

.After We Believe.



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

NOVEMBER 11, 2018

Discussion Guide

BECOMING LIVING IMAGES

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 PHRASE “LIVING IN COMMUNITY” WHAT COMES TO MIND?

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 IMPORTANCE OF ECCLESIOLOGY.
- READ **EPHESIANS 2.1-16** ALOUD. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE, LISTENING TO THE GUIDANCE PAUL GIVES AS IF HE WAS GIVING IT TO UNION CENTER FOR THE FIRST TIME.
- ACCORDING TO PAUL, WHAT ARE THE ASPECTS OF LIVE AS GOSPEL (GOOD NEWS) PEOPLE? WHICH OF THESE SEEM TO BE OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO PAUL? COULD YOU ELABORATE?

- ARE ANY OF THESE ASPECTS SURPRISING? WOULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT LIVING AS PAUL DESCRIBES PROVE TO BE A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO LIVE IN THIS MANNER?
- WHAT, IF ANYTHING, MIGHT HINDER OUR LIVING LIFE AS PAUL DESCRIBES?
- REFLECT ON THE IDEA THAT LIVING THIS LIFE REQUIRES US TO ASK NOT HOW WE GO ABOUT ADDING IT TO OUR LIVES BUT RATHER RECOGNIZING WE ALREADY HAVE THIS LIFE AND CONSIDERING WHAT WE DO TO BLOW IT UP.
- CONSIDER CLOSING BY AFFIRMING THE DEEP CONNECTIONS YOU HAVE WITH ONE ANOTHER IN THE SPIRIT, AND BLESSING ONE ANOTHER.

CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND COMMENTARY

ECCLESIOLOGY AND BEING THE CHURCH

ECCLESIOLOGY IS THE STUDY OR THEOLOGY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH WITH RESPECT TO ITS POLITY, FUNCTION, MISSION, AND ROLE IN THE WORLD. ECCLESIOLOGY IS ONE OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL AREAS OF THEOLOGY, BECAUSE IT IS ECCLESIOLOGY WHICH UNDERGIRDS HOW THE CHURCH ENGAGES GOD, ITSELF, AND THE WORLD. HOWEVER, ECCLESIOLOGY HAS BEEN AND REMAINS TODAY AN UNDERSERVED AREA OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT. IN PART, THIS IS BECAUSE JESUS DID NOT HAND OFF A FORMAL ECCLESIOLOGY TO HIS FOLLOWERS. IT IS CLEAR JESUS INTENDED TO START THE CHURCH, A GATHERING OF PEOPLE WHO LIVED UNDER HIS REIGN, AND THIS CHURCH WAS INTENDED TO SERVE A CRITICAL ROLE IN GOD’S KINGDOM MISSION (MATTHEW 16.17-20). HOWEVER, JESUS DID NOT SPECIFY THE MEANS OF ORGANIZING THIS BODY OF PEOPLE UNDER HIS REIGN, NOR DID HE INDICATE HOW HE INTENDED HIS CHURCH TO CARRY OUT ITS KINGDOM

MISSION BEYOND THE GENERAL THEME OF MAKING DISCIPLES (MATTHEW 28.19-20).

AS THE EARLY CHURCH GREW, IT BEGAN TO EXPERIENCE GROWTH PAINS RELATED TO ITS LACK OF A FORMAL ECCLESIOLOGY. ONE OF THE FIRST OF THESE GROWTH PAINS IS SEEN IN ACTS 6 WHEN THE DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD TO WIDOWS OUTSTRIPPED THE ABILITIES OF THE APOSTLES NECESSITATING THE CREATION OF THE OFFICE OF THE DEACON. HOWEVER, ADDITIONAL STRAINS RELATED TO AN INADEQUATE ECCLESIOLOGY MIGHT BE OBSERVED THROUGHOUT THE BOOK OF ACTS. THESE INCLUDE ISSUES SUCH AS: THE NEED FOR AND PRACTICE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE (ACTS 5.1-11); DETERMINING WHO IS AND IS NOT A PART OF THE CHURCH (ACTS 10-11, 15); ACKNOWLEDGING WHO HAS THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE AND ENFORCE BINDING DECISIONS FOR THE CHURCH (ACTS 15); THE PROCESS OF HOW AND WHO TO APPOINT MISSIONARIES (ACTS 13.1-3; 15.36-41); DETERMINING THE BOUNDS OF ORTHODOXY (ACTS 18.24-26); AND DEVELOPING GUIDELINES FOR DISCERNING GOD'S WILL TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY (ACTS 21.10-16).

IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL, ONE CAN SEE THE BEGINNINGS OF ECCLESIASTICAL THOUGHT AS PAUL WRESTLES WITH ISSUES OF STRUCTURAL POLITY AND LEADERSHIP (1 TIMOTHY 3-6; TITUS 1). HOWEVER, ONE SHOULD NOT MISS THE REALITY THAT THE CORPUS OF PAUL'S LETTERS ARE THEMSELVES AN ONGOING EFFORT TO DEVELOP AN ECCLESIOLOGY AS IT PERTAINS TO HOW THE CHURCH RELATES TO GOD AND ITSELF SO THAT IT MIGHT CARRY OUT ITS REDEMPTIVE MISSION. WHILE MANY COMMENTATORS VIEW PAUL AS THE PRIMARY THEOLOGIAN OF THE EARLY CHURCH, IN REALITY, HE WAS A THEOLOGIAN IN TERMS OF NECESSITY NOT STRATEGY; THAT IS, PAUL'S THEOLOGY HAD MORE TO DO WITH DEALING WITH PRESSING ISSUES (TASK THEOLOGY) THAN PROACTIVELY CREATING A SYSTEMATIC ORTHODOXY WHICH COULD BE HANDED DOWN. TASK THEOLOGY, WHILE ENGAGED IN THINKING ABOUT DOCTRINAL REALITIES, IS PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH THE PRACTICAL FUNCTIONING AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH. THEREFORE, THESE LETTERS MIGHT BE UNDERSTOOD TO BE PAUL DOING ECCLESIASTICAL THINKING IN REAL TIME. PAUL WAS WORKING OUT HOW THE LOCAL CONGREGATIONS TO WHICH HE WROTE UNDERSTOOD HOW TO RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER AND GOD WHO WAS WORKING OUT HIS SALVATION IN THEM, SO THEY MIGHT ENGAGE THE WORLD. WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THE PAULINE CORPUS, AS WELL AS THE OTHER LETTERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, IT BECOMES APPARENT THAT THESE FIRST PASTORS WERE ACTIVELY DEVELOPING AN ECCLESIOLOGY WHICH HAD TWO AREAS OF CONCERN. THE FIRST AREA OF CONCERN INVOLVED THE OFFICES AND POLITY OF THE CHURCH. THE SECOND AREA OF CONCERN INVOLVED THE COMMUNAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH

(LIFE WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER) SO THAT THE CHURCH MIGHT ENGAGE THE WORLD.

TODAY, ECCLESIASTICAL THINKING IS GIVEN LITTLE, IF ANY, THOUGHT. INSTEAD, ISSUES OF SOTERIOLOGY (REDEMPTION) ARE GIVEN MUCH MORE EMPHASIS, TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD. WHAT LITTLE ECCLESIASTICAL THINKING IS DONE INVOLVES ISSUES OF POLITY AND LEADERSHIP. SOME DEBATE IS HAD OVER WHO CAN OR CANNOT LEAD, APPROPRIATE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES, AND HOW THESE STRUCTURES WORK WITHIN AND ACROSS LOCAL CONGREGATIONS. LITTLE, IF ANY, THOUGHT IS GIVEN TO THE COMMUNAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH (LIFE WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER). THIS LACK OF THINKING MAY BE THE RESULT OF THE POPULAR UNDERSTANDING OF PAUL AS A SYSTEMATIC RATHER THAN TASK THEOLOGIAN. TO VIEW PAUL AS A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIAN WITH THE MODERN CONCERN OF DEVELOPING A SYSTEMATIC ORTHODOXY IS TO MISS THE REAL-TIME WRESTLING PAUL IS DOING TO MAKE LIFE TOGETHER IN THESE EARLY CHURCHES WORK. FURTHER, THE LACK OF THIS KIND OF ECCLESIASTICAL THINKING MAY ALSO BE LINKED TO THE EMPHASIS ON THE INDIVIDUAL IN MODERN WESTERN SOCIETY. HOWEVER, THE ABSENCE OF AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF LIFE TOGETHER HAS DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE MODERN CHURCH.

WITHOUT AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF LIFE TOGETHER LOCAL CONGREGATIONS DEVELOP SHALLOW RELATIONAL STRUCTURES IF ANY AT ALL RESULTING IN NOT ONLY A SHALLOUNESS OF DISCIPLESHIP BUT A SHALLOUNESS OF WITNESS. IT IS IN LIFE TOGETHER THAT INDIVIDUALS GROW AND WITNESS IS BORN BECAUSE IT IS IN LIFE TOGETHER THAT THE TRIUNE GOD IS SEEN (EPHESIANS 4.1-16). FURTHER, WITHOUT AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF LIFE TOGETHER, LOCAL CONGREGATIONS DO NOT UNDERSTAND HOW TO WORK WITH OTHER CONGREGATIONS OR DENOMINATIONS. RATHER, A SPIRIT OF COMPETITION IS FOSTERED BECAUSE OF A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING CONCERNING THE COMPREHENSIVE NATURE OF THE BODY OF CHRIST. MOST RECENTLY, THE ABSENCE OF AN ADEQUATE ECCLESIOLOGY OF LIFE TOGETHER HAS LED TO RACIAL TENSIONS BETWEEN BELIEVERS FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES DUE IN PART TO THE INABILITY TO STAND WITH AND FOR ONE ANOTHER BECAUSE OF A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING CONCERNING THE REALITY OF BEING CONNECTED TO ONE ANOTHER.

THE TEXT

EPHESIANS 4.1-16: BEING IMAGE BEARERS. . . TOGETHER

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS IS PAUL'S MOST GENERAL LETTER, ONE OUTLINING THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST AND ITS PRACTICAL OUTWORKING IN EVERYDAY LIFE. MOST LIKELY, THIS LETTER WAS AN ENCYCLICAL LETTER MEANT FOR THE CHURCHES IN ASIA MINOR AND NOT JUST EPHESUS, A REALITY SEEN IN EARLY COPIES WHICH RATHER CONTAIN A BLANK SPACE IN WHICH THE LOCATION COULD BE FILLED IN BY THE READER (EPHESIANS 1.1) RATHER THAN "IN EPHESUS." THIS LETTER FALLS NEATLY INTO TWO GENERAL PARTS: THE OUTLINE OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE WORK IN CHRIST (EPHESIANS 1-3), AND THE OUTWORKING OF REDEMPTION IN THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF CONGREGATIONS OF FAITH AND BELIEVERS (EPHESIANS 4-6).

AS PAUL MOVES FROM HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST TO EVERYDAY LIFE, HE ADMONISHES HIS READERS TO LIVE IN LIGHT OF THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST; THAT IS, THE LIFE THEY LIVE IS TO BE GUIDED AND INFLUENCED BY THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST. THIS INTRODUCTORY ADMONITION UNDERSCORES PAUL'S STRONG BELIEF THAT FAITH IN CHRIST WAS TO BE AN EMBODIED (LIVED OUT) EXPERIENCE.

INTERESTINGLY, THE FIRST EXAMPLE HE PROVIDES CONCERNING EMBODIED FAITH INVOLVES LIFE WITH OTHER BELIEVERS NOT LIFE AS AN INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER. WHILE PAUL DOES DISCUSS LIFE AS INDIVIDUAL FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST IN EPHESIANS 4-6, HIS CHOICE TO FOCUS FIRST ON LIFE TOGETHER IN AN EXTENDED MANNER POINTS TO THE PRIMACY OF LIFE TOGETHER AS EMBODIED FAITH. SIMPLY PUT, REAL FAITH BEGINS IN LIVING LIFE WITH OTHER BELIEVERS. PAUL BEGINS BY NOTING WHAT KIND OF BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES MAKE LIFE-TOGETHER POSSIBLE, ATTITUDES SUCH AS PATIENCE AND ACTIONS WHICH INVOLVE HUMILITY AND GENTLENESS WITH ONE ANOTHER. IT IS CLEAR PAUL UNDERSTANDS THAT BRINGING PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS COULD EASILY CREATE SPARKS, AND SPARKS CREATE FIRES! BUT, IN CAUTIONING PATIENCE AND GENTLENESS, HE SEEKS TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE RELATIONSHIPS ARE LESS LIKELY TO BLOW UP. HOWEVER, HE NOTES THIS KIND OF ENVIRONMENT REQUIRES EFFORT, NOT TO FORM THE BASIS OF LIFE TOGETHER BUT TO KEEP FROM BLOWING IT UP. LIFE TOGETHER IS A GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. ACCORDING TO PAUL, IT IS THE BEHAVIOR OF PEOPLE WHICH ADDS DYNAMITE TO THE FOUNDATION AND THEN LIGHTS THE FUSE.

PAUL DETAILS THE NUMEROUS ITEMS WHICH BELIEVERS HAVE IN COMMON WITH ONE ANOTHER. IF THIS LETTER IS ENCYCLICAL THEN PAUL INTENDS HIS READERS TO SEE THEY HAVE THESE THINGS IN COMMON WITH OTHER IN THEIR OWN CONGREGATION

OF FAITH AND WITH OTHERS IN OTHER CONGREGATIONS OF FAITH, EVEN THOSE WITH WHOM THEY DIFFER ON SOME MATTERS! HOWEVER, AT THE CENTER OF THESE ITEMS WHICH BELIEVERS HOLD IN COMMON STANDS THE TRIUNE GOD: SPIRIT, LORD, AND GOD AND FATHER OF ALL (EPHESIANS 4.4-6). AT THIS POINT, PAUL'S REASONING BEHIND HIS EMPHASIS BECOMES CLEAR, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST. ACCORDING TO PAUL, THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST DID NOT SIMPLY FOCUS ON THE SALVATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL BUT ON THE REDEMPTION OF HUMAN LIFE TOGETHER, THE CREATION OF A NEW HUMANITY BY CREATING UNITY AMONG PEOPLE (EPHESIANS 2.11-18). IN LIVING TOGETHER WITH INTENTION, THE BELIEVERS WERE MAINTAINING THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST WHICH WAS AND WAS BECOMING REALITY THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT. HOWEVER, THIS BRINGING TOGETHER OF PEOPLE WAS ABOUT MORE THAN PEOPLE BEING TOGETHER. IT WAS ABOUT PEOPLE FUNCTIONING AS IMAGE BEARERS OF THE TRIUNE GOD, FOR ONLY TOGETHER COULD PEOPLE DEMONSTRATE TO THE WORLD THE GLORIOUS CHARACTER OF GOD EVEN AS THEY WERE FILLED WITH THE FULLNESS OF GOD (EPHESIANS 3.19). IN OTHER WORDS, IT WAS IN LIFE TOGETHER THAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD LOOKED THE MOST LIKE GOD. HOWEVER, IT WAS ALSO IN LIFE TOGETHER THAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD CAME TO LOOK MORE AND MORE LIKE GOD.

PAUL DESCRIBES THE REALITY OF BEING BEARERS OF THE IMAGE OF THE TRIUNE GOD. PEOPLE EXPERIENCE DIVERSITY IN THEIR UNITY BECAUSE GOD EXPERIENCES DIVERSITY IN HIS UNITY. THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST ENSURES THIS AS CHRIST GIVES TO EACH PERSON A DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL GIFT. THESE GIFTS ARE WHAT CREATE THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH, AND IT IS THESE LEADERS WHO USE THEIR GIFTS TO LEAD PEOPLE TO MATURITY WHICH LOOKS LIKE LIVING THE LIFE OF CHRIST. BUT, THE LEADERS ARE NOT THE ONLY RECIPIENTS OF THESE SPIRITUAL GIFTS. EVERY MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH IS GIVEN A GIFT AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR USING IT. WHEN THEY DO THIS ALONG WITH CONFESSING TRUTH TO ONE ANOTHER (TRUTH ABOUT GOD AND LIFE) THEN THIS TOO LEADS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH LOOKING FROM LIKE JESUS.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

HOW DO I NAVIGATE THIS WORLD AS A PERSON OF FAITH? I FIND IT INTERESTING THAT I ASK IT THIS WAY, "HOW DO I NAVIGATE?" INHERENT TO THE WAY I ASK THE QUESTION IS AN ASSUMPTION, AN ASSUMPTION WHICH SAYS I NAVIGATE THIS WORLD ALONE. PERHAPS I DON'T REALLY MEAN I AM COMPLETELY ALONE. I UNDERSTAND THERE ARE OTHER BELIEVERS ON THIS JOURNEY, BUT MY ASSUMPTION

IS THEY HAVE THEIR JOURNEY AND I HAVE MINE. WE ARE ALONE, TOGETHER. I AM COMING TO SEE HOW WRONG-HEADED THIS IS, ALTHOUGH THIS REALIZATION CREATES NEW PROBLEMS FOR ME FOR WHICH I DO NOT HAVE SOLUTIONS. I AM COMING TO RECOGNIZE HOW IT IS BETTER TO ASK, "HOW DO WE NAVIGATE THIS WORLD AS PEOPLE OF FAITH?" THIS IS THE MORE APPROPRIATE QUESTION BECAUSE FAITH IS NOT AN INDIVIDUAL JOURNEY. I MIGHT GO SO FAR AS TO SAY THERE CAN BE NO FAITH IF THERE IS AN INDIVIDUAL JOURNEY. THE JOURNEY OF FAITH IS A JOURNEY WE MAKE TOGETHER AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

I SUPPOSE I HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN THIS. JESUS' PRAY WAS FOR OUR UNION AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD (JOHN 17.11, 20-23), BUT THIS LIFE TOGETHER HAS ALWAYS BEEN DOWNPLAYED AS OPTIONAL, SOMETHING FOR THOSE "CONNECTING" PEOPLE. BUT, IF I REALLY PAY ATTENTION TO JESUS' PRAYER OUR ONENESS IS ROOTED IN SOMETHING MORE THAN IT BEING A GOOD IDEA TO BE TOGETHER. OUR ONENESS IS A REFLECTION OF THE ONENESS OF GOD, THREE LIVING TOGETHER AS ONE. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS ARE HUGE, AND PAUL DRAWS THEM OUT AND LAYS THEM FORTH IN PLAIN LANGUAGE. . . LANGUAGE WHICH I HAVE READ HUNDREDS OF TIMES AND IGNORED. IF WE ARE BEING REDEEMED TO BE IMAGE BEARERS, AND IF GOD LIVES A LIFE OF COMMUNITY THEN I AM BEING REDEEMED TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY BECAUSE IT IS ONLY IN LIFE WITH OTHERS THAT I AM TRULY AN IMAGE BEARER OF GOD. DIDN'T GOD SAY IT WASN'T GOOD TO LIVE ALONE (GENESIS 2.18)? IT WASN'T BECAUSE WITHOUT OTHERS WE GET LONELY. IT WAS BECAUSE WITHOUT OTHERS WE DON'T LOOK LIKE GOD!

THE BOTTOM LINE IS CLEAR. TO BE REDEEMED TO LIVE ONCE MORE AS AN IMAGE BEARER OF GOD MEANS I AM REDEEMED TO LIVE WITH OTHERS. NOW, HOW THIS WORKS OUT IS LESS THAN CLEAR. SOME OF IT IS MUDDIED BECAUSE OF THE WAY I HAVE STRUCTURED MY LIFE. THE WAY MY LIFE IS LEAVES LITTLE ROOM FOR LIFE WITH OTHER BELIEVERS. TO LIVE WITH OTHERS WOULD TAKE MORE THAN A REARRANGING OF MY SCHEDULE. IT WOULD TAKE A COMPLETE REORIENTATION OF MY ENTIRE LIFE. IN ADDITION, LIVING WITH OTHERS IS HARD; THAT IS TO SAY, PEOPLE ARE HARD. I DON'T LIKE HARD. I HAVE A NUMBER OF OTHER ROADBLOCKS I COULD THROW UP, BUT THESE ARE THE BIGGEST AND SEEM INSURMOUNTABLE. BUT, THEN I PAUSE AND WONDER. IF THEY WERE TRULY INSURMOUNTABLE WHY WOULD THEY BE HELD FORTH AS THE WAY TO LIVE OUT OUR FAITH? I THINK PAUL'S ADMONITION TO LIVE IN A WAY AS NOT TO BLOW UP THIS LIFE WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN IS PERHAPS WHERE I NEED TO START. I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW I GET TO THIS LIFE WHEN I SHOULD PERHAPS BEEN LOOKING AT HOW I KEEP HIJACKING THE SPIRIT'S WORK TO GIVE ME THIS LIFE. IT IS PERHAPS HERE, IN PONDERING MY ACTIONS OF UNDOING RATHER THAN DOING, THAT I FIND MY FIRST STEPS FORWARD TO LIFE TOGETHER.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

HOW DO WE NAVIGATE THE WORLD AS PEOPLE OF FAITH? WHEN WE ASK THIS QUESTION, WE GENERALLY ASSUME WE ARE ASKING ABOUT HOW THIS PLAYS OUT IN OUR LIVES AS INDIVIDUALS. HOWEVER, NAVIGATING THE WORLD AS PEOPLE OF FAITH REQUIRES US TO NAVIGATE IT TOGETHER AS A UNIFIED PEOPLE WHO INTENTIONALLY SHARE LIFE WITH ONE ANOTHER. IT IS IN LIVING THIS LIFE THAT WE BECOME TRUE IMAGE BEARERS OF THE TRIUNE GOD, OUR LIFE TOGETHER DEMONSTRATING HIS LIFE TOGETHER. NOT ONLY DOES LIFE TOGETHER MODEL THE LIFE OF GOD, IT LEADS US DEEPER INTO THE LIFE OF BEING FULLY HUMAN, THOSE WHO TAKE UP THE LIFE OF CHRIST. AFTER ALL, TO BE FULLY HUMAN IS TO LIVE AS AN IMAGE BEARER OF GOD (COLOSSIANS 1.15). SO, HOW DO WE TAKE STEPS TO LIVE LIFE TOGETHER AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD? THE MODERN CHURCH HAS SPENT MUCH ENERGY SEEKING TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION. WE HAVE DEVISED STRATEGIES, CREATED MINISTRIES AND PROGRAMS, AND WRITTEN ENTIRE THEOLOGIES AND PRACTICAL HANDBOOKS, BUT THEY ARE ALL APPROACHING THE ISSUE FROM THE WRONG DIRECTION WHICH IS PROBABLY WHY WE STILL FIND OURSELVES STRUGGLING AND FAILING TO LIVE THIS LIFE TOGETHER. THE REALITY IS THAT WE DO NOT HAVE CREATE THIS LIFE. WE ALREADY HAVE IT AS A GIFT AND WORKING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (EPHESIANS 4.3). THE VERY WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS CREATES THIS LIFE TOGETHER WE CAN LIVE (EPHESIANS 2.11-18). OUR ROLE IS NOT TO STEP TOWARD THIS LIFE BUT TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE WE DO NOT SQUASH THIS LIFE (EPHESIANS 4.3). SO, INSTEAD OF PONDERING WHAT THE NEXT PROGRAM WILL BE WHICH WILL LEAD PEOPLE TOWARD LIFE TOGETHER, PERHAPS WE COULD PONDER WHAT IT IS THAT IS KEEPING US FROM LIFE TOGETHER AND DEAL WITH THESE THINGS. THIS WEEK, CONSIDER PAYING ATTENTION TO YOUR RHYTHMS AND ACTIVITIES WITH AN EYE TO WHETHER THEY FOSTER OR PUSH OUT LIFE WITH OTHER BELIEVERS. WHEN YOU RECOGNIZE AN ACTIVITY OR RHYTHM WHICH PUSHES OUT LIFE TOGETHER, RATHER THAN CONDEMNING IT OR YOURSELF, CONSIDER ASKING GOD HOW YOU MIGHT RESPOND TO THIS RHYTHM OR ACTIVITY. CONSIDER JOURNALING THESE PONDERINGS AND PRAYERS AND TALKING ABOUT THEM WITH A SOUL FRIEND.



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