

# Thoughts and Talks for Being God's People at Home: Eucharisteo

The latest in our video series on being God's people at home is now available:

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## Video Series: Being God's People At Home

God is leading us and calling us in this strange season. It's an opportunity to invest in a mode of being his people that draws us closer to him, stimulates our call, and increases our delight in the leadership of Jesus. This immediate time will shape us and serve us as we go into what is ahead.

Gill and I and others in our household have been putting together some thoughts and talks about how we might respond. In particular, how we might grow in the reality that we are currently expressing as "church in our homes" and while our homes are the location of God's church. In our homes, households, and "telehouseholds" we minister to one another, and draw closer to God.

Two videos have been uploaded, we'll be releasing more over the next little while from time to time.

### Video 1: Introduction

## Q&A: How do you distinguish between your feelings and what God is saying?

**Anonymous** asks (in response to a teaching time from one of our recent livestreams):

*How would you distinguish between the words in your head and what God is saying?*

*I'm sure the Bible says not to act in feelings but if it's a feeling God is giving you how can you know it's from him?*

**[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog or asked of me elsewhere and posted with permission. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: <http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/>]**

I really appreciate this question. It's an honest question. I think many of us ask (and answer it) without noticing, particularly when we are uncomfortable. It's when we find ourselves *confronted* by or *disagreeing* with something we read in the Bible, for instance,

that these questions arise: What is wrong here? What doesn't sit right with me? Why doesn't it sit right? How do I wrestle with it?



Too often, rather than wrestle with it, we put the niggly thing aside so that we can simply feel comfortable again. It is rarely the best way forward.

So how might we explore your question?

**Firstly, let's look at things in general:**

Your question is what we call an *epistemological* question. *Epistemology* is how we think about *knowing* stuff, particularly how we know what is right and what is wrong.

It the words in my head say something is true, is that enough or do I need something else? If it *feels* right, does that make it right? That's the sort of thing we're talking about here.

Our answer is affected by historical and cultural differences:

- Some cultures emphasise *tradition* as more important than individual feelings or realisations. If you *feel* something is wrong, but the cultural tradition says it's right, then the individual gives way to the collective wisdom. The internal process is like this: "I recognise that my experience is limited. Our tradition reflects the shared experience of generations of people, and is therefore less limited. Besides, I want to continue to fit in, so it is therefore more likely that I am wrong and the tradition is right."
- Some times in history have emphasised *reason* as more important than feelings or individual intuitions. The so-called "Age of Enlightenment" from the 1600's through to the 20th Century picked up on this. "Truth" is determined by logic, and science, and cold hard calculations. This is an aspect of what we call *modernism*.
- In the "post-modern" era (20th Century into the present day) we have elevated the value of individual feelings

and thoughts. "Truth is experience" is our catch-cry; if we can't feel it, it is not true. There's value in this. Cold, hard, abstract theory, is not enough to guide and shape our lives. Our lives are also full of creativity, mystery, and the delights of the senses. We are also aware that beneath traditions and logical frameworks there are often hidden emotions and prejudices and unspoken power dynamics; we *deconstruct* these so-called truths as the self-serving assertions they actually are. "Going with your gut" rather than arguing yourself into subservience is a virtue in this worldview.

What does this tell us? That the "words in your head" and your "feelings" are not without value, but neither do they solely determine what is true and what is right. I know from my own experience, that my emotions are often broken. For instance, I have had a break down and depression; during that time my feelings about myself did not match the reality about myself and I had to learn to realise that. There have also been plenty of times when I held a view fervently that I subsequently came to realise was *wrong*. It is impossible to learn or grow without agreeing with the possibility that I've got something to learn.

### **Secondly, how do we approach this from a Christian perspective?**

Our faith in God introduces something else into our epistemology. We believe in a God who is not distant and aloof, but is *involved*, not only in the history of the world, but in our lives. We therefore believe in a God who *speaks*, through word and action. What he says is a *revelation*; it reveals truth about who he is, about who we are, and about what this world is like.

So how do we know what that truth is? How do we know what is being revealed? What is God's revelation to us?

**The beauty of it is that God's revelation is *objective* and *external* to us.** God's truth doesn't depend on us. This is a good thing! If it did, our sense of truth and of right and wrong would be self-defined. The truth is that God loves the world, and loves *me*, whether or not I feel it or "know" it. The truth is that there is right and wrong in God's perfect justice, even if my heart has been hardened and my mind has been dulled, and I am either justifying myself or falsely tearing myself down.

This sense of God's revelation is found in two forms:

It is found in what we call "general revelation"; there is truth to be found within creation and from looking at what is in front of us. "The heavens declare the glory of God", the psalmist says. "Since the creation of the world", Paul says, "God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made." This is how Christian belief embraces and recognises the value of the sciences; it is a study of creation and of humanity that reveals much truth.

It is also found in what we call "special revelation." That is, if God is close, and interacts with his creation, then God reveals himself in *history*. The written accounts of that history will then also reveal him. From looking at that written history we also see how God speaks through *inspiration*. He *speaks* to his people. Sometimes (but not often, it usually freaks people out), this is a direct "voice from heaven" (Exodus 20:18-19, Matthew 17:5). Often it is through the inspiration of a *prophet* who is set apart by God to speak to the people on God's behalf. It is also through the giving of the Law, and in the inspiration of songs and poetry. The Bible is full of these things: history, law, prophetic writings, wisdom and creative writings, the accounts of Jesus' life, and letters from his followers.

When we say "The Bible says" what we mean is that "God has

revealed himself, in history, saying.” God has even spoken about how he speaks. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is therefore an *authoritative objective revelation* for us.

**The beauty of it is also that God’s revelation is *subjective* and *personal* to us.** God isn’t relegated to speak to us in dry and dusty texts with dogmatic formulae; he whispers deeply and personally into the deepest parts of our heart. He calls us by name. He *knows* us. Jesus revealed himself to others in this way. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit who is our Advocate and Counsellor. Sometimes the whispers in my head are prompts by the Spirit of Jesus. Sometimes my feelings are the way in which God is waking me up to his truth, a light in the darkness around me.

### **So how , then, do we *know*?**

We can be certain of something when it all lines up and there is agreement in our epistemology. When our own feelings and logical thoughts agree with the traditions around us... when those things line up with what we read in the Bible and how we feel the Spirit is speaking deeply into our souls... then all is well and good. We have a sense of being *sure*.

When there is disagreement between these epistemological sources, however, we have some wrestling to do.

In particular, when I find myself wrestling with a part of the Bible that doesn’t “sit well” with me, I churn it over.

1. **I look to myself.** What I’m trying to do is to work out what is happening within me. I name up the feeling: Am I feeling angry, guilty, annoyed, fired up and frustrated? What’s going on in me? Are those feelings associated with experiences in my life that I haven’t resolved yet; is there some pain and trauma that is getting poked? **How is this Scripture offending me or moving me?** I don’t

pass judgement and soothe the feeling, I consider myself and work out what the problem is. I recognise that my heart is often fickle, I don't quickly agree with it, but I acknowledge the reality of my feelings.

2. **I apply some reason and look to logic and tradition.** Am I reading this part of Scripture correctly? Do I actually understand what is being said? Have I properly got into the world of those who first read it, and understood what they were hearing? Have I shoved my situation into the text and reacted to something that was never intended in the first place? How have other people understood it over the years? How have they applied it? What can I learn from them?
3. **In all this, I pray for the Holy Spirit to help me.** I ask for the Spirit to *illuminate* my wrestle – to give me insight into the Scripture, or an insight into myself. I trust that the Lord has something for me in the revelation of himself. Sometimes I've had a sense of words "jumping out at me" from the page, or stuck in my mind while I dwell on them. Sometimes the Spirit of God works through these things. But! Just because I feel it, doesn't mean that it's the Spirit at work. In particular, the **personal revelation of God to my spirit will never be at odds with his objective truth in Scripture.**
4. **I do it in community.** I share all this wrestling with others, even it's just one person like my wife or a friend. I explain to them what I'm feeling, and how that's colliding with the words in the Bible. We pray together. We reflect on it together. We wrestle together. And sometimes there's a prophetic word within that community that sheds light and makes things clear.
5. **I allow God to be God.** In the end, I entrust myself to God. It's nice to have our feelings resolved, and to be comfortable with the Bible and God's word, but it's not always the way that leads to growth. Sometimes God is drawing us deeper, and we need to give it time. **I can**

**avoid the pain of that growth by setting God's word aside** by either judging it to be wrong, or subjectifying it as irrelevant to me. But, if I want to grow, I need to allow the wrestle to remain. I fall back in confidence on the things that are sure – e.g. God's love and truth and the beauty of Jesus – and trust God with the rest. Even, and especially, when we cannot see, we acknowledge our blindness, and reach out for God even more.

I hope that answers the question. How we wrestle with our feelings and our own understandings is key to our discipleship and our caring for one another. Thanks for asking. Hope these thoughts help.

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## Delight and Defence of The UK Blessing

If you're anywhere within 200ft of a Christian's social media you will have encountered this youtube video. Musicians and worship leaders from a number of churches across the UK, singing "The Blessing" over the nation.



The video is here in case you've missed it: [The UK Blessing on youtube](#).

Let me be clear from the outset here: I *delight* in this song and how it's being used. This post isn't a substantial



critique. It's a bit of wondering, a bit of defence, a bit of leaning off from it to think about the times we're in and the church of which we are a part. The song itself (attributed in the main to Kari Jobe and Cody Carnes) came into the limelight coincidentally with the Covid-19 pandemic. We've sung it ourselves as a household in this strange season.

So here goes: I **delight** in this song.

**I delight in the content of the song.** Its main motif draws upon the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:22-27:

*The Lord said to Moses, 'Tell Aaron and his sons, "This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:*

*“‘The Lord bless you*

*and keep you;*

*the Lord make his face shine on you*

*and be gracious to you;*

*the Lord turn his face towards you*

*and give you peace.’”*

These are deep and rich words that Scripture leans on from time to time to give assurance of God's love and favour. It's there again in Psalm 67, for instance. It's not about individualistic blessing: the focus is on *nation* and *generations*. This also has rich grounding (Exodus 20:6, Deuteronomy 7:9) as does the invocation of God's *presence* (e.g. Joshua 1:9) and God being *for* his people. These deep waters well up in the New Testament (e.g. Romans 8:31) as declarations of how fundamentally, totally, existentially, substantially, utterly, profoundly is the blessing of God to be found in Jesus of Nazareth, died and risen again as Lord and Saviour!

Notice how a lot of this biblical grounding is from the formative days of God's people, Israel, in the time of their rescue from slavery in Egypt, their wandering in the wilderness, and the entering into the promised land. These

were not easy roads. There were afflictions from around them, and the afflictions of sin and wayward hearts within them. Sometimes it may seem like the loving heart of God looks like discipline (some of us are feeling that at the moment) and feels like his absence (ditto): but the deeper truth remains and calls the heart to trust him. He is for you. He is with you, to the thousandth generation. May his face look upon you and give you peace. **At this time of affliction**, however we might feel it and experience it, these are life-giving words to sing.

Of course, some may (and have) suggested that the blessing that the Scriptures reserves to God's people shouldn't be invoked over the world at large. The critique is not invalid: the blessing of God is not merely a universally and thinly applied sense of warmth, it is deep and located and especially attached to God's determined work, his promises to his people, and his presence in the person and work of Jesus. But it's not wrong to pray for the blessing of many. I've addressed this question before. I long for all people to know the loving presence and saving grace of God, who knows us and made us and has given us his Son to save us and lead us into an eternal life that begins now. Especially now.

**I delight in the recording and release of this song.** Having had to come to grips with sermon recording and livestreaming, I can very much delight in the video and audio editing skills!

It's not perfect, of course. I've already seen some comments from those who haven't seen someone who looks like this that or the other; not all the intersectional categories have been covered. I feel it a bit myself; there's a lot of big evangelical charismatic mega-churches in that mix: Where are the "ordinary worshippers" who look more like me and mine? I've got a well-honed cynicism after years in this church game. The "what about me?" response is an understandable human reaction, but in this case I/we should get over it.

This song hasn't come from some tightly planned bureaucratic focus-group vetted process of fine-tuned diversity management. If there is anyone who has "made it happen" it's Tim Hughes (formerly of Soul Survivor, and now of Gas Street Church Birmingham) and his espoused attitude towards the song is commendable. It has come about from a loose arrangement of friends and networks and invited and offered contributions. It's organic and messy, and therefore not perfect. And that's good.

It also hits a pretty good balance regarding the spotlight and avoiding the sort of brand-driven recognition we often slip into. One of the *points* of this song is to show that the churches are alive and working together. So it needs some sense of being able to recognise people and places and names of congregations. It does a good job of avoiding the celebrity factor. People are not named, *churches* are. It's been released under a neutral brand. The naming of churches serves the purpose of showing a community of communities without overdriving the brands. And I love knowing that there are Eastern Orthodox and Catholics and !Pentecostals and St. Someone's of Somewhere all in the mix.

For me, unlike other attempts at this sort of thing, this feels like my brothers and sisters, and I can sing with them. I *know* these faces. I have seen quite a few of them in real life. I've had conversations with a number of them. There's at least one face in that mix that I've served coffee to across my dining room table. The family of God is both bigger and smaller than we think.

Again, I'm good at cynicism. I've seen ego-driven light-show presentations done with not much more than a Christian aesthetic. This is not that. It's not absolutely pure and precise, but so what? It's a cracked-jar crumpled-paper offering of people who want to declare the love of God over a hurting nation. It is something to delight in.

The only thing that wears my heart, just a little, is this. There's not enough of Jesus. One of the cracks in our jar (that I think this current season is rubbing at, one of the loving disciplines of God for us right now) is that we have been in a rut of church being about church rather than church being about Jesus. The church *is* a blessing – but that's a truth of vocation (what we are called to and enabled to be) rather than identity (what we are by our own right in and of ourselves). The declaration at the end: "Our buildings may be closed... but the church is alive" is great, but it's unfortunate in that it's simply about us. It's the same with the blurb in the video description which is about *our* unity and *our* good works. It's almost there, but not quite. **We are only a blessing because Jesus is. We are only alive, because Jesus is. Let's say that.** We embody the blessing, but Jesus is the substance of it.

We're not singing ourselves over the nation, we are singing the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Keep doing it.

Amen. Amen. Amen.