

PRAAYER AND PRESENCE

THE PURSUIT OF GLORY

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

November 19, 2017

Discussion Guide

MAKING ROOM FOR GOD BY CONFESSING

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

- WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD "CONFESS," WHAT IMAGES OR IDEAS COME TO MIND? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?

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 GOD'S FORGIVENESS.
- READ 1 JOHN 1.5-2.2 ALOUD. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE, SLOWLY.
- JOHN ARGUES THAT GOD IS MORALLY UPRIGHT (LIGHT) AND THAT TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM REQUIRES A COMMITMENT TO A LIFE IN KEEPING WITH WHO GOD

IS. HOWEVER, THIS COMMITMENT REQUIRES THAT OUR SIN, OUR NOT LIVING A LIFE IN KEEPING WITH WHO GOD IS, BE DEALT WITH. GOD HAS DONE THIS THROUGH THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS. HOWEVER, SIN REMAINS AN ONGOING PROBLEM IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER AND MUST BE DEALT WITH IN AN ONGOING WAY. IN WHAT WAYS DOES JOHN ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS TO DEAL WITH THE ISSUE OF ONGOING SIN?

- IS THIS THE WAY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH TODAY DEAL WITH THE ISSUE OF ONGOING SIN? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- ACCORDING TO JOHN, WHAT RESULTS ARE LINKED WITH DEALING WITH ONGOING SIN THROUGH CONFESSION? DO WE SEE THESE SAME RESULTS IN THE WAY WE DEAL WITH SIN TODAY? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- WHAT MIGHT CONFESSION LOOK LIKE IN THE MODERN BELIEVER'S LIFE? IN THE MODERN CHURCH?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT WORSHIP PROVIDE AN APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENT FOR CONFESSION?
- WHAT, IF ANYTHING, MIGHT KEEP PEOPLE FROM CONFESSING IN THIS MANNER?
- CONSIDER TAKING SOME TIME TO WORSHIP. THIS MIGHT INCLUDE THE SINGING OF A SONG WHICH REHEARSES PART OF GOD'S STORY OR THE READING OF SCRIPTURE. PONDER GOD'S STORY AND RESPOND BY FIRST ADMITTING WHERE YOUR OWN STORIES ARE NOT IN LINE WITH GOD'S STORY (CONFESSION). INVITE GOD INTO THESE AREAS OF YOUR LIFE FOR THE PURPOSE OF HAVING HIM DEAL WITH THEM REDEMPTIVELY.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

FORGIVENESS

THE CONCEPT OF FORGIVENESS IS CENTRAL TO THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE (ACTS 2.38), ONE OF THE SUPPORTING PILLARS UPON WHICH THE PROGRESSING KINGDOM WORK OF GOD RESTS UNTIL ALL OF CREATION IS RESTORED (EPHESIANS 1.7; COLOSSIANS 1.13-14). THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, A NUMBER OF WORDS ARE USED TO SPEAK ABOUT FORGIVENESS, BUT MOST HAVE RANGES OF MEANING WHICH OVERLAP. THE WORD FOR FORGIVENESS NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS USED MOST FREQUENTLY HAS A RANGE OF MEANINGS WHICH IMPLY SOMEONE HAS LET GO OR SENT AWAY SOMETHING OR SOMEONE. WHEN APPLIED TO SIN, WITHIN MANY NEW TESTAMENT CONTEXTS, THE WORD INDICATES GOD'S DEALING WITH SIN BY PASSING OVER IT OR LETTING GO OF IT; THAT IS, GOD REFUSES TO RETALIATE IN RESPONSE TO SIN BUT CHOOSES TO LOOK PAST THE WRONG DONE TO HIM FOR THE PURPOSE OF RESTORING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ONE WHO HAS SINNED AGAINST HIM. THIS RESPONSE OF GOD TO SIN BY LETTING IT GO APPEARS TO BE THE CENTRAL THREAD ASSOCIATED WITH GOD'S FORGIVENESS THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE (HOSEA 14.4; PSALM 103.12; EPHESIANS 4.32; HEBREWS 10.17). SIMPLY PUT, A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF GOD'S PLAN TO DEAL WITH THE SINFULNESS OF PEOPLE IS TO PASS OVER OR LET GO OF THEIR SIN FOREVER SO THAT GOD AND PEOPLE CAN BE RECONCILED IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP. JESUS INDICATES THAT THIS FORGIVENESS IS AVAILABLE WITHOUT LIMITS (LUKE 17.4; MATTHEW 18.22), AND THAT SUCH FORGIVENESS IS A NECESSARY PART OF MOVING TOWARD THE EXPERIENCE OF A RESTORED LIFE IN EVERY IMAGINABLE WAY (MARK 2.1-12).

NO OTHER RELIGION TEACHES THAT GOD DEALS WITH SIN BY LETTING IT GO IN THE WAY SCRIPTURE PORTRAYS GOD'S FORGIVENESS. HOWEVER, TO SAY THAT GOD'S UNLIMITED FORGIVENESS TAKES NO ACCOUNT OF SIN WOULD BE MISTAKEN. GOD'S FORGIVENESS TAKES THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN VERY SERIOUSLY, BUT GOD CHOOSES TO BEAR THESE CONSEQUENCES HIMSELF SO THAT HE MIGHT LOOK PAST SIN. GOD'S FORGIVENESS IS BASED UPON THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF JESUS THROUGH WHICH GOD ATONED FOR THE SIN OF PEOPLE (HEBREW 9.11-10.18; 1 JOHN 2.1-2). IN AND THROUGH THE DEATH OF JESUS, SIN AND ITS ASSAULT AGAINST GOD'S CHARACTER IS COVERED OR SATISFIED (1 JOHN 2.1-2). THEREFORE, IN GOD'S SIGHT, THE WRONGDOING NO LONGER EXISTS. SO, PEOPLE AND GOD CAN ENJOY A RECONCILED RELATIONSHIP WHICH LEADS TO THE RESTORATION OF THE LIFE OF THE ONE WHO EXPERIENCES GOD'S FORGIVENESS.

THE TEXT

MATTHEW 6.12, 14-15: *FORGIVE ME AS I FORGIVE THEM*

IN HIS FRAMEWORK FOR PRAYER, JESUS ENCOURAGES HIS FOLLOWERS TO OFFER PRAYERS OF CONFESSION. TO CONFESS MEANS TO BRING OUT INTO THE OPEN THAT WHICH IS HIDDEN. THAT WHICH IS TO BE CONFESSED IS NOTHING OTHER THAN THE DEBTS (TRESPASSES) OF PEOPLE. SIMPLY PUT, JESUS ENCOURAGES PEOPLE TO ADMIT WHERE THEY HAVE CROSSED THE LINE, STRAYING OUTSIDE THE LIFE GOD INTENDED FOR THEM. HOWEVER, THE PURPOSE OF THIS CONFESSION IS TO EXPERIENCE THE FORGIVENESS OF GOD; GOD'S PASSING OVER THE SIN FOR THE PURPOSE OF RESTORING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH PEOPLE BROKEN BY THEIR SIN. ONE MIGHT IMAGINE GOD'S ACT OF FORGIVENESS AS GOD REACHING OVER THE SIN TO PEOPLE AS IF THE SIN DID NOT EXIST. IT IS IN A RESTORED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THAT ONE EXPERIENCES THE ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCK OF A KINGDOM LIFE, A LIFE WITH GOD. THEREFORE, AS JESUS PRESENTS IT, CONFESSION IS ABOUT MOVING TOWARD THE EXPERIENCE OF A KINGDOM LIFE, WHICH MAKES A WAY TO EXPERIENCE A VERY REAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

HOWEVER, JESUS TIES THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS FOUND THROUGH CONFESSION TO ONE'S OWN FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS. ONE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO UNDERSTAND JESUS' WORDS TO INDICATE THAT ONE MUST EARN GOD'S FORGIVENESS THROUGH SIMILAR ACTS OF FORGIVENESS. HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT THE CONTEXT OF THE PRAYER OR THE LARGER SERMON ON THE MOUNT. JESUS' SERMON IS ABOUT UNDERSTANDING AND MOVING TOWARD A LIFE UNDER GOD'S REIGN, A KINGDOM LIFE. PART OF THIS MOVEMENT REQUIRES INTENTIONALLY PURSUING GOD THROUGH SPIRITUAL PRACTICES/DISCIPLINES, MAKING ROOM FOR GOD IN ONE'S LIFE (MATTHEW 6.1-18). WHEN JESUS DESCRIBED THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF PRAYER, OF WHICH CONFESSION IS A PART, HE BEGAN WITH PRAYERS OF WORSHIP. COMING FIRST, THE CONCEPT OF PRAYERS OF WORSHIP IS MEANT TO DOMINATE AND INFORM THE REST OF JESUS' PRAYER FRAMEWORK. THE PERSON OF GOD IS ENCOURAGED TO REHEARSE GOD'S STORY FOR THE PURPOSE OF ALIGNING HIS HEART/LIFE WITH WHO GOD IS AND WHAT GOD IS DOING. IT IS HERE THAT WE FIND THE CONTEXT FOR JESUS' STATEMENT ABOUT EXTENDING FORGIVENESS.

FORGIVENESS IS PART OF GOD'S KINGDOM MOVEMENT, A NECESSARY PILLAR UPON WHICH PEOPLE'S LIVES IN HIS KINGDOM RESTS. PEOPLE LOST THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE IN GOD'S KINGDOM THROUGH THEIR SIN. THEREFORE, A RETURN TO THIS LIFE, IN LARGE PART, RESTS UPON DEALING WITH THEIR SIN. WHEN JESUS SPEAKS ABOUT FORGIVING OTHERS, HE DOES SO IN THE CONTEXT OF A RESPONSE TO WORSHIP. A PERSON WHO HAS WORSHIPPED WILL STEP INTO THE STORY OF GOD WHICH INVOLVES FORGIVENESS; THAT IS, A PERSON WHO HAS WORSHIPPED WILL JOIN GOD IN HIS KINGDOM ACT OF WORSHIP. WHEN JESUS ENCOURAGES HIS FOLLOWERS TO PRAY THAT GOD WOULD FORGIVE THEM AS THEY HAVE FORGIVEN OTHERS, HE IS ENCOURAGING THEM TO UNDERSTAND THAT FORGIVENESS IS A REALITY OF GOD'S KINGDOM MOVEMENT, AND AS SUCH, IT CAN ONLY BE EXPERIENCED

BY THOSE WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO BECOME PART OF GOD'S KINGDOM WITH THEIR LIVES AND NOT JUST THEIR WORDS.

JESUS RETURNS TO THIS IDEA AFTER HE FINISHES HIS FRAMEWORK FOR PRAYER. HE REITERATES THAT PEOPLE WHO HAVE JOINED GOD IN THE KINGDOM ACT OF FORGIVENESS ARE THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE FORGIVENESS. HOWEVER, THOSE WHO HAVE NOT JOINED GOD IN THE KINGDOM ACT OF FORGIVENESS DO NOT EXPERIENCE GOD'S FORGIVENESS. THIS IS BECAUSE TO REFUSE TO ACT IN KEEPING WITH GOD'S STORY IS IN FACT TO REFUSE TO BE PART OF WHAT GOD IS DOING. IT IS A FAILURE TO WORSHIP. WHEN ONE REFUSES TO BE PART OF WHAT GOD IS DOING, THEY CANNOT EXPERIENCE WHAT GOD IS DOING. ONE MIGHT SAY THAT FORGIVENESS CAN ONLY BE EXPERIENCED BY THOSE WHO ARE IN THE KINGDOM, AND THOSE WHO ARE IN THE KINGDOM ARE THOSE WHO HAVE JOINED GOD IN HIS KINGDOM WORK.

1 JOHN 1.5-2.2: CONFESSING OUR SIN

THE LETTER OF 1 JOHN WAS WRITTEN BY THE APOSTLE JOHN IN RESPONSE TO A CHURCH SCHISM. AT SOME POINT, FALSE TEACHERS (PROBABLY GNOSTIC-ORIENTED) FOUND THEIR WAY INTO THIS CONGREGATION. A DISAGREEMENT OVER THE IDENTITY OF JESUS AND WHAT IT MEANT TO FOLLOW HIM AROSE WITH A PORTION OF THE CHURCH CHOOSING TO LEAVE, FOLLOWING THE FALSE TEACHERS (1 JOHN 2.18-19). IN RESPONSE TO THIS SCHISM, MANY IN THIS SMALL COMMUNITY OF FAITH BEGAN TO WORRY THAT PERHAPS THEY HAD BEEN ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE SCHISM. JOHN WROTE TO THEM, REAFFIRMING THE IDENTITY OF JESUS AND WHAT IT MEANT TO FOLLOW HIM IN ORDER TO REASSURE THE SHATTERED CONGREGATION.

PART OF THE CONTROVERSY WITH THE FALSE TEACHERS INVOLVED THE REALITY OF SIN. TRADITIONAL GNOSTIC TEACHING ASSERTED THAT SIN COULD NOT OR DID NOT EXIST. THIS POINT WAS MADE VARIOUS WAYS, BUT ALL RESTED UPON A STRONG DUALISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE PERSON AS SPIRIT AND FLESH. IF A PERSON CONSISTED OF THESE TWO PARTS AND ONLY THE SPIRIT MATTERED, THEN SIN IN THE BODY DID NOT MATTER OR WAS NOT (IN SOME CASES) POSSIBLE. JOHN WROTE TO REAFFIRM THAT WHAT BELIEVERS DID WITH THEIR BODIES MATTERED, AND THAT SIN COMMITTED IN THE BODY WAS REAL AND MUST BE DEALT WITH BY GOD.

JOHN BEGINS TO DEAL WITH THIS ISSUE BY FIRST REHEARSING GOD'S STORY. GOD IS LIGHT AND IN HIM IS NO DARKNESS. LIGHT AND DARKNESS CAN BE USED METAPHORICALLY IN SEVERAL WAYS, BUT IN LIGHT OF JOHN'S USE OF THE TERMS IN HIS GOSPEL, IT IS BEST TO UNDERSTAND HIM AS REFERRING BACK TO GOD'S CREATIVE/RE-CREATIVE ACTION. HOWEVER, THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT INVOLVES MORALITY. THEREFORE, ONE SHOULD PROBABLY UNDERSTAND JOHN TO BE VIEWING CREATION THROUGH A MORAL LENS. GOD CREATED AND IN SO DOING BROUGHT ORDER TO CREATION, AN ORDER BASED

ON HIS CHARACTER. HE WAS LIGHT TO CREATION (JOHN 1.9). HOWEVER, IN CREATION TERMS, DARKNESS STANDS IN APPOSITION TO LIGHT (ORDER). DARKNESS IS CHAOS OR EVIL TO LIGHTS GOODNESS AND ORDER. THUS, JOHN CLAIMS THAT GOD IS THE ONE WHO IS UPRIGHT AND MORALLY PURE. THIS IS THE WAY IN WHICH GOD ORDERED THE WORLD AND IS REORDERING THE WORLD.

TO CLAIM TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH THIS GOD WHO CREATED AND IS RECREATING THE WORLD IS TO CLAIM TO BE PART OF GOD'S UPRIGHT WAYS. HOWEVER, THE PROOF OF THIS CLAIM IS REVEALED IN ONE'S LIFE. TO LIVE CONTRARY TO THESE WAYS (DARKNESS) INDICATES THAT A PERSON HAS NOT TRULY ALIGNED HIMSELF WITH GOD AND WHAT HE IS DOING IN THE WORLD. ONLY PEOPLE WHO LIVE GOD'S CREATIVE INTENTIONS WHICH ARE IN KEEPING WITH HIS CHARACTER ARE THOSE WHO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, AND THIS FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IS SEEN IN FELLOWSHIP AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE. THIS IS JOHN'S FIRST BLOW AGAINST THOSE WHO LEFT. BY THEIR BREAKING OF FELLOWSHIP, CHOOSING TO GO ANOTHER WAY, THESE FALSE TEACHERS HAVE REVEALED THEY ARE NOT TRULY PART OF WHAT GOD IS DOING. HOWEVER, JOHN GOES FURTHER. IN RAISING GOD'S CREATIVE INTENTIONS WHICH ARE ROOTED IN HIS CHARACTER, JOHN MUST ALSO DEAL WITH THE REASON NECESSITATING GOD'S ACTION OF RECREATING—SIN. TO BE PART OF GOD'S INTENDED LIFE, ONE MUST HAVE HIS SIN DEALT WITH. JOHN ASSERTS THAT GOD HAS AND DOES DEAL WITH SIN THROUGH THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF JESUS, AND HE DEALS WITH IT BY FULLY REMOVING IT FROM THE LIFE OF THE ONE WHO HAS ALIGNED HIS LIFE WITH GOD'S OWN LIFE.

HOWEVER, SOME OF THE FALSE TEACHERS HAD CLAIMED THAT PEOPLE HAD NO SIN IN THEM; THAT IS, THAT SIN WAS NOT A REALITY. JOHN'S OPPONENTS MADE THIS CLAIM BASED UPON A SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO FOLLOWING GOD. THEIR "SPIRIT" WAS CLEAN AND COULD NOT SIN, BUT JOHN ARGUED THEIR BODY WAS NOT. THE REALITY WAS THAT IN THEIR BODIES, PEOPLE LIVED CONTRARY TO GOD'S CREATIVE INTENTIONS AND CHARACTER. THIS MUST BE DEALT WITH TO BE PART OF GOD'S MOVEMENT IN THE WORLD. DEALING WITH SIN INVOLVED ADMITTING ONE HAD SINNED. NOTE THAT JOHN DOES NOT GO BEYOND THE STATEMENT OF CONFESSION TO STATEMENTS INVOLVING REMORSE OR GUILT. JOHN SIMPLY ENCOURAGES ONE TO ADMIT THEY ARE LIVING OUTSIDE GOD'S CREATIVE ORDER. BECAUSE GOD IS FULLY DEVOTED TO PEOPLE AND JUST IN DEALING WITH SIN, GOD REACHES PAST THE SIN WITH FORGIVENESS TO RESTORE RELATIONSHIP AND DEALS WITH SIN BY REMOVING IT FROM THE LIFE OF THE ONE WHO HAS CONFESSED. IN SOME WAY, GOD COMPLETELY REMOVES SIN FROM THE RELATIONSHIP AND THE PERSON.

OTHER FALSE TEACHERS CLAIMED THAT THEY HAD NOT SINNED. THESE TEACHERS ACKNOWLEDGED SIN BUT CLAIMED NOT TO HAVE ENGAGED IN IT. JOHN ARGUES THIS IS NOT TRUE AND THAT SUCH A CLAIM REVEALS AN

ABSENCE OF WORSHIP. THIS PERSON HAS NOT HEARD AND RESPONDED TO GOD'S WORD, HIS STORY. TO HEAR GOD'S STORY (WORSHIP) IS TO HEAR HOW ONE HAS SINNED AND IS SINNING. JOHN DOES NOT WISH FOR PEOPLE TO SIN BUT TO BE FREE FROM SIN. HOWEVER, SIN IS A REALITY, ONE WHICH GOD HAS DEALT WITH THROUGH JESUS. IN JESUS, GOD HAS MOVED TO TAKE CARE OF THE REALITIES SIN BRINGS ABOUT, A MOVEMENT INTENDED TO BE FOR THE WHOLE WORLD AND NOT JUST THE MEMBERS OF THE SMALL COMMUNITY OF FAITH.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

JESUS INVITES ME TO PRAY, AND TO PRAY BY CONFESSING WHERE I AM OUT OF PLACE, LIVING A LIFE CONTRARY TO GOD'S KINGDOM PURPOSES AND WAYS. FOR MOST OF MY LIFE AS A FOLLOWER OF JESUS, I HAVE POLITELY DECLINED. I HAVE HAD NO INTEREST IN GOING TO GOD AND LISTING OFF ALL THE WAYS I HAVE BLOWN IT AND KEEP BLOWING IT. MAYBE THIS IS BECAUSE MY IDEA OF CONFESSION HAS BEEN SOMETHING LIKE STANDING BEFORE GOD SAYING HOW SORRY I AM, HOW TERRIBLY I HAVE BEHAVED, AND PROMISING TO NOT DO IT AGAIN, BUT BOTH GOD AND I KNOW I AM GOING TO GO AND DO IT AGAIN. IT FEELS POINTLESS, DEMEANING, A PROCESS MEANT TO DO NOTHING OTHER THAN BRING MORE SHAME INTO AN ALREADY SHAME-FILLED LIFE.

HOWEVER, THE MORE I RELAX AND PONDER JESUS' INVITATION RATHER THAN REJECTING IT OUTRIGHT, THE MORE I AM CONVINCED THAT WHAT I ENVISION AND WHAT JESUS ENVISIONS ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT THINGS. IN MY VERSION OF CONFESSION, THE EMPHASIS IS ON MY MOVEMENT TO APOLOGIZE AND CORRECT, CORRECT MYSELF. IN JESUS' VERSION OF CONFESSION, THE EMPHASIS IS ON RESTORATION AND ME BEING CORRECTED. IF I HEAR JESUS RIGHTLY, THEN HIS PROMISE IS THAT IF I WILL ACKNOWLEDGE WHERE I AM OUT OF PLACE, THEN IN RESPONSE GOD WILL WORK TO REMEDY MY "OUT-OF-PLACENESS." CONFESSION ISN'T ABOUT ME FEELING BAD OR MAKING PROMISES I CAN'T KEEP. CONFESSION IS ABOUT INVITING GOD INTO MY LIFE, INTO AREAS THAT NEED HIS ATTENTION. CONFESSION ISN'T DEMEANING. IT IS MEANT TO BE RESTORATIVE.

I LIKE JESUS' VERSION A WHOLE LOT BETTER THAN MINE. THE ONLY TROUBLE I HAVE WITH IT IS LIVING IT. I CAN'T SEEM TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO NOT DEVOLVE INTO SHAME-BASED CONFESSION. RECENTLY, I HAVE BEEN PAYING MORE AND MORE ATTENTION TO JESUS' LINKING OF WORSHIP WITH CONFESSION. IN JESUS' MIND, PEOPLE WHO WORSHIP ARE PEOPLE WHO SITUATE THEMSELVES TO CONFESS. THAT MAKES SENSE. THE MORE I REHEARSE GOD'S STORY AND RESPOND TO IT, THE MORE I REALIZE HOW OUT OF PLACE I AM AND HOW HELPLESS I AM TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT. SO, MY WORSHIP RESPONSE BECOMES CONFESSION. I ADMIT MY "OUT-OF-PLACENESS," INVITING GOD TO REORIENT AND RIGHT MY HEART, MY HANDS, MY MOUTH, AND MY MIND. AS PART OF MY WORSHIP, CONFESSION NEED NOT DEVOLVE INTO SHAME, BUT IT CAN BE FILLED WITH JOY, JOY IN KNOWING I AM MOVING

TO THE VERY LIFE I WAS MADE TO LIVE.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

CONFESSION FEELS AWFUL. NO ONE LIKES TO ADMIT WE HAVE BLOWN IT. YET, CONFESSION IS A NECESSARY PART OF THE WAY WE PRAY. IN PRAYER, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE MANY WAYS WE HAVE BLOWN IT, THE VARIOUS WAYS WE FIND OURSELVES OUT OF PLACE IN GOD'S KINGDOM. MOST OFTEN, WE THINK OF CONFESSION AS A WAY OF GOD REMINDING US HOW TERRIBLE WE ARE OR SOME VERSION OF THIS STORY, BUT CONFESSION HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS STORY AT ALL. CONFESSION IS PART OF GOD'S STORY AND THAT STORY IS A STORY OF RESTORATION. THAT MEANS CONFESSION IS ABOUT RESTORATION. CONFESSION IS NOT ABOUT FEELING TERRIBLE. IT IS ABOUT MOVING FROM A TERRIBLE PLACE. IT IS ABOUT GOD MOVING US FROM A TERRIBLE PLACE. IN CONFESSION, WE RECOGNIZE WHERE WE ARE AND THEN WE CRY OUT TO GOD FOR HELP, FOR RESCUE. IT IS NOT UNLIKE A DROWNING MAN WAVING HIS ARMS AND SCREAMING, "HELP ME. I AM OVER HERE."

THE FIRST STEP IN CONFESSION IS RECOGNIZING WHERE "HERE" IS. THIS TAKES WORSHIP. WHEN WE REHEARSE GOD'S STORY WE HEAR WHO GOD IS AND WHAT GOD DESIRES FOR US. WHEN WE CONSIDER GOD'S STORY IT IS SOON APPARENT WHERE WE ARE AND ARE NOT ALIGNED WITH GOD'S STORY. IT IS THOSE PLACES OF MISALIGNMENT THAT WE MUST CONFESS. CONFESSION NEED NOT BE HARD OR GRIEF-RIDDEN. IT NEED ONLY BE AGREEMENT, AGREEMENT THAT WE ARE OUT OF PLACE, AND WE TELL GOD AS MUCH. IN TELLING GOD WHERE WE ARE, WE ARE ADMITTING THAT WE ARE NOT GOD. WE ARE NOT THE ONES WHO SET THE COURSE FOR WHAT IS RIGHT. WE YIELD TO HIS REIGN BY ASKING HIM TO COME TO US AND WORK IN OUR LIVES SO THAT WE MIGHT BE WHERE WE ARE MEANT TO BE.

THIS IS NOT A ONCE AND FOR ALL PRACTICE BECAUSE WE OFTEN FIND OURSELVES IN THE SAME SPOT OVER AND OVER AGAIN. RATHER THAN GIVING UP, WE KEEP CONFESSING, KEEP AGREEING THAT WE FIND OURSELVES ONCE MORE OUT OF PLACE. IN SO DOING, WE KEEP INVITING GOD TO DEAL WITH THIS PART OF OUR LIVES UNTIL WE ARE IN PLACE FOR GOOD.

TO CONFESS IN THIS WAY, CONSIDER MAKING CONFESSION A PART OF YOUR ACTS OF WORSHIP. FOR INSTANCE, WHEN YOU READ SCRIPTURE OR SING GOD'S STORY, TAKE A MOMENT TO PAUSE AND ASK IF YOU ARE ALIGNED WITH GOD'S STORY. IF YOU ARE NOT, TELL GOD. TELL HIM WHERE YOU FIND YOURSELF AND AGREE THAT IT IS NOT WHERE YOU ARE MEANT TO BE. ASK GOD TO DEAL WITH YOUR "OUT-OF-PLACENESS." REPEAT THIS PRACTICE EVERY TIME YOU WORSHIP. AS GOD'S STORY WORKS ITS WAY INTO YOU, SO TOO WILL THE PRACTICE OF CONFESSION.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

 twitter.com/blake_shipp
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