**God’s Spark**

***Part Two: Distraction: What We Do After God initiates contact with us***

***Proposition:*** After God initiates contact with us, we tend to create distractions to focus upon rather than focusing upon God’s presence.

***Evidence***

As we consider the evidence for this proposition, let’s return to the book of Matthew. Look at the wide range of distractions that people have created when God disrupts our lives.

**Respond with tradition. Matt 1: 18-25**

Joseph responded to Mary’s virgin pregnancy by focusing upon what the church would suggest that he do in such a time as this. Joseph’s desire was to behave righteously in this situation. In doing so, he desired to “put Mary away quietly.” To curb this behavior, God intervened a second and third time and even spoke to Joseph a fourth time through a dream, encouraging Joseph and Mary to return to Israel.

**Eliminate the threat of change, no matter how drastic the act. Matthew 2**

King Herod responded to the disruption from the news of the wise men by ordering an unspeakable act. He sought to eliminate the threat no matter what the action did to his long term approval rating. God intervened again, this time through the chief priests and scribes, or who knows what might have happened. God also continued to intervene among the wise men directing them down a new pathway and letting them know who could and could not be trusted.

**Just say no. Matthew 3**

John the Baptist pleaded with Jesus not to have to baptize the Messiah. John simply tried saying, “No” to Jesus. But Jesus appealed to his sense of righteousness and God sent a dove as confirmation.

**Get rid of the person causing the disruption. Matthew 8:28-34.**

A pair of demoniacs seek healing from Jesus. The demons inside of the demoniacs plea with Jesus to send them into the swine, which Jesus does. The herd of swine then rush down the steep bank into the sea and perish in the water. At this point, the entire crowd agrees that this Jesus character must go, “Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood.”

**Give them the silent treatment. Matthew 9:1-8.**

Jesus heals a paralyzed man. Apparently, this one was not done on the Sabbath day, because there is no mention of that. But, instead of telling the man to get up and walk, he told the man, “Your sins are forgiven.” The scribes didn’t need to utter a single word to reveal their displeasure, “Jesus, perceiving in their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” The crowd was filled with awe, but the scribes gave them the silent treatment.

**“Employ the ‘Guess who’s coming to dinner?’ tactics.” Matthew 9:9-26**

A number of participants in the story offer distractions when Jesus begins the evening by disrupting the meal with uninvited guests.

“God doesn’t want us to associate with those people.” The Pharisees focus upon the notion that these people are unwelcome because they are sinners; they are in a different class and should not have been invited.

“Focus on the major to avoid the minors.” The disciples of John attempt to provide a distraction away from the disruption by offering some disruption of their own, asking, “I wonder why Jesus doesn’t fast?” Jesus’ disciples picked up on the opportunistic distraction.

“Laugh it away.” Laughter is also used as a distraction in this passage. Introducing laughter into a conversation can send the message that what is taking place is absurd and not real. Have you ever responded to God’s disruption by asking, “They can’t be serious, can they?”

**Search for a different leader. Matthew 11:1-19**

As John the Baptist continues to experience distractions from the disruptions, he sends an inquiry to Jesus. This time, Jesus names the distraction for them, naming the fact that they are “Looking for something else.” Jesus response is to ask, “What do you see?”

**Suggest that the disruption is from an evil source and if that doesn’t work, say, show us the money!” Matthew 12:1-14**

As the Pharisees suggest that Jesus should not be walking through a grain field on the way to church only to receive the response that “Something greater than the temple is here,” they dig deeper for their distractions. They suggest that Jesus power is surfacing from an evil source. This time Jesus responds that a house divided cannot stand and the Pharisees again return with a new distraction, “Show us a sign.”

**Suggest that the disruption is supernatural and if that doesn’t work, ask for immediate results.**

As Jesus approaches the boat that the disciples are riding in, in a storm no less, someone suggests that this is a supernatural act, “A ghost!” Hearing Jesus own voice still leaves doubts in their minds, so someone suggests, “If it really is you, command me to walk on water too!”

**Ask what the neighbors will think! Matthew 15:1-20**

Perhaps the greatest distraction of all is to ask what the neighbors will think of this new way of doing things. The disciples express concern over the fact that, ““The Pharisees took offense at you.”

**Get rid of the new people. Matthew 15:21-28**

If you discover that these new people are as much a distraction as Jesus is, complain about their strange behavior. The disciples remarked, ““Send her away.” She is loud and not one of us.”

**Focus on the minors to avoid the major. Matthew 15:1-20**

It is not just the meal itself that is disruptive, but even the preparation for it. A simple act of washing one’s hands becomes a source of disruption for Jesus and the disciples nearby.

**Claim undue hardship. Matthew 16:13-23**

One of Jesus strongest supporters proclaimed, ““This (suffering) must never happen to you” and when given the opportunity, denied knowing Jesus so as to avoid personal suffering as well.

**Accept the quick win and stay there. Matthew 17:1-13**

Who wouldn’t want to build a new worship service upon the likes of Moses and Elijah? The disciples ask to stay in a place of comfort when one is finally revealed as a part of the disruption that is taking place.

**Seize your leadership role amidst the changes. Matthew 18-20**

One sure way of avoiding the disruption is to spend some time clarifying who is really in charge of your church or situation. Restructuring can also be an effective distraction. The disciples argue among themselves about who is the fairest and greatest of them all. Jesus responds by asking for the children to come to him. Where do children and youth fit into your new leadership structure?

**Discussion Questions**

1. Which of these distractions can you or your church identify with?
2. Some of these distractions surface from the disciples and some of the distractions surface from the Pharisees. Do you identify with either one of these groups?
3. In many of the passages, Jesus refocuses their attention on the main issue rather than the distraction. How has Jesus come to you a second time after you initially responded to God’s presence with a distraction?

**Lectio Divina/Dwelling in the Word**

Several American Baptist Churches are currently using Lectio Divina or Dwelling in the Word small group processes. The exploration of the God’s Spark material included with this document lends itself well to such a process. Here is a suggested outline:

1. Select a passage from the list above and ask two different persons to read the passage aloud in your small group.
2. Listen for the word or phrase that stands out to you and share that word or phrase with the group using “Mutual Invitation” until everyone in the group has had an opportunity to share.
3. Hear the passage read aloud a third time. This time listen for a place in the text where distraction seems to be taking place. Share that with the group using “Mutual Invitation.”
4. Hear the passage read aloud a final time and reflect upon what God is inviting you to do amidst the distractions that may be surfacing in your life, church, community, etc. Share your reflections with the group using “Mutual Invitation.”