



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

March 19, 2017

Discussion Guide

WHERE DO I BELONG?

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- DO YOU THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE A PLACE YOU CALL HOME AND PEOPLE YOU CALL FAMILY? COULD YOU ELABORATE?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, DISCUSS THE WAY PEOPLE IN JESUS' DAY

UNDERSTOOD THE MAKEUP OF A PERSON AND HOW THIS MIGHT DIFFER FROM OUR UNDERSTANDING TODAY.

- READ LUKE 6.43-45 ALOUD. SEEK TO IMAGINE JESUS SPEAKING THESE WORDS TO A CROWD AND THAT YOU ARE IN THAT CROWD. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE. PAY ATTENTION TO HOW THE WORDS OF JESUS IMPACT YOU.
- ACCORDING TO JESUS, HOW MIGHT ONE IDENTIFY THOSE WHO ARE TRULY HIS PEOPLE? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY ANSWERS AS POSSIBLE IN THE TEXT.
- IN WHAT WAYS ARE THE MARKERS JESUS PROVIDES DIFFERENT OR THE SAME FROM THOSE USED TODAY? WHAT EFFECT, IF ANY, DOES THIS HAVE? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- ONE MIGHT SAY THAT GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE ARE THOSE WHO ACT LIKE COVENANT PEOPLE. ACCORDING TO JESUS, WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO ACT LIKE A COVENANT PERSON? IS THIS WHAT WE TYPICALLY LOOK TO WITH RESPECT TO THE MOTIVATION AND STRENGTH FOR SUCH ACTION? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- IN SPEAKING TO HIS AUDIENCE, JESUS IS ABLE TO ASSUME THE STORY OF GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM BECAUSE IT WAS PART OF THE FABRIC OF HIS CULTURE. IN THIS STORY, ABRAHAM WAS TRANSFORMED BY GOD, ENABLED TO LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY, WHEN HE RESPONDED IN FAITH TO GOD (GENESIS 15.1-6). TAKE A FEW MOMENTS AND READ THIS STORY ALOUD. THE APOSTLE PAUL RETURNS TO THIS STORY AS HE ELABORATES UPON THE POINT JESUS MAKES IN HIS SERMON. HE TOO, STATES THAT THE ABILITY TO LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY COMES WHEN ONE ORIENTS THEIR LIFE AROUND GOD IN FAITH, NOT BY TRYING REALLY HARD (ROMANS 4.1-5). TAKE A FEW MOMENTS AND READ THIS TEXT.
- IN LIGHT OF THE STORY OF GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM, WHAT KIND OF RESPONSE MIGHT JESUS BE

CALLING FOR FROM THOSE WHO WISH TO BE PART OF WHAT HE IS DOING? TO WHAT KIND OF LIFE DOES THIS RESPONSE LEAD WHEN VIEWED IN TERMS OF COVENANT? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, IS THIS SIMILAR OR DISSIMILAR TO HOW YOU HAVE UNDERSTOOD A RELATIONSHIP OF FAITH TO WORK WITH GOD? COULD YOU ELABORATE? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DOES THIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE OUTWORKING OF FAITH MAKE SENSE OF HOW JESUS IDENTIFIES THOSE WHO ARE COVENANT PEOPLE?

- CONSIDER CLOSING IN PRAYER, OFFERING YOURSELVES IN FAITHFUL RELATIONSHIP TO GOD.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

HEART AND MOUTH

IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD, LITTLE THOUGHT WAS GIVEN TO THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE PERSON. SUCH INTROSPECTION IS A MORE RECENT PHENOMENON. RATHER, PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD THEMSELVES DYADICALLY; THAT IS, PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD THEMSELVES ONLY IN RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PEOPLE. THEREFORE, MOST OF THEIR THOUGHT ABOUT THEMSELVES INVOLVED CONCRETE EXTERNAL ACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS RATHER THAN INNER-FEELINGS OR THINKING. SOME GREEK AND ROMAN PHILOSOPHERS DID DELVE, SOMEWHAT, INTO THE INNER-MAKEUP OF THE PERSON, SEEKING TO DIVIDE THE PERSON INTO CATEGORIES: BODY AND SOUL; INTELLECT, WILL, AND CONSCIENCE; VIRTUES AND VICES; INDWELLING DEITY AND THE IMMORTAL SOUL. HOWEVER, EVEN THESE CATEGORIES TENDED TO LEAN TOWARD THE OUTWARD ACTIONS OF PEOPLE RATHER THAN SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND INNER-THOUGHT AND FEELING.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTICE IS THAT, IN SCRIPTURE, THE MEDITERRANEAN CONCEPT OF DYADIC RELATIONSHIPS IS THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE FOR UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE, WITH LITTLE ATTENTION BEING GIVEN TO THE INNER-WORKINGS OF THE PERSON. IN SCRIPTURE, PEOPLE ARE PORTRAYED CONCRETELY, TYPICALLY THROUGH A LENS THAT FOCUSES ON THE OUTER PERSON. NOWHERE IN SCRIPTURE DO WE FIND THE HEBREW WRITERS OR LATER NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS EXPLORING THE INNER-PERSON USING THE CATEGORIES OF GREEK AND ROMAN PHILOSOPHERS, THOUGH THESE HAVE BEEN USED TO INTERPRET SCRIPTURE, PARTICULARLY PLATO'S DUALISM OF BODY AND SOUL. HOWEVER, TO READ SCRIPTURE THROUGH THIS PLATONIC LENS DISTORTS THE MEANING OF THE TEXT IN VIEW.

WHILE WE DO NOT DISCOVER THE AUTHORS OF SCRIPTURE EXPLORING THE INNER-MAKE UP OF PEOPLE, WE CAN FIND A COMMON WAY OF UNDERSTANDING THE PERSON FROM THE OUTSIDE WHICH GIVES SOME UNDERSTANDING INTO THE ANCIENT VIEW OF THE INNER-WORKINGS OF PEOPLE. THIS UNDERSTANDING SEEMS TO FALL INTO THREE CATEGORIES: EMOTION-FUSED THOUGHT; THOUGHT-INFUSED SPEECH; AND PURPOSEFUL (THOUGHT/SPEECH)-INFUSED ACTION. AS WE MIGHT EXPECT, CONCRETE/PHYSICAL PARTS OF THE BODY WERE USED TO DESCRIBE THIS CONCEPT OF THE PERSON. THE HEART

AND EYES WERE LINKED WITH EMOTION-FUSED THOUGHT. THE HEART WAS UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE PLACE WHERE PEOPLE KNEW, THOUGHT, UNDERSTOOD AND CHOSE, WHILE THE EYES PROVIDED THE DATA FOR THE HEART TO SORT (MATTHEW 6.22-23; LUKE 6.45). THE MOUTH WAS USED TO DESCRIBE THE CONCEPT OF THOUGHT-INFUSED SPEECH. THE MOUTH WAS UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE PLACE FROM WHICH THE THOUGHTS OF THE HEART ISSUED, THE WORDS THEMSELVES REVEALING THE CHARACTER AND DESIRES OF THE PERSON (LUKE 6.45). THE HANDS AND FEET WERE CONNECTED WITH PURPOSEFUL ACTION, ACTION WHICH WAS DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE WORDS SPOKEN BY THE MOUTH. RARELY DO THESE THREE APPEAR CONNECTED, AS A WHOLE, IN ONE PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE. MOST OFTEN, TWO OF THE THREE ZONES APPEAR, BUT WE DO SEE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE THREE IN PSALM 15 AND PROVERBS 6.16-19. IN BOTH PASSAGES, THE PURPOSE IS TO DESCRIBE, IN CONCRETE TERMS, THE LIFE GOD DESIRES.

IN LUKE'S SERMON ON THE PLAIN, JESUS REFERS TO TWO ZONES OF THE PERSON: MOUTH AND HEART (LUKE 6.45). WE MIGHT ARGUE THAT HE ASSUMES THE ZONE OF PURPOSEFUL ACTION (HANDS AND FEET) AS HE MOVES TO A DISCUSSION OF CONCRETE ACTION OF BUILDING ON A SOLID FOUNDATION IN VERSES 46-49, THOUGH HE DOES NOT SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFY THIS ZONE OF ACTION. IN READING JESUS, WE ARE TEMPTED TO INTERPRET HIS WORDS THROUGH OUR MODERN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PERSON; THAT IS, WE ARE TEMPTED TO HEAR HIM SPEAK OF HEART IN TERMS OF EMOTION OR INTROSPECTIVE FEELING. IN ADDITION, WE ARE TEMPTED TO UNDERSTAND HIM TO SPEAK ABOUT WORDS IN CATEGORIES OF INTENTION OR WISH. IN REALITY, JESUS IS NOT SPEAKING IN THESE TERMS AT ALL. WHEN JESUS SPEAKS ABOUT THE HEART, HE IS SPEAKING OF CONCRETE THOUGHT, A PHYSICAL REALITY WITHIN THE PERSON WHICH IS FORMED IN A SPECIFIC WAY TO DO SPECIFIC THINGS. WHEN HE SPEAKS ABOUT THE MOUTH, HE IS SPEAKING ABOUT WORDS WHICH NOT ONLY GIVE VOICE TO THE CONCRETE FORMATION OF THE HEART, BUT THEY GO BEYOND INTENTION TO ACTION, ACTIONS WHICH ARE UNDERSTOOD TO TAKE PLACE IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD, IN DIRECT RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PEOPLE.

THE TEXT

LUKE 6.43-45: WHO ARE GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE?

IN LUKE 6, JESUS PREACHES A SERMON IN WHICH HE ADDRESSES SOME OF LIFE'S MAJOR QUESTIONS. AS JESUS ANSWERS THESE QUESTIONS, EACH ANSWER BUILDS A FOUNDATION FOR THE ANSWER TO THE NEXT QUESTION. JESUS BEGINS WITH THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY, NOTING THAT PEOPLE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD BEAR THE IDENTITY OF BLESSED. THIS IDENTITY LEADS TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF PURPOSE. BLESSED PEOPLE MOVE THROUGH THE WORLD BLESSING OTHERS WITH THE RADICAL, FIERCE LOVE OF GOD. THIS PURPOSE CARRIES FORWARD INTO HOW GOD'S PEOPLE DEAL WITH WHAT IS WRONG IN THE WORLD. THEY REFUSE TO ENGAGE IN THE PROCESS OF JUDGMENT AND CONDEMNATION AS THIS IS THE FATHER'S ROLE. RATHER, THEY SEEK TO LOVE EVERYONE, INCLUDING THE WRONG-DOER WITH GOD'S RADICAL LOVE, EVEN AS

THEY DEAL WITH THEIR OWN OUT-OF-PLACENESS (SIN).

WITH THESE MAJOR QUESTIONS ANSWERED, WE HAVE IN VIEW A BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT GOD'S KINGDOM PEOPLE DO. HOWEVER, WE ARE LEFT ASKING WHO THESE PEOPLE ARE. HOW DOES ONE IDENTIFY THE PEOPLE WHO ARE IN GOD'S KINGDOM? THIS IS OF PARTICULAR IMPORT BOTH FOR SELF-IDENTIFICATION, WHICH MAY BE JESUS' MAIN POINT, BUT ALSO FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF OTHERS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW WHICH EMPHASIS JESUS IS PROVIDING CONTEXTUALLY, AS BOTH COULD FIND A STRONG ARGUMENT. ONE COULD ARGUE THAT JESUS IS EMPHASIZING SELF-AWARENESS BECAUSE OF THE PRECEDING VERSES WHICH ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO LOOK TO THE CARE OF THEMSELVES AND THEIR OWN SIN. HOWEVER, THIS KIND OF INTROSPECTIVE THINKING IS MORE MODERN THAN ANCIENT. WHILE THIS MAY NOT BE OUT OF JESUS' MIND, THE CONCRETE NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS WAS ALWAYS IN FOCUS, PARTICULARLY IN TERMS OF BELONGING TO A GROUP, FOR IDENTITY WAS ONLY FOUND WHEN ONE WAS CONNECTED WITH A GROUP. THEREFORE, ONE COULD ARGUE THAT WHAT JESUS HAS IN MIND IS A "TEST" WHICH HELPS ONE FIND THEIR GROUP, A GROUP KNOWN TO BE TRUE KINGDOM PEOPLE.

JESUS' TEST IS QUITE SIMPLE AND VERY CONCRETE, SOMETHING WHICH SHOULD NOT SURPRISE US. IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD, CONCRETE ACTION WITH RESPECT TO OTHERS WAS ALWAYS MOST IMPORTANT. IN KEEPING WITH THIS CONCEPT, JESUS STATES THAT THE TRUE IDENTITY OF A PERSON WAS REVEALED IN THEIR ACTIONS (LUKE 6.44). HE BRACKETS THIS PRINCIPLE WITH TWO AGRICULTURAL ILLUSTRATIONS WHICH MAKE THE SAME POINT. TREES BEAR FRUIT WHICH ARE IN KEEPING WITH THEIR TRUE IDENTITY. GOOD TREES BEAR GOOD FRUIT, AND BAD TREES BEAR BAD FRUIT. FIGS DO NOT GROW ON THORN BUSHES, AND GRAPES ARE NOT FOUND ON THISTLE PLANTS. WITH THIS TEST IN MIND, JESUS SEEMS TO SAY THAT HIS PEOPLE ARE IDENTIFIED BY THEIR ACTIONS; THAT IS, HIS PEOPLE ARE THOSE WHO LIVE, IN CONCRETE WAYS, THE LIFE HE HAS BEEN DESCRIBING. THEY LIVED OUT A BLESSED IDENTITY, LOVING OTHERS, AND DEALING WITH WRONG IN A LOVING MANNER. TO BEHAVE DIFFERENTLY IDENTIFIES A PERSON AS NOT BEING A CITIZEN OF GOD'S KINGDOM.

WITH THIS IN MIND, THE QUESTION THEN TURNS TO HOW ONE IS TO ACT AS A KINGDOM PERSON. ONE MIGHT VIEW THIS QUESTION AS INVOLVING THE NATURE OF HOW ONE ENTERS THE KINGDOM, AND THIS IS PERHAPS IN VIEW AS ONE EXTRAPOLATES UPON WHAT JESUS SAYS. AT A MINIMUM, JESUS IS EXPLAINING WHERE KINGDOM ACTION COMES FROM. IT COMES FROM A HEART WHICH IS GOOD. IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PERSON, JESUS IS NOT SAYING THAT THESE ACTIONS COME FROM POSITIVE FEELINGS OR GOOD INTENTIONS WHICH ARE FOUND IN A PERSON'S HEART. WHAT HE IS SAYING IS THAT THERE IS A CONCRETE PART OF A PERSON WHICH HAS BEEN FORMATIVELY CHANGED INTO SOMETHING

GOOD, A GOODNESS WHICH COMES OUT IN SPEECH AND ACTION. THIS KIND OF STATEMENT BEGS THE QUESTION OF HOW A PART OF ONESELF IS FORMATIVELY CHANGED TO GOOD, WHICH THEN LEADS TO THE KIND OF EXTRAPOLATION MENTIONED ABOVE.

THINKING COVENANTALLY, THE ANSWER IS ROOTED IN THE COVENANT OF GOD WITH ABRAHAM (GENESIS 12, 15). IN GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM, WE SEE A MAN INVITED TO EXPERIENCE THE BLESSED LIFE GOD INTENDED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING FORTH THAT BLESSING (GENESIS 12.1-3); THAT IS, WE HAVE A MAN INVITED INTO THE VERY LIFE JESUS IS DESCRIBING IN HIS SERMON. IN LIGHT OF WHAT JESUS HAS JUST SAID, TO ACT IN THIS MANNER, SHOULD ABRAHAM'S ACTIONS BE IN KEEPING WITH THIS MANNER OF LIFE, HE WOULD BE IDENTIFIED AS A PART OF GOD'S KINGDOM, A COVENANT PARTNER WITH GOD. HOWEVER, JESUS HAS ALSO SAID THAT FOR THIS TO BE POSSIBLE, A CONCRETE PART OF ABRAHAM MUST BE TRANSFORMED TO GOOD. THAT IS, ABRAHAM'S OWN OUT-OF-PLACENESS MUST BE DEALT WITH. JUST HOW THIS HAPPENS WITH ABRAHAM IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE BECAUSE IT SETS THE PATTERN FOR HOW IT MUST HAPPEN WITH FUTURE COVENANT PARTNERS, CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM. IN GENESIS 15, WE DISCOVER THE FORMALIZATION OF GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM AND SOME INSIGHT ON ABRAHAM'S TRANSFORMATION. HE CHOSE TO BELIEVE GOD AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM (BY GOD) AS RIGHTEOUSNESS (GENESIS 15.6). THIS IS AN IMPORTANT STATEMENT WHICH NEEDS TO BE EXPLORED. FIRST, ABRAHAM BELIEVED. IN THE CONTEXT, THIS MEANS THAT ABRAHAM TRUSTED THAT WHAT GOD WAS SAYING WAS TRUE. HE TRUSTED GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS COVENANT PROMISES AND CHOSE TO ENTER INTO THAT COVENANT RELATIONSHIP. THE NEW TESTAMENT WORD FOR THIS IS FAITH. BASED UPON ABRAHAM'S BELIEF/FAITH (ENTERING INTO COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD), GOD ACTED BY CREATING RIGHTEOUSNESS IN ABRAHAM. IN THE CONTEXT, RIGHTEOUSNESS MEANS CONCRETE BEHAVIOR WHICH SERVES THE COMMUNITY ACCORDING TO GOD'S NORM; THAT IS, A PART OF ABRAHAM WAS TRANSFORMED WHICH ENABLED HIM TO ACT IN KEEPING WITH GOD'S COVENANT INVITATION. THIS IS THE PATTERN TO WHICH ALL FUTURE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM MUST LOOK, A POINT PAUL MAKES IN ROMANS 4.1-5. THE COVENANT LIFE TO WHICH GOD'S KINGDOM PEOPLE ARE CALLED CAN ONLY COME WHEN A PART OF THEM IS TRANSFORMED, MAKING SUCH A LIFE POSSIBLE. THIS LIFE CANNOT BE ACHIEVED THROUGH DILIGENT WORK OR GOOD INTENTION. RATHER, A PERSON MUST WILLINGLY ENTER INTO A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, TRUSTING THAT GOD WILL BE AND HAS BEEN FAITHFUL. UPON THIS, GOD MOVES, CREATING A CAPACITY WITHIN THE PERSON TO LIVE IN COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM, A RELATIONSHIP WHICH LEADS TO THE LIFE JESUS HAS BEEN DESCRIBING.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

WHO AM I? WHAT AM I HERE TO DO? HOW DO I DEAL WITH WHAT IS WRONG? THESE ARE ALL BIG QUESTIONS, IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

BECAUSE THEY TELL ME HOW I AM TO ACT IN THE WORLD IF I AM TO BE IDENTIFIED AS A COVENANT PARTNER WITH GOD. HOWEVER, I AM LEFT ASKING, AS A COVENANT PARTNER WITH GOD, WHERE DO I BELONG IN THIS WORLD? WITH WHOM DO I BELONG? DEEP INSIDE ME IS A LONGING NOT TO BE ALONE. I WANT TO HAVE A HOME, A PEOPLE, A PLACE WHERE I AM ACCEPTED AND WELCOMED, BUT WHERE IS THAT PLACE? WHO ARE THOSE PEOPLE?

GROWING UP IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION AND BEING EDUCATED IN A SOUTHERN BAPTIST SEMINARY, THE ANSWER WAS VERY CLEAR. "YOUR PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE WHO BEAR THE NAME SOUTHERN BAPTIST." SIMPLE ENOUGH. YOU MOVE TO A NEW TOWN, YOU FIND YOUR PEOPLE WHEN YOU FIND THE SIGN WHICH BEARS THE NAME "SOUTHERN BAPTIST." THERE WAS JUST ONE PROBLEM. I DIDN'T ALWAYS RESONATE WITH THESE PEOPLE, NOR THEY WITH ME. WE JUST SEEMED TO BE OUT OF STEP, AND MORE SO THE FURTHER ALONG ON THE JOURNEY OF FAITH I TRAVELED. IT WASN'T THAT WE WERE ANTAGONISTIC. WE JUST HAD TWO VERY DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF LIFE WE WERE PURSUING AND THE ONE I WAS PURSUING WAS NOT LOOKED UPON ALL THAT FAVORABLY BECAUSE IT INVOLVED PRACTICAL ACTION BASED UPON THE LIFE OF JESUS AND HIS GOSPEL MESSAGE, ACTION WHICH WAS "NOT APPROVED" FOR SOUTHERN BAPTIST PEOPLE. SO, I FOUND MYSELF HOMELESS AND ORPHANED WITH NO WAY OF REALLY KNOWING WHERE I BELONGED. THAT WAS PERHAPS ONE OF THE HARDEST SEASONS OF MY FAITH JOURNEY, A SEASON IN WHICH I WANTED TO QUIT AND BOW OUT. THIS FAITH THING WAS TOO HARD, TOO DIFFICULT, AND GOD'S PEOPLE WERE JUST TOO MEAN. REALLY.

I SPENT SOME TIME WANDERING AND WONDERING. WHO ARE MY PEOPLE? WHERE IS THEIR SIGN? WHERE ARE THEY FOUND? A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, I FINALLY BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT THEY WERE ALL AROUND ME. I WAS JUST LOOKING FOR THE WRONG SIGN. I HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR THE PHYSICAL SIGN ON THE ROAD WHICH SAID "GOD'S PEOPLE ARE HERE," BUT I BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT GOD'S PEOPLE DON'T PUT OUT SIGNS LIKE THAT. THE SIGNS THEY PUT OUT ARE MUCH MORE SUBTLE AND MUCH MORE POWERFUL. THEY ARE SIGNS LIKE FORGIVING THE ONE WHO HAS WRONGED THEM, LOVING THE ONE WHO HAS CURSED THEM, LIVING WITH JOY AND CONTENTMENT IN THE FACE OF PAIN, SORROW, AND SUFFERING. THESE WERE THE SIGNS THEY WERE PUTTING OUT, SIGNS WHICH PROCLAIMED LOUDLY, "HERE IS A PERSON TRANSFORMED AND LIVING IN COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD." THESE WERE MY PEOPLE, AND THEY MET IN BUILDINGS WHICH BORE ALL MANNER AND SORT OF SIGNS. THEY CALLED THEMSELVES BY DIFFERENT NAMES. THEY SANG ALL MANNER AND SORT OF DIFFERENT SONGS. SOME WERE LOUD AND SOME WERE SOFT, BUT THEY WERE ALL MY PEOPLE, AND WHEN I AM AROUND THEM, I FEEL AT HOME.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHO ARE WE? WHY ARE WE HERE? WHAT DO WE DO WITH WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE WORLD? THESE ARE ALL IMPORTANT QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS WHICH JESUS ANSWERS, BUT THERE IS OFTEN ONE

QUESTION LEFT UNANSWERED. WHERE DO WE BELONG? DEEP INSIDE US IS A LONGING TO BELONG, TO HAVE A PEOPLE AND A PLACE TO CALL HOME. NO ONE WANTS TO BE AN ORPHAN. AND YET, MANY OF US SPEND OUR DAYS FEELING ORPHANED, LIKE WE REALLY DON'T FIT, OR THAT PEOPLE JUST DO NOT UNDERSTAND US. WE TRY TO FIT IN. WE TRY ON DIFFERENT HOBBIES, DIFFERENT SPORTS AFFILIATIONS, EVEN DIFFERENT STYLES OF CLOTHING OR MUSIC, JUST TO FIND A PEOPLE, BUT WE STILL FEEL SOMEWHAT OUT OF PLACE. SO, HOW DO GOD'S PEOPLE FIND THEIR PEOPLE? HOW DO THEY FIND WHERE THEY BELONG? THE STANDARD ANSWER HAS BEEN TO FIND A SPECIFIC DENOMINATION OR STYLE OF WORSHIP OR PREACHING STYLE AND IN THAT YOU WILL FIND YOUR HOME. HONESTLY, MANY PEOPLE HAVE TRIED THIS AND FOUND IT LACKING. IN REALITY, DENOMINATIONS, STYLES OF WORSHIP, PREACHING, OR EVEN PROGRAMS HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH FINDING WHERE YOU BELONG. ACCORDING TO JESUS, THOSE WHO ARE HIS PEOPLE BELONG AMONG PEOPLE WHO LIVE LIKE HIS PEOPLE. HOME IS FOUND AMONG GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE WHO ACT LIKE HIS COVENANT PEOPLE. THEY LIVE CONTENTLY AND WITH JOY AS BLESSED PEOPLE. THEY LOVE RADICALLY, AND THEY CARRY OUT THIS LOVE IN THE WAY THEY DEAL WITH WRONG. THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO ARE FAMILY, AND THEY COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES. THEY PREACH IN A WIDELY DIVERGENT MANNER. THEY EVEN SING IN VASTLY DIVERSE WAYS, BUT THEY ARE FAMILY, AND WHEN WE ARE AMONG THEM, IF WE ARE OPEN, WE WILL FEEL AT HOME. BEING OPEN TAKES A WILLINGNESS TO LOOK FOR SOMETHING OTHER THAN THAT FOR WHICH WE HAVE BEEN LOOKING. PERHAPS YOU HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR SOMETHING LIKE A SPECIFIC TYPE OF WORSHIP OR PREACHING, OR EVEN A PARTICULAR TYPE OF PROGRAMING AS A "SIGN" THAT YOU BELONG. THIS WEEK, COULD YOU PERHAPS BE OPEN TO LOOKING FOR SOMETHING OTHER? COULD YOU BE OPEN TO LOOKING FOR CONCRETE ACTIONS, ACTIONS IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WHICH IDENTIFY THEM AS GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE? IN SEEING THESE ACTIONS, COULD YOU CONSIDER WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE TO CONNECT AND IDENTIFY WITH THESE PEOPLE AS FAMILY, TO ACT LIKE FAMILY, TO TALK LIKE FAMILY, FOR IN SO DOING, YOU WILL FIND YOURSELF HOME.

ALMIGHTY GOD, MY HEAVENLY FATHER: I HAVE SINNED AGAINST YOU, THROUGH MY OWN FAULT, IN THOUGHT, AND WORD, AND DEED, IN WHAT I HAVE DONE AND IN WHAT I HAVE LEFT UNDONE. FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR SON OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, FORGIVE ME ALL MY OFFENSES; AND GRANT THAT I MAY SERVE YOU IN NEWNESS OF LIFE, TO THE GLORY OF YOUR NAME. AMEN.



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