

God intrudes

By [James Sledge](#)

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Graham Standish wrote in one of his books about the typical church meeting. The committee or governing board gathers. Someone offers a prayer asking God to bless the work they are about to do. And then God is asked to wait outside, perhaps go get a cup of coffee, while they do their work. After they are done, they will invite God back in as they pray for God's blessing on what just transpired.

In our staff meetings here, we try to avoid this pattern by spending a good bit of our time in reflection and discussion of Scripture. This is not a quick devotion, but an extended time of seeking to hear what a text says to us and how this calls us to act or change or respond. We then try to let this discussion flow into the items we need to cover. But we can still manage in subtle ways to invite God out of the meeting as we begin to discuss some event, program, or activity in the life of the congregation. Thankfully, God does not always oblige.

Today we were discussing this Sunday's gospel reading. We spent a great deal of time listening to and discussing the first two parables of the reading comparing the Kingdom to a mustard seed and to yeast or leaven. But as we made the transition from talking about God's sometimes imperceptible and even subversive activity that bring about the kingdom to talking about program logistics, God did not leave.

Somehow our programmatic discussions turned back onto our gospel discussions, and we ended up talking about how often in the life of the church we operate without much sense that God is at work to bring about the Kingdom. Often we act as if the congregation is simply the result of our combined efforts, talents, activities, plans and strategies, etc. In the operation of the church, in its programs, even in its worship, God can be nearly as absent as God is from many of our

meetings.

As God refused to be absent from this morning's meeting, I became acutely aware of how easy it is for us to operate as if God was at the margins of our lives, or perhaps better, how hard it is for us to live as though God was the central character of our life stories, the essential actor without whom the entire story falls apart. And we as a staff recalled how important it is for us to live in ways that model a different worldview than the primary one in our culture, one where humans and market forces and money and power are not the primary agents moving history forward. Rather, God is.

It is easy to miss the mustard seed, to fail to notice the yeast doing its work. It is easy to imagine that we humans are totally free and autonomous, masters of our own destinies, the most important characters in our own personal narratives, and the narrative of history. Thank goodness that God occasionally intrudes and shatters such illusions.

Originally posted at [Pastor James](#).