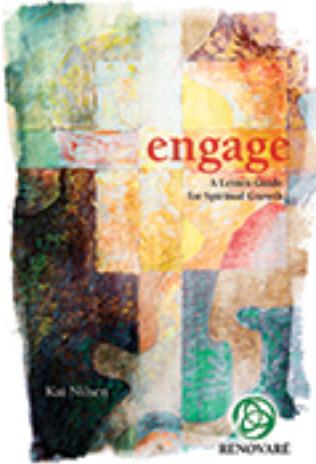


Engage: A Note from Author Kai Nilsen



A family friend used to stop drinking alcohol during the season of Lent. It was his seasonal discipline. On the surface, it seemed laudable. What we now know is that it was his way of trying to prove to family and friends that he wasn't an alcoholic. "If I can stay dry for six weeks, I must be able to control my drinking." Unfortunately, Easter Sunday and beyond was ugly. As soon as the time frame of Lent elapsed, the booze flowed. **Is that what Lent is all about – justifying ourselves?**

I've known many others, myself as well, who have participated in some other act of denial during Lent – chocolate, red meat, TV – only to let loose the post-Easter binge. It's like all our pent-up, over-disciplined activities burst out of the tomb with Jesus on Easter Sunday. Rather than Easter's being the proclamation of something radically new, it becomes the acting out of something radically the same. Same old life. Same old habits. Death has been overcome but our lives have, once again, come under the tyrannical force of the same old, same old. Is that what Easter is all about – empty tomb, empty life?

Historically, the focus of the Lenten season has been on the passion narrative of Jesus, leading us through the horrific death of Jesus to the dramatic, life-changing news of an empty tomb. The season has been set aside for teaching about the life of Jesus, the way of the cross, and the cruciform pattern of our Jesus-following lives.

This season we hope the chosen spiritual disciplines of engagement will open your mind and heart to this life giving story. Why do we focus on spiritual disciplines during this season? In the Renovaré community we talk about spiritual disciplines as activities in our power that we intentionally undertake to open ourselves to the power beyond our imagining – the power of Jesus's death and resurrection. In an earlier book, *Less is More: A Lenten Guide for Spiritual Renewal*, the Renovaré community invited you to focus on disciplines of abstinence; exercises like fasting, solitude, simplicity, etc.

In *Engage: A Lenten Guide for Spiritual Growth*, we are inviting you to open yourself to the power of God's Spirit through disciplines of engagement; exercises where you actively engage your life with God, with one another, and with the world.

The process is simple. Each week we will focus on a new discipline. There will be a description of the discipline itself, sample activities, biblical and theological reflection, and a guided discussion for what we call "*Formational Friends*." Formational friends are people willing to make an intentional journey with you. Start thinking now about who you would like to invite on this journey.

In the end, the point of this journey is not to say that you did it, accomplishing something important for yourself or God. The point is also not to keep these life practices bound by a six-week time frame. **Our hope for you is that the daily immersion in the story of Jesus's death and resurrection through these disciplines of engagement will become a life-giving habit that extends far beyond the season of Lent.**