Challenge 37 of 40

Reflection by Dilys Brooks - Loma Linda, USA

I’m not sure when it was that the phrase, “God with us,” moved from being a phrase synonymous with the Christmas story to becoming the lens through which I live as a Christ follower. This knowledge has had such a transforming impact on my perception of my purpose, place, and become my passion. Immanuel: God with us is recorded first in Isaiah 7:14, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

The first time we read this phrase Immanuel in scripture, it is uttered in a prophecy addressed to one of the most wicked kings in Israel’s history. King Ahaz led the children of Israel into idolatry and apostasy—away from the commitment to serving only Yahweh. God reminded the people through the various prophets including Isaiah that the consequence of idolatry would be the displacement of God’s chosen people under the rule of foreign kings away from the land that God had given to Abraham’s descendants. Isaiah’s prophetic declaration would be a promise, the sliver of hope, which would comfort them during their exile.

That’s the thing I love most about God. When we sin or disobey Him while we have to live through the consequences of those choices, He never abandons us or leaves us without hope. He is always Immanuel—God with us.
We know the promise given to Ahaz through Isaiah was fulfilled because we find recorded in Matthew 1:23, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel." God came to be with us to show us the Father and save us from eternal separation through Immanuel’s death on a lonely cross. Yet His death was not the end of the story because three days later Jesus rose again from the dead conquering sin, satan and hell.

“God with us” is not simply a phrase we sing or read about during the Christmas season. Instead it should be the soundtrack to the life of every Christ follower. It’s the Eden experience fully enacted and restored. We get to be “with” God again, every moment of our lives. God with us doesn’t end after the lights are put away and presents are opened. It is to be enacted 24/7, 365/6 days in the life of the disciple because indeed when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior God is with us!

Often in my own experience I find myself being distracted by the challenges that come along with being human. Sometimes I find myself tempted like Ahaz of old to create “idols” out of my ambitions, goals, fears and desires. I spend time focusing on them instead of responding to the invitation from God to seek Him and His kingdom first. The concerns about serving as a chaplain or being the wife and mother that my husband and children need me to be, while balancing the expectations of so many others can often leave me feeling displaced and alone.

Thankfully because of Immanuel—God with us, your story and my story won’t end in exile. We are drawn by the Holy Spirit to come and remember that He is within us. We go sometimes sheepishly, boldly or even reluctantly in acceptance of this promise that He will never leave us or forget us. HE is Immanuel!

Recalibrate

1) What are the “idols” that need to be broken in your life?

2) How will Immanuel—God with us impact your life going forward?
My Dream - Megan Townend

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