brass tack guidelines for those who like that style of instruction, and who want to use “Immanuel Interventions” in their own healing work, or their ministry with others. We also have some fascinating material on placing these new tools in the context of current brain science research and issues of Christian community. Unfortunately, we can’t think of a way to summarize those topics briefly. But we think that once you’ve heard the material, you’ll think, “Wow, I had no idea how helpful it is to know this information and have these perspectives.” You be the judge once we get there!

But we do hope that you’ll join us on this journey, and be part of this new generation of ways to experience the full fruits of life *with God* – the abundant life, even when it passes through suffering, that Jesus came to give us.