



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

JUNE 3, 2018

Discussion Guide

KINGDOM GROWTH

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

- IN YOUR MIND, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GROW THE CHURCH?

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 CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND THEMES OF 1 PETER.
- ACCORDING TO JESUS, THE GOSPEL WAS BOTH A PROCLAMATION ABOUT SEEING AND AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, BOTH OF WHICH WERE MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE CHURCH (MARK 1.14-15). READ JESUS' GOSPEL IN MARK 1.14-15 ONCE MORE. IF JESUS' INVITATION TO JOIN THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE CHURCH THEN

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH? FOR THE WORLD? COULD YOU ELABORATE?

- WHAT ARE SOME ATTEMPTS TO GROW THE CHURCH YOU HAVE WITNESSED? HOW MIGHT YOU RATE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- READ 1 PETER 2.1-3.18 ALOUD. SEEK TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE WAY PETER ENCOURAGES THESE CHURCHES TO ENGAGE THEIR WORLD? HOW MIGHT YOU SUMMARIZE PETER'S ADVICE?
- ACCORDING TO PETER, AS THE CHURCH ENGAGED ITS WORLD WITH GOOD DEEDS, THIS SHOULD LEAD TO CONVERSATIONS FOR WHICH THE CHURCH WAS TO BE PREPARED TO HAVE (1 PETER 3.15). HOW MIGHT THIS WORK?
- CONSIDERING THE WAYS THE MODERN CHURCH HAS SOUGHT TO GROW, HOW SIMILAR OR DISSIMILAR ARE THESE TO THE PATH PETER OUTLINES?
- DO YOU THINK IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THE CHURCH TO GROW TODAY FOLLOWING PETER'S GUIDANCE? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT MIGHT BE NECESSARY FOR THIS KIND OF APPROACH TO WORK TODAY?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOUR GROUP TO FOLLOW PETER'S GUIDANCE?
- YOU MIGHT CONSIDER CLOSING BY PRAYING FOR THOSE CLOSEST TO YOUR GROUP (CO-WORKERS, NEIGHBORS, ETC.), THAT THEY WOULD HEAR AND SEE THE LOVE OF GOD THROUGH THE MEMBERS OF YOUR GROUP, AND THAT THEY WOULD SEEK TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE GOD WHOM WE FOLLOW.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

PETER'S EXHORTATION ON BEING THE CHURCH

THE LETTER OF 1 PETER IS ADDRESSED TO BELIEVERS SCATTERED THROUGH FIVE PROVINCES OF THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF ASIA MINOR, MODERN TURKEY. WE DO NOT HAVE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE OF AN EVANGELIZING MISSION IN THIS AREA, BUT MOST LIKELY, THESE AREAS WERE EVANGELIZED BOTH BY JEWISH BELIEVERS WHO FLED THE JERUSALEM PERSECUTION (ACTS 8.1) AND UNKNOWN MISSIONARIES SENT BY LOCAL CONGREGATIONS IN ASIA MINOR. WE DO KNOW THAT THE EPHESIAN CHURCH SERVED AS A HUB FOR CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY IN ASIA MINOR AND ENGAGED IN THE PLANTING OF CHURCHES SUCH AS THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE. THEREFORE, IT WOULD NOT BE A STRETCH TO ENVISION THE EPHESIAN CHURCH AS POTENTIALLY BEING BEHIND THE PLANTING OF THESE CONGREGATIONS.

CHURCH TRADITION MAINTAINS THE APOSTLE PETER WROTE THE LETTER AS THE LETTER ITSELF ATTESTS (1 PETER 1.1). HOWEVER, MORE RECENTLY, SOME SCHOLARS HAVE RAISED DOUBTS ABOUT THE LETTER BEING FROM PETER BECAUSE OF THE SUPERB GREEK IN WHICH THE LETTER IS WRITTEN—FISHERMEN ARE NOT ASSUMED TO WRITE WELL!—AND BECAUSE PETER WAS VIEWED AS THE APOSTLE TO THE JEWS. HOWEVER, PETER WAS NOT ABOVE MINISTERING TO GENTILES AS EVIDENCED IN HIS WORK WITH CORNELIUS (ACTS 10-11), THE GALATIAN CHURCH (GALATIANS 2), AND LATER, THE ROMAN CHURCH. FURTHER, THE LETTER MAKES IT CLEAR THAT PETER DID NOT PEN THE LETTER BUT USED SILAS AS HIS AMANUENSIS (SECRETARY) TO PEN THE LETTER (1 PETER 5.12). AN AMANUENSIS WORKED BY LISTENING TO THE MESSAGE TO BE WRITTEN AND THEN WRITING THIS MESSAGE IN HIS OWN WORDS, MAINTAINING THE AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL VERBAL INTENT AND MEANING. HE WOULD THEN READ THE LETTER TO THE ONE DICTATING THE CONTENT FOR REVISION AND APPROVAL. THEREFORE, THE RESULTANT PRODUCT WOULD MOST CERTAINLY CARRY PETER'S THOUGHT BUT SILAS' WORDING. THEREFORE, IT IS NOT SURPRISING TO FIND THE LETTER TO HAVE EXCELLENT GREEK. IN ADDITION, THE LETTER CARRIES MANY GOSPEL TIES AND MAINTAINS A DEEP CONNECTION WITH JEWISH THOUGHT AND SCRIPTURE, SOMETHING WE WOULD EXPECT OF ONE OF JESUS' JEWISH DISCIPLES. IT IS THEREFORE BEST TO AGREE WITH CHURCH TRADITION IN ACCEPTING PETER AS THE AUTHOR OF THE LETTER.

PETER WROTE THIS LETTER FROM ROME (1 PETER 5.13) TO BELIEVERS WHO SEEM TO BE UNDERGOING SOME SORT OF PERSECUTION. WE HAVE NO RECORD OF OFFICIAL PERSECUTION IN THIS AREA DURING THIS PERIOD OF TIME. SO, WHAT IS BEING ADDRESSED IS LIKELY LOCAL PERSECUTION IN THE FORM OF SOCIAL OSTRACIZATION AND UNFAIR TREATMENT/PUNISHMENT (1 PETER 1.6-7; 2.1, 20; 3.14-17; 4.4, 12-16; 5.9). THESE FORMS OF PERSECUTION WERE COMMON IN THE EARLY CHURCH. THEY AROSE AS BELIEVERS TURNED FROM OLD WAYS OF BEING TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

THIS WOULD INCLUDE DEDICATING ONESELF TO ONE GOD RATHER THAN FOLLOWING A PANTHEON OF GODS, CHOOSING A NEW COMMUNITY AND TURNING AWAY FROM OLD COMMUNITY TIES, AND CHOOSING TO LIVE OUT A NEW SET OF ETHICAL VALUES. IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD, THESE BEHAVIORS WOULD HAVE BEEN VIEWED AS ANTISOCIAL AND POSSIBLY SUBVERSIVE TO THE FABRIC OF SOCIETY. IN RESPONSE, FAMILY MEMBERS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES WOULD FIRST RESPOND, SEEKING TO EXERT PRESSURE ON THE NEW BELIEVERS IN AN EFFORT TO TURN THEM AWAY FROM THEIR NEW FAITH.

SOME HAVE ARGUED THAT THE LETTER IS A BAPTISMAL SERMON OR CATECHETICAL DOCUMENT BECAUSE IT DEALS WITH BASIC ISSUES OF THE FAITH. HOWEVER, THE TOPICS ADDRESSED ARE TOO NARROW TO VIEW THE LETTER AS A DOCUMENT CENTRAL TO ANY OVERARCHING DISCIPLING PROCESS. RATHER, IT SEEMS THE LETTER CONCERNS HOW TO FUNCTION AS THE CHURCH IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT. THIS FOCUS LEADS TO A DISCUSSION OF HOW THE BELIEVERS ARE TO RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER AS A FAITH COMMUNITY, AND HOW THIS COMMUNITY IS TO ENGAGE THE WORLD AROUND IT. WHILE THE LETTER IS SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSED TO PERSECUTED BELIEVERS, AND AS SUCH PROVIDES PASTORAL COMFORT, ITS FOCUS ON BEING THE CHURCH APPLIES TO ANY COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS, PROVIDING GUIDANCE CONCERNING HOW TO BE A COUNTER-CULTURAL COMMUNITY AND RELATE AS THIS COMMUNITY TO THE WORLD.

THE LETTER BEGINS WITH AN INTRODUCTION WHICH IDENTIFIES THOSE ADDRESSED AS GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE, CLEARLY ECHOING AND APPLYING THE OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE OF GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE ISRAEL TO THE CHURCH (1 PETER 1.1; GENESIS 12; EXODUS 20.1). AS GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE, THEY ARE PART OF WHAT GOD HAD BEGUN TO DO THROUGH ISRAEL AND ANNOUNCED THROUGH THE JEWISH PROPHETS (1 PETER 1.3-12). LIKE ISRAEL, THE CHURCH WAS CALLED TO LIVE AS GOD'S PEOPLE, TAKING UP GOD'S CHARACTER OF HOLINESS (1 PETER 1.13-21; LEVITICUS 11.44-45), AND FORMING A COMMUNITY OF LOVE (1 PETER 1.22; JOHN 13.34). FURTHER, AS THOSE WHO WERE PART OF WHAT GOD HAD BEGUN TO DO THROUGH ISRAEL, THEY WERE TO FUNCTION AS A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS, ENGAGING THEIR WORLD BY DECLARING THE GOODNESS AND GLORY OF GOD (1 PETER 2.4-10; EXODUS 19.4-6). CLEARLY, PETER UNDERSTANDS THE CHURCH TO BE A COMMUNITY DISTINCT FROM THE WORLD, LIVING BY A DIFFERENT MORAL CODE, UNDER A DIFFERENT RULER, JESUS (1 PETER 2.11). HOWEVER, PETER IS NOT EXPLICITLY CLEAR ON HOW THIS COMMUNITY WAS FORMED. HE NOTES THEY HAVE RESPONDED TO A GOSPEL MESSAGE (1 PETER 1.25), BUT HOW THIS MESSAGE WAS PROCLAIMED IS ONLY ALLUDED TO IN THE BRIEFEST FASHION. SOMEHOW, THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL WAS PROCLAIMED IN A WAY THAT THESE BELIEVERS EXPERIENCED GOD'S GOODNESS AND THEN CHOSE TO BECOME PART OF GOD'S COMMUNITY, HIS KINGDOM OF PRIESTS (1 PETER 2.3). AS BRIEF AS THIS ALLUSION IS, IT IS CENTRAL

TO PETER'S UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE CHURCH IS TO ENGAGE ITS WORLD WITH THE GOSPEL.

AS A PEOPLE WHO HAVE RESPONDED TO THE GOSPEL, THE CHURCH IS A COMMUNITY WHICH HAS JESUS AS ITS FOUNDATION (1 PETER 2.4-8). THEY FOLLOW HIM WITH OBEDIENCE, UNDERSTANDING HIS WAY TO BE TRUTH (1 PETER 1.2, 22). IN SO DOING, THEY CREATE A COMMUNITY IN WHICH SELFLESS LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE (1 PETER 1.22; 2.17; 3.8). THIS LOVE HOLDS THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH TOGETHER EVEN AS IT IS MADE UP OF IMPERFECT PEOPLE (1 PETER 4.8), AND IS TO BE EXPERIENCED THROUGH THE EXPRESSION OF GENEROUS HOSPITALITY AND SERVICE (1 PETER 4.9-10).

HOWEVER, AS A COMMUNITY WHICH IS A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS, THE CHURCH IS TO HAVE AN OUTWARD FOCUS, FULFILLING THEIR ROLE AS PRIESTS. PRIESTS SERVE AS THE ONES WHO STAND BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE DIVINE. AS SUCH, THE CHURCH IS TO REACH OUT AND INVITE THOSE CLOSEST TO THEM TO RESPOND TO GOD BY FOLLOWING AND OBEYING JESUS. HOW PETER ENVISIONED THIS WORKING WAS THROUGH GOOD WORKS CARRIED OUT BOTH WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH AND IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY. THESE GOOD WORKS WERE INTENDED TO DISPEL THE NEGATIVE TALK ABOUT THE CHURCH AND TO DRAW INQUIRIES ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH WHICH WOULD LEAD TO GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS (1 PETER 2.12, 15, 20; 3.9, 13, 15-17).

HOW GOOD DEEDS, LOVE EXPRESSED TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY, WERE TO LEAD TO GOSPEL-CENTERED CONVERSATIONS CAN BE DIFFICULT TO GRASP. IN OUR OWN MODERN EXPERIENCE, GOOD DEEDS RARELY LEAD TO SUCH CONVERSATIONS. AT BEST, OUR GOOD DEEDS LEAD TO PEOPLE LAUDING US AS GOOD PEOPLE. HOWEVER, IF PETER HAS IN MIND JESUS' DISCUSSION OF SHARING LOVE FROM THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (MATTHEW 5.43-47), THEN INQUIRIES AND SUBSEQUENT GOSPEL-ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS WOULD BE A NATURAL RESULT BOTH THEN AND NOW. IN HIS SERMON, JESUS NOTED THAT TRULY LOVING ONE'S NEIGHBOR LED TO LOVING WITHOUT LIMITS OR DISTINCTION IN THE SAME WAY GOD LOVED BOTH THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE UNRIGHTEOUS. THIS KIND OF LIMITLESS LOVE MAKES THE CHURCH LIKE GOD BUT UNLIKE THE WORLD. IN SHOWING THE COMMUNITY AROUND THEM THIS KIND OF SELFLESS LOVE, EVEN FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTED THEM, THE CHURCH WOULD BE EXPRESSING SUCH LAVISH DEVOTION TO PEOPLE SO THAT CONVERSATIONS COULD NOT HAVE BEEN AVOIDED. HOWEVER, THE POINT OF THESE LOVING ACTIONS IS NOT TO PROP UP THE COMMUNITY AROUND THEM, BUT THEY ARE INTENDED TO LEAD PEOPLE INTO THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH. IN OTHER WORDS, THESE GOOD WORKS ARE NOT ABOUT THE BUILDING UP OF THE WORLD BUT ABOUT ITS REPLACEMENT THROUGH A WOOING WHICH WOULD DEPOPULATE EARTHLY KINGDOMS AS PEOPLE JOINED THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

THIS IS ROOTED IN THE CHURCH VIEWING ITSELF AS DISTINCT FROM THE WORLD, THEIR GOOD DEEDS AN EXPRESSION OF THE LIFE THEY LIVED AND THE GOD THEY SERVED (1 PETER 2.3, 11). IN TASTING THIS LIFE AND GOODNESS OF GOD, AND IN HEARING THE TRUTH OF THIS GOD'S LONGING FOR HUMANITY, PETER ENVISIONED THE WIDER COMMUNITY TURNING TO GOD (1 PETER 2.12).

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

HOW IS THE CHURCH TO ENGAGE ITS WORLD? HOW WE ANSWER THIS QUESTION IS FIRMLY ROOTED IN HOW WE UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL, FOR THE GOSPEL IS CENTRAL TO OUR CARRYING OUT THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS. OVER THE PAST TWO WEEKS, WE HAVE BEEN DIGGING IN, TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL IN JESUS' TERMS. WE HAVE DISCOVERED JESUS' GOSPEL IS BOTH A KINGDOM PROCLAMATION AND INVITATION. JESUS DECLARED THAT PEOPLE COULD SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THEY WERE INVITED TO JOIN IT. WHEN JESUS SPOKE OF GOD'S KINGDOM, HE WAS SPEAKING OF LIFE AS GOD INTENDED IT TO BE, PEOPLE LIVING WITH GOD UNDER HIS SOVEREIGN REIGN. JESUS DECLARED THE CHURCH WAS CRUCIAL TO BOTH THE SEEING AND JOINING OF GOD'S KINGDOM BECAUSE THE CHURCH WAS THE VISIBLE AND TANGIBLE PRESENCE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE PRESENT.

WITH THIS IN MIND, WE TOOK A STEP FORWARD AND NOTED THAT IF THIS IS JESUS' GOSPEL, THEN THE FIRST STEP IN ENGAGING OUR WORLD IS TO CREATE COMMUNITIES OF FAITH WHERE PEOPLE LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS; THAT IS, THE FIRST STEP IS FOR THE CHURCH TO PROVIDE THE WORLD WITH AN EXAMPLE OF THE LIFE GOD INTENDED. BUT WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP? AGAIN, THE ANSWER DEPENDS ON HOW YOU DEFINE THE GOSPEL. I GREW UP IN A TRADITION WHICH DEFINED THE GOSPEL AS A MESSAGE OF SALVATION. THIS MEANT THAT ENGAGING OUR WORLD HINGED UPON A WILLINGNESS TO INVITE PEOPLE TO "BE SAVED." OTHERS I HAVE KNOWN, WERE RAISED IN TRADITIONS WHICH DEFINED THE GOSPEL AS A CALL TO SOCIAL JUSTICE. THEREFORE, ENGAGING THE WORLD WAS ABOUT FIGHTING FOR SOCIAL ISSUES. I AM MORE AND MORE CONVINCED THAT BOTH SIDES OF THE GOSPEL DEBATE GOT SOME PIECES RIGHT AND SOME BIG PIECES WRONG.

JESUS' GOSPEL IS TWO PART: PROCLAMATION AND INVITATION, AND THE CHURCH IS CENTRAL TO BOTH. IF THE FIRST PART INVOLVES THE FORMING OF COMMUNITIES WHERE THE LIFE OF GOD IS DISPLAYED, WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO STEP INTO THE SECOND PART OF JESUS' GOSPEL? THAT THE SECOND PART OF JESUS' GOSPEL IS AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE KINGDOM IMPLIES THAT ENGAGING THE WORLD INVOLVES CALLING THEM TO BECOME PART OF GOD'S KINGDOM; THAT IS, THE SECOND PART IS ABOUT THE KINGDOM GROWING. HOWEVER, IF WE UNDERSTAND KINGDOM, THEN THIS GROWTH IS REALLY A REVOLUTION, AN OVERTHROW OF OTHER KINGDOMS BECAUSE THE GROWTH OF GOD'S KINGDOM COMES AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHER KINGDOMS AS PEOPLE RENOUNCE THEIR SUBMISSION TO OTHER AUTHORITIES AND WILLINGLY

LIVE WITH GOD UNDER HIS SOVEREIGN REIGN. IF THIS IS EXPERIENCED IN AND THROUGH THE CHURCH, THEN ENGAGING THE WORLD IS ABOUT THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH NUMERICALLY, AN EVENT WHICH IS MEANT TO DEPOPULATE AND EVENTUALLY OVERTHROW OTHER KINGDOMS. SIMPLY PUT, AS THE CHURCH ENGAGES ITS WORLD, IT DOES SO IN A WAY THAT LEADS TO ITS SUCCESS SO THAT IT EVENTUALLY REPLACES ALL OTHER KINGDOMS. IMMEDIATELY, THIS CAUSES SOMETHING OF AN ALLERGIC REACTION IN ME, BECAUSE IN MY TRADITION, I WAS ALWAYS TAUGHT TO BE PATRIOTIC, TO BE A GOOD AMERICAN, BUT JESUS' GOSPEL IS NOT ABOUT BEING A GOOD AMERICAN. IN FACT, IT IS ABOUT AN ENGAGEMENT WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY REPLACE AMERICA AND ALL OTHER NATIONS WITH ONE KINGDOM, GOD'S KINGDOM. THIS MEANS THAT WHATEVER IT LOOKS LIKE TO GROW GOD'S KINGDOM, IT DOES NOT INVOLVE ACTIONS AIMED AT SUSTAINING ANY PRESENT COUNTRY, BUT RATHER IT INVOLVES ACTIONS WHICH LEAD TO THEIR DEMISE. THE GOSPEL OF KINGDOM IS NOTHING SHORT OF REVOLUTION.

SO, HOW DOES ONE CARRY OUT THIS REVOLUTION? IT IS NOT DONE BY GATHERING AN ARMY TO WAGE A WAR OF WORDS OR ACTIONS, BUT IN ORIENTING A PEOPLE TO SHOW LOVE. I AM MORE AND MORE CONVINCED THAT THE NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE IS FOR THE CHURCH TO ENGAGE ITS WORLD BY FIRST EXTENDING ACTS OF LOVE, SELFLESS LOVE WHICH GIVES PEOPLE A TASTE OF THE LIFE FOUND IN THE CHURCH, GOD'S EARTHLY KINGDOM. IT SEEKS JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS. THE CHURCH FEEDS AND CLOTHES. THE CHURCH PROTECTS AND SERVES, BUT IT DOES NOT DO THESE THINGS TO MAKE ITS WORLD BETTER. IT DOES SO TO INVITE PEOPLE INTO A BETTER WORLD. THE CHURCH EXTENDS LOVE TO WOO PEOPLE TO A BETTER LIFE, GOD'S LIFE. IT WOOS THEM BY GIVING THEM GLIMPSES OF WHAT LIFE IS MEANT TO BE LIKE. THIS IS MEANT TO GENERATE OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK ABOUT THE GOODNESS OF GOD AND HIS REDEMPTIVE LOVE. THIS SOUNDS WONDERFUL, BUT DOES IT WORK? SOMETIMES PEOPLE REFER TO THIS APPROACH AS LIFESTYLE EVANGELISM, LIVING A GOOD LIFE SO PEOPLE WILL NOTICE. THE TROUBLE IS NO ONE EVER NOTICES. I WONDER IF THIS IS BECAUSE OUR LIVING OUT OF OUR LOVE IS NOT EXCEPTIONAL ENOUGH TO BE NOTICED. JESUS STATED THAT LOVING OTHERS INVOLVED THE DEMONSTRATION OF EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY AND DEVOTION WITHOUT DISTINCTION. NO ONE WAS OFF LIMITS, NOT EVEN ONE'S ENEMY. WHEN I CONSIDER MY OWN LIFE, I AM NOT SURE THIS IS THE TYPE OF LOVE PEOPLE SEE. I AM WILLING TO LOVE THOSE WHO ARE EASY TO LOVE, THOSE WHO ARE LIKE ME OR LIKE ME, BUT I TRY TO END IT THERE. THIS KIND OF LOVE IS COMMON IN THE WORLD. COMMON GOES UNNOTICED. HOWEVER, LOVE WHICH EXTENDS GRACE AND KINDNESS IN EXTRAORDINARY WAYS, LOVE DOES NOT PAY ATTENTION TO RACE, CREED, NATIONALITY, ECONOMIC STATUS, POLITICAL VIEWPOINTS OR THE LIKE GETS NOTICED. PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW WHY ANYONE WOULD LOVE IN SUCH A MANNER, AND THEN WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE LOVE, INVITING PEOPLE INTO A NEW WAY OF BEING. BUT IT ALL HINGES ON WHETHER I WILL LOVE, REALLY LOVE.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO ENGAGE OUR WORLD, TO CARRY FORTH THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS? WHATEVER THE ANSWER IS, IT IS ROOTED IN HOW WE DEFINE THE GOSPEL, BECAUSE THE GOSPEL WAS CENTRAL TO JESUS' REDEMPTIVE MISSION. AS WE HAVE DISCUSSED THE NATURE OF JESUS' GOSPEL, WE HAVE DISCOVERED THAT JESUS' GOSPEL WAS ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO BE SEEN AND JOINED IN AND THROUGH THE CHURCH. THIS MEANS THAT THE FIRST STEP OF ENGAGING OUR WORLD IS TO FORM COMMUNITIES OF FAITH WHERE PEOPLE CAN SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD, THE LIFE GOD HAS ALWAYS INTENDED. BUT THE NEXT STEP INVOLVES INVITING PEOPLE INTO THIS EXPERIENCE, INVITING PEOPLE TO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS AS THEY BECOME PART OF THE CHURCH. THIS MEANS THAT ENGAGING OUR WORLD IS ABOUT GROWING THE CHURCH, BUT HOW DO WE DO THAT? HOW DO WE INVITE PEOPLE TO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS? SIMPLY SPEAKING THE MESSAGE THAT PEOPLE MUST BE SAVED IS BECOMING LESS AND LESS EFFECTIVE AS THE PRESUPPOSITION POOL OF OUR CULTURE SHIFTS AWAY FROM A BIBLICAL FOCUS. ACTS OF JUSTICE ARE GOOD, BUT THEY OFTEN HAVE LITTLE TO DO WITH PEOPLE TURNING TO LOCAL CONGREGATIONS TO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS.

PETER SUGGESTS ANOTHER WAY. PETER SUGGESTS LOVING OUR WORLD IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY WILL STAND UP AND ASK WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE BELIEVE SO THAT WE CAN VERBALLY TELL THEM OF THE HOPE WE HAVE IN JESUS, INVITING THEM TO LIVE UNDER HIS REIGN. SOMETIMES THIS IS REFERRED TO AS LIFESTYLE EVANGELISM, LIVING A GOOD LIFE SO PEOPLE WILL NOTICE. THE TROUBLE IS FEW PEOPLE EVER NOTICE, BUT I WONDER IF THIS IS BECAUSE THE GOOD LIVES WE LIVE ARE ANYTHING BUT EXTRAORDINARY. LOTS OF PEOPLE LEAD GOOD LIVES. THIS IS FAR FROM EXCEPTIONAL. HOWEVER, JESUS SAID LIVING A LIFE OF LOVE (DOING GOOD FOR OTHERS) WITHOUT LIMIT WAS DIFFERENT. IT IS IN LOVING OTHERS WITHOUT RESPECT FOR THEIR RACE OR NATIONALITY, SOCIAL OR POLITICAL VIEWS, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR ANYTHING ELSE THAT WE MOVE FROM LIVING ORDINARY LIVES TO EXTRAORDINARY LIVES. IT IS THESE EXTRAORDINARY LIVES WHICH CAUSE PEOPLE TO SIT UP AND PAY ATTENTION.

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE FOR THE CHURCH TO LOVE IN THIS MANNER? I THINK THE ANSWER DEPENDS ON THE LOCAL CONTEXT. BUT WHATEVER THE FORM, IT REQUIRES A PEOPLE WHO FIRST ARE LIVING UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS. ONLY PEOPLE WHO LOVE GOD FIRST AND OTHERS AS THEMSELVES ARE FREE TO LOVE IN THIS KIND OF RADICAL WAY. PEOPLE WHO LOVE POSSESSIONS MORE THAN GOD OR PLACE LIMITS ON THE EXPRESSION OF THEIR LOVE TO OTHERS ARE BOUND SO THAT THEIR EFFORTS TO LOVE LOOK LIKE THE LOVE WE EXPERIENCE IN THE WORLD AROUND US. SO, PERHAPS THE FIRST STEP IN LOVING OUR WORLD IS TO RETURN TO THE FIRST STEP OF THE GOSPEL, THE FORMATION OF COMMUNITIES WHO ARE SEEKING TO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP