



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

JUNE 10, 2018

Discussion Guide

KINGDOM AND THE BULLIED

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

- HAVE YOU EVER BEEN BULLIED? IF SO, WHAT WAS THIS EXPERIENCE LIKE?

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 REALITY OF BULLYING IN AMERICA TODAY.
- WHEN CONSIDERING BULLYING, THE FIRST QUESTION IS WHETHER IT IS AN ISSUE TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE CHURCH. READ MATTHEW 22.36-40; MATTHEW 7.12; AND JOHN 13.34-35 ALOUD. THESE ARE THE COMMANDMENTS BY WHICH THE CHURCH IS TO LIVE. THINKING ABOUT THESE COMMANDMENTS, IN WHAT WAY, IF ANY, DOES BULLYING FIT WITHIN THEM?

- CONSIDERING THE COMMANDMENTS BY WHICH JESUS' FOLLOWERS LIVE, WOULD YOU CONSIDER THE PRESENCE OF BULLYING AN ISSUE TO BE ADDRESSED? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHEN ADDRESSING BULLYING, AN IMPORTANT ISSUE IS THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS APPROACHED. READ JOHN 7.53-8.11 ALOUD. SEEK TO IMAGINE THE SCENE IN YOUR MIND, PERHAPS AS ONE OF THE CHARACTERS PRESENT. READ THE TEXT ALOUD ONCE MORE.
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, IS BULLYING PRESENT IN THIS TEXT? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY INSTANCES OR FORMS AS POSSIBLE.
- IN WHAT WAYS DOES JESUS ADDRESS THE PRESENCE OF BULLYING? WHAT MIGHT YOU IDENTIFY AS IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF HIS APPROACH?
- WOULD YOU SAY BULLYING EXISTS IN THE CHURCH TODAY? OUTSIDE THE CHURCH? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- WHEN ENGAGING OUR WORLD, THE CHURCH BEGINS BY SEEKING TO BE A COMMUNITY WHICH PORTRAYS THE LIFE GOD INTENDS. FOLLOWING JESUS' APPROACH, WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO ADDRESS BULLYING IN THE CHURCH?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT THIS BE A PURSUIT OF LOVING ONE ANOTHER AS WE LOVE OURSELVES?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO EXTEND THIS SAME LOVE TO INSTANCES OF BULLYING IN OUR WORLD?
- WHAT, IF ANYTHING, MIGHT MAKE ADDRESSING BULLYING EASY? DIFFICULT?
- CONSIDER CLOSING IN PRAYER BY PRAYING FOR THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF BULLYING. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER PRAYING FOR EYES TO SEE BULLYING AND HEARTS EMBOLDENED TO ADDRESS IT.

CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND COMMENTARY

BULLYING IN AMERICA

BULLYING IS UNWANTED AND TYPICALLY REPEATED AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR WHICH INVOLVES A REAL OR PERCEIVED IMBALANCE OF POWER. THIS IMBALANCE OF POWER MAY BE DUE TO A DIFFERENCE IN PHYSICAL STRENGTH, ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE OR INFORMATION, OR THE POSSESSION OF GREATER SOCIAL OR FINANCIAL CAPITAL. THIS POWER IMBALANCE ENABLES THOSE WHO BULLY TO CONTROL OR HARM OTHERS.

BULLYING CAN TAKE MULTIPLE FORMS: VERBAL, SOCIAL, PHYSICAL, AND IN CYBERSPACE. VERBAL BULLYING INVOLVES ACTIONS LIKE NAME CALLING, THREATENING, AND INAPPROPRIATE OR DEROGATORY COMMENTS. SOCIAL BULLYING CONSISTS OF ACTIONS WHICH PURPOSEFULLY EXCLUDE OR ISOLATE PEOPLE, SPREAD RUMORS, AND PUBLICLY SHAME OR EMBARRASS. PHYSICAL BULLYING INVOLVES ASSAULT AND BATTERY, THE USE OF PHYSICALLY THREATENING GESTURES AND THE INSTANCE OF HITTING, KICKING, SPITTING, ETC. CYBERBULLYING INVOLVES THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO SPREAD RUMORS, ISOLATE, OR PUBLICLY HUMILIATE.

BULLYING IS A COMMON EXPERIENCE AT EVERY AGE, OCCURRING IN SCHOOLS, HOMES, WORKPLACES, AND THE PUBLIC FORUM. LEVELS OF BULLYING AMONG ADULTS ARE DIFFICULT TO GAUGE, BUT MOST ADULTS REPORT FEELING OR BEING BULLIED AT SOME POINT. AMONG STUDENTS, MORE RESEARCH HAS BEEN DONE. NEARLY 83% OF GIRLS AND 79% OF BOYS AGES 12-18 REPORT BEING BULLIED AT SOME POINT. OVER ANY GIVEN SCHOOL YEAR, AT LEAST 1 IN 5 STUDENTS REPORT EXPERIENCING SIGNIFICANT BULLYING. SOME 77% OF THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE BULLYING REPORT THIS BULLYING TO INVOLVE VERBAL ELEMENTS. DURING THE SCHOOL DAY, 29% OF BULLYING OCCURS IN THE CLASSROOM, 29% IN THE HALLWAYS, 23% IN THE CAFETERIA, AND 19% IN THE GYM. ON AVERAGE, 12% OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN BULLIED REPORT BEING TORTURED IN THE BATHROOM. OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL DAY, SOCIAL MEDIA IS THE PLATFORM THROUGH WHICH MOST STUDENTS EXPERIENCE BULLYING.

THE EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING CAN LEAD TO DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY. BULLYING LEADS TO AN EXPERIENCE OF GREATER HEALTH ISSUES AND LOWERS ONE'S ABILITY TO PERFORM WELL AT WORK OR SCHOOL. IT INCREASES THE RISK OF SUICIDE AND FORMS OF RETALIATION. SHOCKINGLY, ABOUT 75% OF RECENT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS HAVE BEEN LINKED TO SCHOOL BULLYING.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BULLYING OR TIPS ON HOW TO RECOGNIZE OR ADDRESS BULLYING, VISIT WWW.STOPBULLYING.GOV OR WWW.NOBULLYING.COM.

THE TEXT

JOHN 7.59-8.11: JESUS AND THE BULLIES

PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST WELL-KNOWN SCENES FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN IS THAT OF JESUS AND THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN (JOHN

7.59-8.11). HOWEVER, JOHN DID NOT ACTUALLY WRITE THIS TEXT. THIS SCENE IS MISSING FROM THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS OF JOHN, LATER LATIN MANUSCRIPTS, AND ANCIENT SYRIAN TRANSLATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. VARIOUS ANCIENT EXEGETES NOTE THE TEXT WAS SPURIOUS AND DIDYMUS THE BLIND OF ALEXANDRIA (4TH CENTURY) COMMENTS ON A NOW LOST VARIATION OF THIS SCENE. WHEN ANCIENT COPYISTS DID INCLUDE THIS PASSAGE, THEY OFTEN SET IT ASIDE WITH ASTERISKS NOTING THE TEXT WAS CONTROVERSIAL EVEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH. IN ADDITION, COPYISTS WERE NOT CONSISTENT IN WHERE THEY PLACED THIS PASSAGE. SOME PLACED IT AFTER JOHN 7.36, SOME AT JOHN 21.25, AND OTHERS IN LUKE 21.38 OR LUKE 24.53. IT APPEARS THAT ANCIENT COPYISTS WERE NOT REALLY SURE WHAT TO DO WITH THIS PASSAGE BECAUSE IT DIDN'T REALLY FIT WHERE IT WAS. FURTHER EVIDENCE AGAINST JOHN'S AUTHORSHIP IS GLEANED FROM THE STYLE WHICH DIFFERS GREATLY FROM THE REST OF JOHN'S GOSPEL.

SO, IF JOHN DID NOT WRITE THIS TEXT, WHO DID AND HOW DID IT MAKE ITS WAY INTO THE NEW TESTAMENT? THE ANSWER TO THE FIRST QUESTION IS LOST IN HISTORY. HOWEVER, THE SECOND QUESTION IS EASIER TO ANSWER. THIS TEXT MADE ITS WAY INTO THE NEW TESTAMENT BECAUSE IT IS A WONDERFUL STORY PORTRAYING JESUS AT HIS FINEST. MOST LIKELY, THIS WAS AN ORAL STORY ABOUT JESUS, PASSED AMONG THE VARIOUS CHURCHES ALONG WITH OTHER STORIES ABOUT JESUS, TOLD BY EYEWITNESSES TO HIS MINISTRY. WHEN THE GOSPELS WERE WRITTEN, THIS STORY WAS LEFT OUT FOR UNKNOWN REASONS, BUT THIS STORY CONTINUED TO BE TOLD. THE STORY WAS SUCH A POWERFUL EXAMPLE OF THE MINISTRY AND MESSAGE OF JESUS THAT THE CHURCH DID NOT WISH TO LOSE IT, BUT AS THE WRITTEN GOSPELS BEGAN TO REPLACE THE ORAL TRADITION ABOUT JESUS, THE CHURCH REALIZED THIS STORY NEEDED TO BE PART OF ONE OF THE GOSPELS IF IT WAS TO SURVIVE. THEREFORE, SOMEONE INSERTED IT. IT APPEARS THAT THERE WAS SOME DEBATE ABOUT WHERE TO INSERT THE STORY, WHETHER IN LUKE OR JOHN AND AT WHICH POINT IN THESE GOSPELS. EVENTUALLY, JOHN 8 WAS THE CHOSEN POSITION, MOST LIKELY BECAUSE IT IS A TEMPLE SCENE AND IN THIS PART OF JOHN, JESUS IS TEACHING AT THE TEMPLE. THEREFORE IT FIT GEOGRAPHICALLY IN THE STORYLINE. HOWEVER, IN TAKING THIS STORY OUT, ONE CAN SEE THAT JOHN 7.52 CONTINUES SEAMLESSLY WITH JOHN 8.12, JOHN'S ORIGINAL NARRATIVE.

BECAUSE THIS NARRATIVE COMES FROM THE LIFE OF JESUS, AUTHENTICATED BY THE EARLY CHURCH SEEKING TO MAINTAIN PART OF THE ORIGINAL ORAL TRADITION OF JESUS' MINISTRY, WE SHOULD STUDY AND LEARN FROM THIS PASSAGE. HOWEVER, ATTEMPTS TO USE THE LARGER CONTEXT OF JOHN TO INTERPRET THE PASSAGE ARE FRUITLESS BECAUSE THE TEXT IS NOT ORIGINAL TO JOHN.

IN THIS STORY, JESUS WAS IN THE TEMPLE COURTS TEACHING THE CROWDS. AT SOME POINT DURING HIS TEACHING, THE SCRIBES (RELIGIOUS LAWYERS) AND PHARISEES (A LAY-SECT OF THE JEWS) BROUGHT A WOMAN TO JESUS, PUTTING HER ON DISPLAY BEFORE THE CROWD. THE TEXT NOTES THAT THIS WAS A WOMAN WHO HAD BEEN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY. INTERESTINGLY, THE MAN INVOLVED IN THE SAID EPISODE IS MISSING! ONE WONDERS HOW IT WAS THAT HE WAS NOT

BROUGHT AS WELL SINCE THIS WOMAN WAS CAUGHT IN THE ACT OF ADULTERY (JOHN 8.4).

THESE RELIGIOUS LEADERS TELL JESUS THEY HAVE CAUGHT THIS WOMAN IN THE ACT OF ADULTERY AND NOTE THAT THE LAW OF MOSES FORBID THIS ACT AND DEMANDED A PUNISHMENT, THAT OF STONING. THESE LEADERS ARE CORRECT. ADULTERY WAS FORBIDDEN (EXODUS 20.14; LEVITICUS 20.10; DEUTERONOMY 5.18; 22.22-24), BUT THE MAN WAS TO BE PUNISHED ALONG WITH THE WOMAN (DEUTERONOMY 22.22-24). THE ABSENCE OF THE MALE OFFENDER IS AN IMMEDIATE SIGN THAT ALL IS NOT ON THE UP-AND-UP. THESE LEADERS ARE SEEKING TO CREATE A RELIGIOUS/POLITICAL DILEMMA FOR JESUS. IF HE DISMISSES THE LAW OF MOSES, THEY HAVE HIM. IF HE URGES STONING, THE ROMANS HAVE HIM!

STEPPING BACK AND OBSERVING THESE EVENTS, ONE CAN RECOGNIZE THE UNFOLDING OF RELIGIOUS BULLYING. THESE RELIGIOUS LEADERS ARE USING THEIR POSITION AND SOCIAL STANDING TO INTIMIDATE AND THREATEN JESUS, SEEKING TO CONTROL AND HARM HIM. HOWEVER, THIS WAS NOT NEW FOR JESUS. HE WAS REGULARLY THREATENED AND CHALLENGED BY THE RELIGIOUS ELITE. THE REAL VICTIM IN THIS SETTING IS THE WOMAN. WHILE THIS WOMAN WAS CERTAINLY CAUGHT IN SINFUL BEHAVIOR, THAT SHE IS BROUGHT TO JESUS AND THE MAN IS NOT MARKS THE PRESENCE OF AN IMBALANCE OF POWER ALONG GENDER LINES. THAT SHE WAS DISCOVERED MAY MEAN SHE WAS SET UP OR REPORTED. REGARDLESS, THESE RELIGIOUS LEADERS HAD ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION THROUGH A SOCIAL NETWORK AND USED THIS INFORMATION TO PUBLICLY SHAME THE WOMAN BEFORE THE CROWD AND JESUS. FURTHER, THESE MEN USED THEIR DEEP KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW AND THEIR POWER AS MEN TO USE THIS WOMAN AS A PAWN IN A SCHEME TO CATCH JESUS.

JESUS' RESPONSE TO THE SCHEMING AND BULLYING OF THESE MEN IS INSTRUCTIVE FOR IT SHINES A LIGHT ON HOW JESUS' FOLLOWERS ARE TO RESPOND TO SIMILAR SITUATIONS. FIRST, JESUS REFUSED TO ENGAGE IN THE BULLYING. HE REFUSED TO CALL THE WOMAN AN ADULTERER. HE REFUSED TO DEBATE THE LAW. HE REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE THE EVENT WAS OCCURRING AT ALL AS HE WROTE UPON THE GROUND. WHAT HE WAS WRITING IS UNKNOWN, BUT THE EFFECT WAS A COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL AS AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN THE BULLYING EPISODE. JESUS WOULD NOT ENGAGE IN ANY ACTIVITY WHICH FURTHER SHAMED THIS WOMAN. FRUSTRATED BY THEIR INABILITY TO DRAW JESUS INTO THEIR SCHEME, THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS PEPPERED JESUS UNTIL HE FINALLY STOOD AND ENGAGED. HOWEVER, WHEN HE ENGAGED, HE DID SO BY CREATING A ZONE OF SAFETY FOR THE WOMAN. RATHER THAN DEBATING THE LAW OR THE PROPER RESPONSE WHICH WOULD HAVE KEPT THE WOMAN IN THE CENTER FURTHER SHAMING HER, JESUS INVITED THE LEADERS WHO WERE WITHOUT SIN THEMSELVES TO STONE HER. IN SO DOING, JESUS DID NOT NEGATE THE WOMAN'S ACTIONS OR THE LAW OF MOSES. BOTH WERE VALID, BUT HIS WORDS CREATED A SAFE PLACE FOR THE WOMAN BY MAKING IT SO THESE MEN COULD NO LONGER SAY OR DO ANYTHING FURTHER TO HARM HER. EFFECTIVELY, JESUS HAD EQUATED THE STANDING OF THESE MEN WITH THAT OF THE WOMAN. UNABLE

TO HARM THIS WOMAN OR USE HER FURTHER IN THEIR SCHEME, THE LEADERS FIND THEY ARE UNABLE TO COMPLETE THEIR TASK OF TRAPPING JESUS AND LEAVE. JESUS THEN TURNS TO THE WOMAN AND ADDRESSES HER. HE ASKS WHO CONDEMNS HER, INVITING HER TO RECOGNIZE THE SAFE SPACE HE HAS CREATED. NEITHER THEIR MEN NOR JESUS WOULD CONDEMN THIS WOMAN. SHE WAS FREE FROM FURTHER SHAME AND DISGRACE. HOWEVER, JESUS DOES ADDRESS HER ACTIONS. GOD INTENDED MORE FOR HER THAN HER ACTIONS OF ADULTERY ENTAILED. JESUS ENCOURAGED HER TO GO FORTH AND STEP INTO THIS LIFE, BUT SHE WAS ABLE TO DO SO BECAUSE OF THE SAFE PLACE JESUS CREATED.

JESUS' ACTIONS DEMONSTRATE HOW ONE MIGHT NAVIGATE THE TENSION BETWEEN LOVE AND JUSTICE IN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH. WITH RESPECT TO BULLYING, JESUS' ACTIONS DEMONSTRATE THAT BULLYING CAN BE ADDRESSED FIRST BY PROTECTING THE BULLIED. THIS REQUIRES REFUSING TO BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN THE BULLYING AND CREATING A SAFE ZONE WHERE THE BULLIED CAN NO LONGER RECEIVE ABUSE. SECOND, JESUS REMINDS US THAT THOSE WHO BULLY MUST BE ADDRESSED, THE UNLOVING NATURE OF THEIR ACTIONS BROUGHT TO THEIR ATTENTION EVEN AS GOD'S JUSTICE IS RESPECTED AND HONORED.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

HOW IS THE CHURCH TO ENGAGE ITS WORLD? HOW WE ANSWER THIS QUESTION IS SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL, JESUS' PROCLAMATION CONCERNING OUR ABILITY TO SEE AND JOIN THE KINGDOM OF GOD. CENTRAL TO THIS SEEING AND JOINING STANDS THE CHURCH, THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH MADE UP OF THOSE WHO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS. THEREFORE, AS THE CHURCH, WE ENGAGE OUR WORLD FIRST BY SEEKING TO BE A PEOPLE IN WHOM THE WORLD CAN SEE THE LIFE GOD INTENDS, THE LIFE OF GOD'S KINGDOM. SECOND, THE CHURCH EXTENDS TASTES OF THIS LIFE TO THE WORLD, INVITING THE WORLD INTO THE CHURCH SO THEY MIGHT EXPERIENCE THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S INTENDED KINGDOM LIFE. THIS SOUNDS WONDERFUL IN THEORY, BUT WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE? THIS IS THE QUESTION WITH WHICH I AM ALWAYS WRESTLING AS A PASTOR. I PRAY IT IS THE QUESTION WE FIND OURSELVES WRESTLING WITH AS FAITH COMMUNITIES, BECAUSE IT IS THE LIVING OUT OF OUR THEOLOGY WHICH MATTERS WHEN WE ARE TALKING ABOUT ENGAGING OUR WORLD.

THIS WEEK, WE CHATTED ABOUT BULLYING, ONE OF THE LARGEST AND MOST UNRECOGNIZED ISSUES IN AMERICA TODAY. THE REALITY IS PEOPLE ARE BULLIED. EVERY DAY, ADULTS AND STUDENTS EXPERIENCE OTHERS WHO HAVE GREATER POWER THAN THEM USE THIS POWER TO HARM OR CONTROL THEM. SOMETIMES THESE PEOPLE USE THEIR WORDS. SOMETIMES THEY USE THEIR POSITION. SOMETIMES, THEY JUST ROLL UP THEIR SLEEVES AND USE THEIR FISTS. REGARDLESS OF THE NATURE OF THE BULLYING, THE EFFECT IS THE SAME: SHAME, DISTRESS, ISOLATION, ANXIETY, DESPAIR, AND MORE. THE QUESTION IS NOT WHETHER BULLYING EXISTS BUT WHETHER BULLYING IS AN ISSUE THE CHURCH NEEDS TO ADDRESS.

ONE MIGHT ARGUE THAT BULLYING IS AN ISSUE WHICH NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED SIMPLY BECAUSE IT DOES NOT FIT WITH A LIFE LIVED ON

JESUS' TERMS OF LOVING GOD AND OTHERS AS WE LOVE OURSELVES. UNDER NO SCENARIO IS BULLYING LOVING ANOTHER AS WE LOVE OURSELVES, OR TO TAKE A PAGE FROM JESUS, IT IS NOT TREATING OTHERS AS WE WOULD WISH TO BE TREATED (MATTHEW 7.12). So, HOW DO WE ADDRESS BULLYING? THOSE WHO ARGUE THE GOSPEL IS SIMPLY THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION TYPICALLY STATE THAT BELIEVERS SHOULD ADDRESS ISSUES LIKE THIS BY INVITING PEOPLE TO BE SAVED, THEN BULLYING WILL STOP. THOSE WHO ARGUE THAT THE GOSPEL IS A CALL TO JUSTICE NOTE THE CHURCH SHOULD FIGHT FOR LAWS TO PROTECT THE BULLIED, AND THE BULLYING WILL STOP. BOTH GROUPS HAVE ENGAGED THEIR WORLD USING BOTH STRATEGIES, AND BULLYING REMAINS AS BIG A PROBLEM AS EVER, BOTH WITHIN THE CHURCH AND OUTSIDE THE CHURCH. NEITHER OF THESE APPROACHES SEEMS TO BE EFFECTIVE, AND JESUS HIMSELF DID NOT FOLLOW THIS APPROACH WHEN HE ENCOUNTERED BULLIES.

WHEN JESUS CAME FACE TO FACE WITH BULLIES WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD, THE FIRST THING HE DID WAS REFUSE TO ENGAGE, REFUSE TO BE CAUGHT UP IN THE BULLYING. SECOND, HE CREATED A SAFE ZONE FOR THE ONE BULLIED. THIRD, HE CALLED THE BULLIES OUT, MAKING IT SO THEY COULD NO LONGER BULLY. WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE IF WE FOLLOWED JESUS' EXAMPLE?

I HAVE BEEN THINKING THROUGH THIS QUESTION RECENTLY, ESPECIALLY AS I HAVE WITNESSED THE HIGH RATE OF BULLYING IN THE CHURCH. EVEN PEOPLE WHO SAY THEY LOVE JESUS CAN BE BULLIES, BUT IF BULLYING IS NOT PART OF THE LIFE GOD INTENDS, WE MUST FIRST DEAL WITH JESUS-LOVING BULLIES. IN OTHER WORDS, WE MUST BECOME A PEOPLE AMONG WHOM NO BULLIES ARE FOUND, A PEOPLE WHERE PEOPLE ARE NOT BULLIED REGARDLESS OF THEIR LIFE EXPERIENCES OR PRACTICES. WE MUST BECOME A PEOPLE WHO DO NOT SEEK TO CONTROL OR HARM ONE ANOTHER. IF WE ACTED LIKE JESUS, THEN TO DO THIS, WE WOULD FIRST CATCH OURSELVES BEFORE WE JOINED IN WITH THE BULLYING, BEFORE WE ISOLATED OR GOSSIPED OR EMBARRASSED. WE WOULD CREATE SAFE PLACES AND EXPERIENCES WHERE THE BULLIED COULD FLEE, PLACES WHERE WE STOOD BETWEEN THE BULLIED AND THE BULLY. FINALLY, WE WOULD CALL THE BULLIES OUT, REMINDING THEM THAT WE LIVE IN THE TENSION OF GOD'S LOVE AND JUSTICE. BUT, AS HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL WE WOULD NOT STOP THERE. WE WOULD DO THE SAME IN OUR CULTURE. WE WOULD STOP PARTICIPATING IN THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO BRING ABOUT THE PUBLIC SHAMING OF OTHERS. WE WOULD STOP WATCHING SHOWS OR APPLAUDING THOSE WHO BULLIED. WE WOULD REFUSE TO ADD FUEL TO THE BULLY FIRE. SECOND, WE WOULD CREATE SAFE PLACES FOR PEOPLE, SAFE HOMES, SAFE CLASSROOMS, SAFE OFFICES WHERE PEOPLE MIGHT FLEE TO FIND REFUGE AND SAFETY REGARDLESS OF LIFESTYLE OR PRACTICES. FINALLY, WE WOULD CALL THE BULLIES OUT, REMINDING THEM OF GOD'S LOVE AND JUSTICE. AND, WE WOULD INVITE BOTH THE BULLIED AND THE BULLY INTO A COMMUNITY WHERE BOTH MIGHT FIND A LIFE BEYOND BULLYING, THE LIFE THEY WERE MEANT TO LIVE.

REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS? SEEKING TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION IN CONCRETE, PRACTICAL TERMS IS ESSENTIAL IF THE CHURCH IS TO BE A HERALD OF THE GOSPEL IN OUR MODERN WORLD. OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, WE HAVE DEVELOPED A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR HOW THIS MIGHT LOOK. WE MUST THEN APPLY THIS FRAMEWORK TO SPECIFIC SITUATIONS, SEEKING TO USE OUR MINDS GUIDED BY GOD'S SPIRIT TO WORK OUT OUR RESPONSES AND THEN ACT ACCORDINGLY.

SOMETIMES WORKING THESE ISSUES OUT IS DIFFICULT, PARTICULARLY IF WE ARE NEW TO APPROACHING FAITH IN THIS MANNER. THEREFORE, IT IS OFTEN BETTER TO BEGIN WITH ISSUES WHERE WE HAVE A CLEAR EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW IN THE LIFE OF JESUS. BULLYING IS ONE SUCH EXAMPLE. BULLYING IS A MAJOR PROBLEM IN AMERICA TODAY, AN ISSUE WHICH NEEDS THE CHURCH. BULLYING IS ANYTHING BUT THE LIFE GOD INTENDED FOR US, A LIFE OF LOVING ONE ANOTHER AS WE LOVE OURSELVES. HOWEVER, WE CAN STRUGGLE TO KNOW HOW TO ADDRESS BULLYING, HOW TO DEAL WITH IT FIRST IN THE CHURCH AND THEN IN THE WORLD. JESUS' LIFE CAN SERVE AS A GUIDE WITH THIS ISSUE BECAUSE JESUS ENCOUNTERED BULLIES, BULLIES IN THE FAMILY OF GOD, AND HE DEALT WITH THEM. WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE IN JESUS' APPROACH IS THAT IT FIRST FOCUSED ON THE BULLIED, THE PROTECTION OF THE ONE BEING HARMED EVEN WHEN THE ONE BULLIED WAS SINFUL. SECOND, JESUS WAS BOLD AND CALLED THE BULLIES OUT IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY WERE NO LONGER ABLE TO BULLY.

ACTING THIS WAY IN THE CHURCH REQUIRES MUCH COURAGE BECAUSE BULLYING HAS BECOME A WAY OF LIFE IN THE CHURCH. THOSE WITH MONEY SEEK TO CONTROL THOSE WITHOUT. THOSE WITH POSITION ISOLATE THOSE WITHOUT. THOSE WHO ARE MALE PUT DOWN THOSE WHO ARE FEMALE. WE COULD GO ON, BUT THE POINT IS CLEAR. BULLYING IS EVERYWHERE IN THE CHURCH, OFTEN IN "SANCTIFIED" FORMS WHICH ARE REALLY FORMS OF CONTROL AND MEANS OF DOING HARM. HOWEVER, WHEN WE ACT WITH COURAGE, WE STEP TOWARD THE LIFE GOD INTENDS AND SHOW THE WORLD WHAT IT IS TO LOVE AS WE LOVE OURSELVES.

ADDRESSING BULLYING IN THE WORLD IS WHERE THINGS GET MESSY, BECAUSE OFTEN THE BULLIED ARE THOSE WHO LIVE LIVES WE DO NOT FEEL ARE INTENDED BY GOD. PERHAPS THIS IS SOME OF WHY THEY ARE BULLIED IN THE FIRST PLACE. CREATING ZONES OF SAFETY AND NOT PARTICIPATING CAN BE DIFFICULT BECAUSE IT CAN FEEL AS IF WE ARE "CONDONING" SIN, BUT JESUS SHOWS US HOW TO MANAGE THE TENSION BETWEEN JUSTICE AND LOVE. LOVE IS AFFIRMED, AND PEOPLE ARE POINTED TO THE GREATER LIFE GOD INTENDS FOR THEM WITHOUT THE USE OF CONTROL OR COERCION. FINALLY, THE BULLIES ARE ADDRESSED, WHICH CAN LEAD TO THE EXPERIENCE OF FURTHER BULLYING, SOMETHING JESUS KNEW ONLY TOO WELL. HOWEVER, IN THESE ACTS, WE DEMONSTRATE TO THE WORLD THE LIFE GOD INTENDS. THE MESSIER THE SITUATION WE ARE WILLING TO STEP INTO, THE MORE THE WORLD WILL SIT UP AND NOTICE WHICH GIVES US OPPORTUNITIES TO INVITE PEOPLE TO STEP FURTHER INTO THE LIFE GOD INTENDS FOR THEM.

REAL LIFE WITH You:

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO ENGAGE OUR WORLD, TO CARRY FORTH THE



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

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