

PRAAYER AND PRESENCE

THE PURSUIT OF GLORY

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

November 5, 2017

Discussion Guide

MAKING ROOM FOR GOD WITH WORSHIP?

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

- WHY DO PEOPLE WORSHIP? CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

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, TALK ABOUT THE NATURE OF HEBREW POETRY.
- READ PSALM 145 OUT LOUD. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE SEEKING TO HEAR THE PSALM AS A PRAYER OF WORSHIP.
- IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, WORSHIP IS ABOUT REHEARSING GOD'S STORY. WORSHIP BEGINS BY STATING WHO GOD IS. IT THEN MOVES TO WHAT GOD HAS DONE AND WHAT HE WILL DO. SEEK TO TRACE THESE MOVEMENTS THROUGH THIS PSALM. WHAT IS GOD'S STORY?

- THE PURPOSE OF ANCIENT WORSHIP WAS TO INVITE THE WORSHIPER TO ALLOW HIS STORY TO BE SHAPED BY GOD'S STORY. CONSIDERING PSALM 145, WHAT INVITATIONS MIGHT THIS WORSHIP EXTEND TO OTHERS?
- ANCIENT WORSHIP WAS TO BE REPEATED, TO REHEARSE THE SAME STORY AND EXTEND THE SAME INVITATIONS IN ORDER TO COMBAT THE CULTURAL WORSHIP NARRATIVES. IN WHAT WAY MIGHT THIS BE SEEN AS NECESSARY?
- CONSIDERING OUR MODERN APPROACH TO WORSHIP, IN WHAT WAYS IS ANCIENT WORSHIP LIKE OR UNLIKE MODERN WORSHIP?
- WHAT MIGHT ANCIENT WORSHIP LOOK LIKE IN OUR MODERN CONTEXT?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT THIS ANCIENT WORSHIP IN OUR MODERN CONTEXT SHAPE OR RESHAPE OUR LIVES AND RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?
- CONSIDER CLOSING BY USING A PSALM LIKE PSALM 145 OR 146 TO WORSHIP GOD IN PRAYER. YOU MIGHT PRAY THESE PSALMS SLOWLY, ALLOWING THEM TO DRAW YOU INTO CONSIDERING AND RESPONDING TO GOD'S STORY.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

HEBREW POETRY

POETRY IS DIFFICULT TO DEFINE BECAUSE IT CAN TAKE SO MANY DIFFERENT FORMS. HOWEVER, IT MIGHT BE BEST TO THINK OF POETRY AS A DISTINCT OR INTENSIFIED USE OF LANGUAGE. IN ORDER TO INTENSIFY LANGUAGE, A POET MIGHT MAKE USE OF ANY NUMBER OF LITERARY/RHETORICAL TOOLS SUCH AS RECURRENT PATTERNS, USE OF SOUNDS, IMAGES, SYMBOLS, METAPHORS, METER/CADENCE, AND MORE. BECAUSE POETRY IS SO VARIED IN ITS FORM, IT EASILY LENDS ITSELF TO MANY LITERARY GENRES, INCLUDING NARRATIVE PROSE.

RECOGNIZING AND INTERPRETING POETRY CAN BE DIFFICULT, PARTICULARLY WHEN ONE IS READING POETRY WHICH HAS BEEN TRANSLATED FROM ANOTHER LANGUAGE. IT IS OFTEN THE CASE THAT

THE LANGUAGE OF THE READER CANNOT SUPPORT THE POETICAL DEVICES OF THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE IN A WAY THAT CONVEYS ANY OR PART OF THE AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL POETICAL INTENT. THIS IS PARTICULARLY THE CASE WHEN THE AUTHOR HAS MADE USE OF RHYTHMIC PATTERNS OR SOUNDS SUCH AS RHYMING PATTERNS.

THE AUTHORS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HEAVY USE OF POETRY. THE PSALMS, PROVERBS, AND JOB ARE CLEARLY POETRY, BUT POETRY IS THE PREDOMINATE DEVICE FOUND IN ALL THE PROPHETS, HYMNS, LAMENTS, THANKSGIVINGS, BLESSINGS, AND CURSES. EVEN MUCH OF THE HISTORICAL PROSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SLIPS IN AND OUT OF POETRY. HEBRAIC POETRY DOES, AT TIMES, MAKE USE OF SPECIFIC CADENCES, SOUNDS AND RHETORICAL DEVICES SUCH AS USING THE HEBREW ALPHABET AS AN ACROSTIC FRAMEWORK, BUT THESE ARE NOT THE PREDOMINATE DEVICES UTILIZED. BY AND LARGE, THE PREDOMINATE FEATURE OF HEBREW POETRY IS SOMETHING CALLED THE COUPLET. PERHAPS A BETTER WAY TO UNDERSTAND THIS DEVICE IS TO UNDERSTAND THIS DEVICE IN TERMS OF PARALLELISM.

PARALLELISM IS A FORM OF "THOUGHT RHYME." IN PARALLELISM, A SECOND LINE WILL ECHO ITS PRECEDING LINE TO ENRICH THE FORMER LINE'S CONTENT IN SOME WAY. PARALLELISM CAN BE USED TO RESTATE A PREVIOUS LINE (PSALM 103.10; ISAIAH 2.4). HOWEVER, IT CAN ALSO BE USED TO BUILD TO A CLIMAX, EVEN USING A THIRD LINE TO BUILD UPON THE SECOND (ISAIAH 2.12). HEBREW AUTHORS ALSO USED PARALLELISM TO CREATE ANTI-THETICAL OR CONTRASTING STATEMENTS, JUXTAPOSING TWO DIVERGENT IDEAS (PSALM 37.21).

THE PRESENCE OF PARALLELISM IN HEBREW POETRY HELPS TO MAKE POETICAL SECTIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT MORE RECOGNIZABLE AS THESE ARE EASILY TRANSLATED. AUTHORS APPEAR TO FAVOR THIS DEVICE ABOVE OTHERS BECAUSE IT PRESSES THE READER BEYOND GLEANING INFORMATION FROM A TEXT TO EXPERIENCING THE TRUTH PRESENTED THROUGH MULTIPLE PRESENTATIONS OF AN IDEA OR IMAGE. THIS DEVICE REVEALS THAT THE AUTHORS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT UNDERSTOOD THEIR TEXTS TO BE ABOUT MORE THAN CONVEYING IDEAS ABOUT GOD AND THE LIFE HE WAS INVITING HIS PEOPLE TO LIVE. RATHER, THESE AUTHORS UNDERSTOOD THEIR TEXTS TO BE INVITATIONS TO EXPERIENCE GOD AND LIVE HIS LIFE.

The Text

PSALM 145: *WORSHIP PRAYERS*

PSALM 145 IS THE LAST PSALM OF DAVID IN THE PSALTER. IT IS ALSO THE LAST ACROSTIC PSALM, EACH VERSE BEGINNING WITH A LETTER OF THE HEBREW ALPHABET, IN THE PSALTER. ACROSTIC POEMS ARE NOT ATYPICAL IN HEBREW LITERATURE WITH THE USE OF THE ALPHABET SERVING AS A FRAMEWORK AIDING IN THE MEMORIZATION AND SUBSEQUENT RECITATION OF THE POEM. THAT

DAVID USED AN ACROSTIC FRAMEWORK INDICATES HE INTENDED THAT THIS PSALM BE REMEMBERED AND REPEATED.

THIS PSALM IS ONE OF PRAISE OR WORSHIP. THE BEGINNING AND END ARE HIGHLY PERSONALIZED, BUT THE MIDDLE OF THE PSALM IS CLEARLY FORMATTED TO INCLUDE A WIDER AUDIENCE. ONE MIGHT IMAGINE THAT DAVID WROTE THIS PSALM IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT COULD BE USED BY A LECTOR AND CHOIR IN A WORSHIP SETTING, THOUGH THIS NEED NOT NECESSARILY BE THE CASE.

DAVID BEGINS THIS PSALM BY STATING THAT HE WISHES TO LIFT HIS VOICE IN WORSHIP. FROM THE FIRST NOTE, DAVID INDICATES THAT HE IS GOING TO FOCUS HIS WORSHIP UPON THE THEME OF GOD'S KINGSHIP AND THAT HE INTENDS THIS OFFERING OF WORSHIP TO BE PART OF AN ONGOING EXALTATION OF GOD WHO IS GREAT AND WORSHIP OF SUCH ONGOING PRAISE (PSALM 145.1-3).

DAVID NEXT MOVES TO NOTE THAT HIS WORSHIP IS PART OF A LARGER CHORUS OF PRAISE OFFERED TO GOD, PRAISE WHICH EXTENDS NOT JUST TO OTHERS IN HIS GENERATION BUT TO THOSE GENERATIONS WHICH HAVE COME BEFORE HIM. IN WORSHIP, ONE GENERATION DECLARES THE WORTH OF GOD TO ANOTHER, FOCUSING UPON HIS MIGHTY ACTS. THIS REPEATED HANDING OFF OR RECOUNTING OF GOD'S DEEDS HAS THE EFFECT OF MOVING DAVID TO PONDER (MEDITATE) WHAT GOD HAS DONE AND HOW WONDERFUL THESE DEEDS ARE. FURTHER, IN THE TELLING OF THE WORKS OF GOD, DAVID HIMSELF IS MOVED TO JOIN IN THE CHORUS, CELEBRATING AND SINGING OF GOD'S GREATNESS (PSALM 145.4-7).

WHAT DAVID SAYS IN THESE VERSES REVEALS A GREAT DEAL ABOUT HIS UNDERSTANDING OF WORSHIP. IN DAVID'S MIND, WORSHIP IS THE RECOUNTING OF GOD'S STORY, A RECOUNTING THAT IS INTENDED TO PASS GOD'S STORY FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT. THE RECOUNTING OF GOD'S STORY IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT LEADS ONE TO CONSIDER GOD THEREBY INVITING THE HEARER TO JOIN HIS VOICE WITH THE CHORUS OF OTHERS WHO ARE WORSHIPING. IN THIS VIEW, WORSHIP IS CERTAINLY GOD-FOCUSED, BUT IT HAS A HUMAN GOAL IN MIND. GOD IS LIFTED UP AND PRAISED FOR THE PURPOSE OF INVITING OTHERS TO DO THE SAME. HERE WE SEE DAVID'S INTENTIONS AND MOTIVES NOT JUST WITH THIS PSALM BUT WITH ALL HIS PSALMS OF PRAISE. IN HIS PSALMS OF WORSHIP, DAVID IS ATTEMPTING TO RECOUNT THE STORY OF GOD TO LEAD HIMSELF AND OTHERS TO CONTINUE RECOUNTING/REHEARSING GOD'S STORY. THE PATTERN IS MEANT TO REPEAT UNTIL ALL OF CREATION IS RECOUNTING/REHEARSING GOD'S STORY (WORSHIPING).

DAVID'S REHEARSAL OF GOD'S STORY BEGINS IN VERSE 8 AND MIGHT BE BROKEN INTO THREE MOVEMENTS OR WORSHIP CYCLES. IN EACH MOVEMENT/CYCLE, DAVID FOLLOWS A STANDARD FORM BY WHICH HE FIRST NOTES GOD'S PERSON AND CHARACTER. HE THEN SUPPORTS HIS CLAIM BY REHEARSING THE DEEDS OF GOD. HE CONCLUDES BY LOOKING TO THE FUTURE WHICH GOD'S CHARACTER AND DEEDS POINT.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS CYCLE IS INTENDED TO CALL OTHERS AND THE PRESENT WORSHIPER INTO WORSHIP; THAT IS, THIS WORSHIP CYCLE IS INTENDED TO DRAW THE HEARER INTO PONDERING THE STORY OF GOD AND ALLOWING THIS STORY (THROUGH THE FUTURE TRAJECTORY) TO INFLUENCE HIS STORY SO THAT HE TURNS AND REHEARSES GOD'S STORY OUT OF HIS OWN EXPERIENCE.

THE FIRST WORSHIP CYCLE (PSALM 145.8-13A) BEGINS WITH DAVID STATING THAT GOD IS GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE WHICH IS SEEN IN HIS SLOWNESS TO ANGER AND ABOUNDING LOVE. OUT OF THIS CHARACTER OF GRACE AND COMPASSION, GOD RELATES TO ALL OF HIS CREATION WITH GOODNESS. DAVID PICKS UP ON THE IDEA OF GOD AS CREATOR AND TURNS TO THE IDEA AS GOD AS KING OVER CREATION BY NATURE OF HIS STATUS AS CREATOR. ALL THAT GOD HAS MADE PRAISES GOD WHICH INCLUDES THE PEOPLE OF HIS CHOOSING (JEWS). CREATION/PEOPLE REHEARSE THE WONDER OF GOD'S REIGN AND HIS MIGHT AS KING. IN DAVID'S MIND, GOD'S GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE CHARACTER IS SUPPORTED BY THE EXPERIENCE OF CREATION. HE THEN LOOKS TO THE FUTURE NOTING THAT GOD'S KINGDOM WILL NEVER END; THAT IS, GOD'S GRACIOUS REIGN AND INVOLVEMENT WITH CREATION WILL NOT END. IN THIS CYCLE, DAVID CALLS HIS FELLOW WORSHIPERS TO CONSIDER GOD'S CHARACTER AS A GOOD KING, AND HE INVITES THEM TO EXPERIENCE THIS REIGN OF GOD WHICH IS MORE THAN A PASSING EXPERIENCE.

THE SECOND CYCLE (PSALM 145.13B-17) BEGINS AND ENDS WITH STATEMENTS AFFIRMING THE UPRIGHT CHARACTER OF GOD. GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY AND RIGHT IN ALL HE DOES. DAVID SUPPORTS THIS CLAIM BY REHEARSING THE STORY OF GOD WHICH IS ONE OF CARING FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN. THE IDEA IS MOST LIKELY NOT JUST THAT OF GOD HELPING THOSE WHO FIND THEMSELVES IN A TIME OF NEED BUT THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN OPPRESSED OR OVERCOME IN LIFE. FURTHER, DAVID NOTES THAT ALL OF CREATION DEPENDS UPON GOD FOR THEIR FOOD AND THAT GOD PROVIDES THIS FOOD. THE CLOSING STATEMENT ABOUT GOD'S UPRIGHTNESS, WHILE ECHOING THE BEGINNING CLAIM ABOUT GOD IS FUTURE ORIENTED. GOD WILL CONTINUE TO BE RIGHTEOUS AND TRUSTWORTHY. THIS IS HIS TRACK RECORD AND WILL THEREFORE CONTINUE TO BE HIS WAY OF BEING. THIS FUTURE ORIENTATION INVITES THE WORSHIPER TO CONSIDER AND RESPOND TO GOD BY ORIENTING HIS LIFE AROUND GOD IN SUCH A WAY THAT HE DEPENDS UPON GOD'S UPRIGHT NATURE.

THE FINAL CYCLE (PSALM 145.18-20) BEGINS WITH DAVID CLAIMING THAT GOD IS NEAR TO ALL WHO CALL OUT TO HIM; THAT IS, GOD HEARS THE CRIES OF THOSE WHO CRY OUT TO HIM IN FAITH. HE SUPPORTS THIS CLAIM BY NOTING THAT GOD FULFILLS THE DESIRES OF THOSE WHO FEAR HIM WHICH INDICATES HE HAS HEARD THEIR CRY. HE THEN LOOKS TO THE FUTURE CLAIMING THAT GOD WILL WATCH OVER THOSE WHO LOVE HIM AND WILL DESTROY THOSE WHO DO NOT. THIS FUTURE ORIENTATION INVITES THE WORSHIPER TO ALIGN HIS

STORY WITH THE STORY OF GOD WHO LISTENS TO PRAYER.

DAVID CONCLUDES HIS PSALM BY REITERATING THAT HE IS WORSHIPING GOD, AND HIS WORSHIP IS INTENDED TO LEAD OTHERS INTO WORSHIP. THIS FRAMEWORK FOR WORSHIP, PARTICULARLY A PRAYER OF WORSHIP, CAN FEEL STRANGE TO THE MODERN WORSHIPER. IN MODERN WORSHIP, THE FOCUS IS GENERALLY UPON WHO GOD IS AND THE WORSHIPER'S RESPONSE TO GOD'S CHARACTER, PARTICULARLY THE EMOTIONAL RESPONSE OF THE WORSHIPER. IN LESS THAN GENEROUS TERMS, THIS WORSHIP APPROACH HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS "JESUS IS MY BOYFRIEND" WORSHIP; THAT IS, THE WORSHIPER LOOKS AT GOD AND SAYS, "YOU MAKE ME FEEL GOOD, AND I LOVE YOU." THIS IS CLEARLY NOT DAVID'S APPROACH TO WORSHIP, ALTHOUGH HE DOES NOT DISTANCE HIMSELF FROM HIS FEELINGS ABOUT GOD.

DAVID'S APPROACH TO WORSHIP IS NOT ABOUT GENERATING FEELING BUT ABOUT GENERATING WORSHIP AND WORSHIPERS. IN OTHER WORDS, WORSHIP IS TO LEAD TO MORE WORSHIP, IN THE LIFE OF THE WORSHIPER AND IN CREATION. THIS IS DONE BY REHEARSING GOD'S CHARACTER, HIS DEEDS, AND EXTENDING THE INVITATION TO ALLOW GOD'S STORY TO SHAPE THE LIFE EXPERIENCE OF THE HEARER AS PRESENT OR FUTURE WORSHIPER. WHEN COMPARED AND CONTRASTED WITH MODERN WORSHIP, THE ONLY COMMONALITY WHICH IS TRULY APPARENT IS THE OPENING MOVEMENT OF STATING GOD'S CHARACTER. HOWEVER, IF WORSHIP IS TO REMAIN GOD-CENTERED AND TO MAKE ROOM FOR THE WORSHIPER TO EXPERIENCE MORE OF GOD (PRAYER) THEN ONE CANNOT IMMEDIATELY MOVE TO FEELING OR RESPONSE. THE ANCIENT WORSHIP ARC OF REHEARSING THE DEEDS OF GOD BECOMES ALL-IMPORTANT BECAUSE THIS REHEARSAL GROUNDS THE WORSHIP CLAIM OF GOD'S CHARACTER. APART FROM THIS GROUNDING THE WORSHIPER'S CLAIM BECOMES SUBJECTIVE AND IN TIME CAN BECOME DEPENDENT UPON THE FEELING OF THE WORSHIPER.

IN THE SAME WAY THAT CLAIMS ABOUT GOD MUST BE SUPPORTED TO A REHEARSAL OF GOD'S DEEDS, SO TOO MUST A REHEARSAL OF DEEDS LEAD TO A CONSIDERATION OF THE FUTURE. IF WORSHIP WERE TO END WITH A STATEMENT OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE, THE WORSHIPER QUICKLY BECOMES DETACHED FROM GOD AS GOD BECOMES A FIGURE OF MYTH OR HISTORY. WHEN A WORSHIPER REHEARSES THE DEEDS OF GOD AND THEN CONSIDERS THE FUTURE TRAJECTORY TO WHICH THESE DEEDS POINT, THE WORSHIPER FINDS HE IS INVITED TO STEP INTO GOD'S FUTURE WITH HOPE AND SURETY. THIS IN TURN, LEADS TO MORE WORSHIP AS THE WORSHIPER EXPERIENCES THE CHARACTER OF GOD FOR HIMSELF AND CAN THEREFORE ADD TO THE STORY OF GOD BY HIS OWN EXPERIENCE.

A SECOND ASPECT OF MODERN WORSHIP WHICH DIFFERS FROM THIS ANCIENT WORSHIP ARC IS THAT OF REPEATED REHEARSAL. IN MODERN WORSHIP, "NEW" AND "CREATIVE" ARE IMPORTANT WATCHWORDS. SOME OF THIS IS DRIVEN BY OUR GOD-ORDAINED CREATIVE NATURE

WHICH REFLECTS HIS OWN. HOWEVER, MUCH IS DRIVEN BY OUR CULTURAL BENT TOWARD NEW, BIGGER-AND-BETTER EXPERIENCES. IN THE ANCIENT WORSHIP ARC, THE STORY OF GOD IS REPEATED AND REPEATED. DAVID INDICATES THIS IS HIS INTENTION WITH THE USE OF THE HEBREW ALPHABET FORMING AN ACROSTIC FRAMEWORK FOR HIS PSALM OF PRAISE. THE PURPOSE OF SUCH A FRAMEWORK WAS TO AID MEMORY IN FUTURE RECITATIONS OF THE PSALM. THUS, DAVID INTENDED FOR HIS PSALM TO BE REHEARSED AGAIN AND AGAIN. THIS STANDS AGAINST THE MODERN DESIRE FOR NEW EXPERIENCES, BUT THIS PURSUIT OF THE NEW CAN BECOME A FORM OF IDOLATRY IN ITSELF. THE REPETITION OF THE OLD IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE WHILE GOD'S STORY GROWS, IT DOES NOT CHANGE. IT STANDS AGAINST THE COMPETING WORSHIP NARRATIVES OF CULTURE WHICH CONTINUALLY INVITE THE WORSHIPER TO JOIN THEIR STORY WITH THAT OF THE MODERN AGE. THE REPEATED OR RHYTHMIC REHEARSAL OF GOD'S STORY COURSE CORRECTS THE HEART OF THE WORSHIP AS HE FINDS HIS HEART TURNED THROUGH THE REPEATED REHEARSAL OF CULTURE'S NARRATIVES.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

WE WORSHIP IN PRAYER. OUR SINGING IS PRAYER. OUR PRAISE IS PRAYER. OUR PROCLAMATION IS PRAYER. WE WORSHIP IN PRAYER, BUT WHAT MAKES PRAYER WORSHIP? I WAS TAUGHT THAT PRAYER IS WORSHIP WHEN IT AFFIRMS WHO GOD IS. GOD IS GREAT. HE IS AMAZING. HE IS WONDERFUL. YOU GET THE POINT. THIS IS NOT WRONG. IN FACT, THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF PRAYERS OF WORSHIP. IT JUST ISN'T THE END. WHEN THIS IS THE END, AND IT WAS FOR SO MANY YEARS, I BECAME DETACHED FROM GOD, AND THIS IS THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF WHAT IS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN THROUGH PRAYER. WHEN I AFFIRM WHO GOD IS AND STOP THERE, OVER TIME I BEGIN TO WONDER IF GOD REALLY IS THESE THINGS. HOW DO I KNOW? WHO SAID? WHAT IF HE IS NOT? ALL I HAVE TO GO ON IS HOW I FEEL. IF I FEEL GREAT AND MY WORSHIP MOVES ME THEN IT MUST BE TRUE, BUT IF I HAVE A BAD DAY AND FEEL AWFUL. . . THEN WHAT?

I AM LEARNING THAT PRAYER THAT IS WORSHIP, MUST GO BEYOND WHO GOD IS. THESE PRAYERS MUST STATE WHY. THEY MUST RETELL GOD'S STORY, A STORY WHICH EXTENDS FAR BEYOND MINE IN BOTH DIRECTIONS. WHEN I LOOK BACK, I SEE THE TRUTH SUPPORTING WHO GOD IS. WHEN I LOOK FORWARD, I SEE THE TRAJECTORY OF WHERE GOD IS HEADED, AND I HAVE A CHOICE OF WHETHER TO JOIN MY STORY WITH HIS. IF I DO, THEN I AM DRAWN INTO WORSHIP NOT BECAUSE OF MY RESPONSE BUT BECAUSE OF THE EXPERIENCE TO WHICH MY RESPONSE LEADS ME. IN SAYING "YES" TO GOD'S STORY, I BECOME PART OF WHAT GOD IS DOING AND I NOW KNOW THE TRUTH OF GOD'S CHARACTER FOR MYSELF, AND AM ABLE TO TELL HIS STORY OUT OF EXPERIENCE AND NOT HEARSAY. I AM ABLE TO INVITE OTHERS TO TASTE AND SEE THE GOODNESS OF GOD BECAUSE I KNOW WHO HE IS, AND THAT IS WORSHIP.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHEN WE WORSHIP, WE DO SO AS PRAYER. THESE PRAYERS CAN TAKE MANY FORMS, BUT WHATEVER FORM THEY TAKE, THEY REMAIN WORSHIP. IF WE WISH TO PRAY IN THIS WAY, THE QUESTION CONCERNS THE NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP. IN OUR MODERN MIND, WORSHIP IS ABOUT KNOWING WHO GOD IS AND RESPONDING IN AN EXPERIENTIAL WAY. HOWEVER, PRAYING IN THIS WAY CAN BE DIFFICULT, OFTEN LEAVING US MORE DETACHED FROM GOD AND ATTACHED TO OUR FEELINGS. THIS IS BECAUSE WORSHIP IS NOT ABOUT KNOWING WHO GOD IS AND RESPONDING IN AN EXPERIENTIAL MANNER. WORSHIP IS ABOUT REHEARSING GOD'S STORY SO WE MIGHT STEP INTO GOD'S STORY, EXPERIENCING HIM THEREBY FINDING OURSELVES WORSHIPING BY TELLING GOD'S STORY TO INVITE OTHERS INTO THE SAME EXPERIENCE. PRAYING IN THIS WAY REQUIRES AFFIRMING GOD'S CHARACTER, REMEMBERING GOD'S STORY WHICH SUPPORTS OUR CLAIM, AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE WHERE GOD'S CHARACTER AND ACTIONS POINT SO THAT WE MIGHT CHOOSE WHETHER TO BECOME PART OF WHAT GOD IS DOING AND WHERE HE IS HEADED. PRAYING IN THIS WAY CAN FEEL DIFFICULT, BUT WE CAN LEARN. ONE WAY IS TO PRAY THE PSALMS OF PRAISE, ALL OF WHICH FOLLOW THIS FORMAT. ONE SUCH PSALM IS PSALM 146. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER PRAYING THIS PSALM AS IT IS WRITTEN, PAYING ATTENTION TO THE STORY OF GOD AND WHERE THAT STORY POINTS, CONSIDERING ITS INVITATION TO ALLOW GOD TO BE YOUR KING. RATHER THAN PRAYING THIS PSALM ONCE, CONSIDER PRAYING THIS PSALM DAILY FOR AN ENTIRE WEEK OR MONTH. IT IS IN THE REPEATED REHEARSAL OF THIS PRAYER THAT WE NOT JUST LEARN HOW TO PRAY BUT WE DISCOVER HOW PRAYERS OF WORSHIP DO THEIR WORK. THEY SLOWLY AND SURELY COUNTERACT THE COMPETING WORSHIP NARRATIVES OF OUR CULTURE, CALLING US TO ALLOW OUR LIVES TO BE SHAPED BY THE STORY OF THE ONE TRUE GOD. APART FROM THIS REPETITION, THE CONSTANT DRUMBEAT OF CULTURE WINS OVER OUR HEARTS. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER JOURNALING ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES AS YOU ENGAGE IN THIS PRACTICE.



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