

BE (i'm) PERFECT

GOING DEEPER DISCUSSION GUIDE MARCH 3, 2018

Discussion Guide

DON'T INSTAGRAM YOUR CHURCH

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

- COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: WHEN RELATIONSHIPS GET MESSY I _____. COULD YOU ELABORATE?

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.)

- DISCUSS THE NATURE OF THE ANCIENT CITY OF CORINTH AND THE EARLY CORINTHIAN CHURCH.
- READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12.12-27 ALOUD. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE SEEKING TO HEAR THESE WORDS AS A MEMBER OF THE CORINTHIAN CONGREGATION.
- IN THESE VERSES, PAUL USED THE ISSUE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO ADDRESS A DEEPER ISSUE OF LACK OF UNITY IN THE CORINTHIAN CONGREGATION. WHAT TRUTHS ABOUT UNITY DID PAUL SEEK TO IMPRESS UPON THE

CONGREGATION? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY AS POSSIBLE IN THE TEXT.

- CONSIDER, FOR A MOMENT, THE PRESENT CONTEXT OF THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH, ITS MESSINESS. WITH THIS MESSINESS IN MIND, RECONSIDER PAUL'S ENCOURAGEMENT TO UNITY, A UNITY WITH MESSY PEOPLE. YOU MIGHT READ AND PONDER VERSES 18 AND 21-25 AS PART OF YOUR CONSIDERATION. WHAT NEW INSIGHTS, IF ANY, DOES THIS PONDERING PROVIDE YOU? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- SOMEHOW, IN SPITE OF ITS MESSINESS, TOGETHER, THE MESSY PEOPLE OF CORINTH FORMED THE BODY OF CHRIST (VS 27), AND GOD'S HAND WAS IN IT ALL; THAT IS, THE MESSY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH PLAYED A PART IN MOVING PEOPLE TO THE LIFE OF JESUS. HOW MIGHT THIS HAVE BEEN THE CASE IN CORINTH?
- CAN GOD STILL USE MESSY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH TO LEAD PEOPLE TO CHRIST-LIKENESS? HOW MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- DO YOU THINK PEOPLE ARE WILLING OR UNWILLING TO ENTER INTO MESSY RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER BELIEVERS? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- WHAT MIGHT HELP PEOPLE STAY IN THESE RELATIONSHIPS?
- YOU MIGHT CONCLUDE BY SHARING STORIES OF HOW GOD HAS USED MESSY PEOPLE TO SHAPE YOU TO BE MORE LIKE HIM. YOU MIGHT PRAY FOR GOD TO GIVE HIS GRACE TO YOUR GROUP SO THAT YOU MIGHT REMAIN WITH ONE ANOTHER THROUGH THE MESSINESS OF RELATIONSHIPS IN ORDER TO LOOK MORE LIKE HIM.

CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND COMMENTARY

CORINTH AND CRISIS IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

THE FIRST-CENTURY CITY OF CORINTH WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST CITIES IN ITS TIME, THE LARGEST IN ALL OF GREECE. CORINTH, AS IT EXISTED IN THIS PERIOD, HAD BEEN FOUNDED BY JULIUS CAESAR IN 44 B.C.. CAESAR HAD CHOSEN TO REBUILD THE CITY WHICH HAD LAIN IN RUINS FOR ALMOST A CENTURY, CHOOSING TO POPULATE IT WITH FREED-PEOPLE AND FORMER SOLDIERS. THEREFORE, FROM ITS BEGINNING, CORINTH WAS A COSMOPOLITAN CITY, BOASTING PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE AND ALL CORNERS OF THE KNOWN WORLD.

BECAUSE OF ITS GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION ON THE ISTHMUS BETWEEN THE AEGEAN SEA AND THE GULF OF CORINTH, THE CITY BECAME A MAJOR PORT CITY SPECIALIZING IN THE TRANSPORTATION OF GOODS ACROSS THE ISTHMUS IN ORDER TO CUT SHIPPING TIMES. HOWEVER, THE CITY ALSO WAS KNOWN FOR ITS BRONZE WITH A HIGH TIN CONTENT, KNOWN AS CORINTHIAN BRONZE, A METAL GREATLY VALUED ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD.

THE PATRON GODDESS OF CORINTH WAS APHRODITE, THE GODDESS OF LOVE, BEAUTY, AND THE SEA. PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD CAME TO VISIT THE TEMPLE OF APHRODITE WHICH BECAME WELL KNOWN FOR ITS TEMPLE PROSTITUTES. THIS INFLUENCE COMBINED WITH THE STATUS OF A PORT CITY LED TO A WELL-DESERVED REPUTATION AS A CITY WHERE ALL FORMS AND KINDS OF SEX COULD BE FREELY FOUND AND HAD. HOWEVER, CORINTH ALSO BOASTED A TEMPLE OF APOLLO, WHICH, WITH ITS CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE ORACLE OF DELPHI (50 KM), HAD SOME LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE. FURTHER, THE TEMPLE OF ASKLEPIOS, THE GOD OF HEALING, WAS VERY POPULAR, WITH SUPPLICANTS OFFERING CASTS OF BODY PARTS FOR WHICH THEY DESIRED HEALING, MANY OF WHICH ARE STILL BEING FOUND TODAY.

THE CHURCH IN CORINTH WAS FOUNDED BY PAUL DURING THE RULE OF GALLIO THE PROCONSUL (51-52 A.D.). HIS FIRST LETTER TO THIS CHURCH WAS LIKELY WRITTEN AROUND 53-55 A.D. THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH CONSISTED MOSTLY OF POOR PERSONS OF LOW STATUS. HOWEVER, SOME PERSONAGES WITH WEALTH AND POWER WERE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION (1 CORINTHIANS 1.26-28). THE PRESENCE OF SO FEW PEOPLE OF HIGHER STATUS AND WEALTH LIKELY LED TO A POWER IMBALANCE WHICH PROBABLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE DIVISIONS WHICH FORMED IN THE CONGREGATION (1 CORINTHIANS 1-4). THE CONGREGATION CONSISTED OF MOSTLY GENTILES FROM PAGAN BACKGROUNDS WITH SOME JEWS AND GOD-FEARING GENTILES PRESENT (1 CORINTHIANS 7.18-20).

NO OTHER CHURCH REPRESENTED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT PROVIDES A BETTER LOOK INTO WHAT LIFE IN THE EARLY CHURCH WAS LIKE, NOR DOES ANY OTHER CHURCH EXCEED THE LEVEL OF TURMOIL AND STRIFE PRESENT IN CORINTH. PAUL STRUGGLED FOR YEARS TO SHEPHERD THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH, VISITING THEM PERSONALLY SEVERAL TIMES. IT IS LIKELY THAT PAUL LOST HIS BATTLE TO SHEPHERD THIS CONGREGATION AS WE CAN SEE PAUL, IN HIS LATER LETTERS, TURNING HIS ATTENTION EASTWARD TO ROME IN AN ATTEMPT TO FIND A NEW BASE OF SUPPORT AND MISSION (ROMANS 14-16). WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LATTER HALF OF THE FIRST-CENTURY IS LOST TO US, BUT IN THE WRITINGS OF THE PATRISTIC FATHERS, WE SEE THAT THIS CHURCH LATER TURNED AND BECAME A CENTER OF CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN THE SECOND-CENTURY UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF GOOD AND STRONG BISHOPS.

THE ISSUES IN CORINTH SEEM TO HAVE BEGUN WITH DIVISIONS WHICH AROSE OVER LEADERSHIP (1 CORINTHIANS 1-4). GROUPS FORMED AROUND VARIOUS LEADERS, EACH WITH ITS OWN SLOGANS AND TALKING POINTS CONCERNING ISSUES OF BAPTISM, WISDOM, SPIRITUALITY, AUTHORITY, AND MATURITY. THESE ISSUES ONLY DEEPENED AFTER THIS FIRST LETTER WHICH PROVIDES THE CONTEXT OF PAUL'S SECOND LETTER. WHILE THE CORINTHIANS WERE ARGUING OVER WHOM THEY SHOULD FOLLOW, A SERIES OF SERIOUS ETHICAL ISSUES DEVELOPED WITHIN THE CONGREGATION: INCEST, LAWSUITS, SEXUAL IMPROPRIETY, MARRIAGE STRUGGLES, SEXUAL AND SOCIAL STATUS ISSUES REGARDING THE PRACTICE OF THE LORD'S TABLE, AND THE OCCASIONAL DABBING WITH FORMER PAGAN PRACTICES (1 CORINTHIANS 5-10). AS IF THESE WERE NOT ENOUGH, THE CORINTHIANS ALSO FOUND THEMSELVES DIVIDED OVER ISSUES OF WORSHIP AND THEOLOGY WHICH INCLUDED DISAGREEMENTS OVER SPIRITUAL GIFTS, DRESS CODES, THE ROLE OF WOMEN, AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD (1 CORINTHIANS 11-15). HOWEVER, PAUL HAD GREAT HOPE FOR THIS CONGREGATION, AND SAW THEM, AS MESSY AS THEY WERE, AS STILL ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE POSITIVELY TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD (1 CORINTHIANS 16).

THE TEXT

1 CORINTHIANS 12.12-27: *WE BELONG TOGETHER*

THE VARIOUS LEADERSHIP, ETHICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL ISSUES WITHIN THE CORINTHIAN CONGREGATION CREATED MAJOR FAULT LINES WITHIN THIS ANCIENT CHURCH WHICH WORKED THEMSELVES OUT QUITE NATURALLY IN THE ABSENCE OF UNITY OR DEEP CONNECTION BETWEEN PEOPLE. PEOPLE DID NOT FEEL A SENSE OF TRUST, CONNECTION, OR DEVOTION TO ONE ANOTHER. RATHER,

THEY VIEWED ONE ANOTHER AS ADVERSARIES TO BE OVERCOME. WHILE EVERY ISSUE LENT ITSELF TO THIS REALITY, PAUL CHOSE THE SPIRITUAL ISSUE OF GRACE GIFTS AS THE OPENING THROUGH WHICH TO ADDRESS THESE DEEP DIVIDES (1 CORINTHIANS 12.1-11).

PAUL BEGINS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF DEEP DIVISION IN THE CONGREGATION BY STATING A THEOLOGICAL REALITY WHICH HE WOULD RESTATE AT SEVERAL POINTS IN HIS ADDRESS: THE CHURCH WAS TO EXPERIENCE UNITY IN ITS DIVERSITY. PAUL ROOTS THIS TRUTH IN THE LIFE OF JESUS HIMSELF WHICH HE THEN LINKS TO THE METAPHOR OF A BODY AS A MEANS OF APPLYING THIS TRUTH TO THE PRESENT SITUATION. PAUL BEGINS BY NOTING THAT A BODY EXISTS AS A SINGLE UNITY OF BEING EVEN THOUGH IT IS MADE UP OF MANY DIFFERING PARTS. IN THE SAME WAY, HE ARGUES, THIS IS THE LIFE OF CHRIST AS HE EXPERIENCES IT. HERE PAUL DOES NOT ELABORATE BUT HE POINTS TO THE DIVINE NATURE OF JESUS WHO EXPERIENCES LIFE AS ONE OF UNION WITH THE FATHER AND SPIRIT EVEN AS THE THREE ALSO EXPERIENCE A SPECIAL UNIQUENESS OF PERSON; THAT IS, THEIR INDIVIDUALITY IS NOT LOST IN THEIR UNITY WHILE THEIR INDIVIDUALITY DOES NOT NEGATE THEIR UNITY.

BECAUSE JESUS EXPERIENCES LIFE AS ONE OF UNITY WHILE MAINTAINING HIS UNIQUE PERSONHOOD, SO TOO IS THIS TO BE THE EXPERIENCE OF THOSE WHO FOLLOW HIM. GOD HIMSELF HAS ASSURED THAT THIS WILL BE THE CASE IN HIS GIVING OF THE SINGLE SPIRIT TO ALL WHO FOLLOW CHRIST. IN SO DOING, MANY VARIOUS AND DIVERSE PEOPLE BECOME ONE NOT ONLY WITH GOD BUT WITH ONE ANOTHER THROUGH THEIR COMMON POSSESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. THIS IS WHY, PAUL RESTATES, THE CHURCH IS TO EXPERIENCE UNITY IN ITS DIVERSITY.

THAT PEOPLE ARE DIVERSE, CONTEXTUALLY BECAUSE OF THE SPECIAL WAY GOD'S GRACE WORKS OUT OF THEM, IT CAN BE TEMPTING TO FEEL ONE DOES NOT BELONG OR FIT. THEY ARE UNLIKE OTHERS WITH WHOM THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO BE DEEPLY CONNECTED. FEELING CONNECTED TO THOSE WHO ARE UNLIKE YOU CUTS AGAINST HUMAN NATURE WHICH IS DRAWN TO SIMILARITY RATHER THAN DISSIMILARITY. HOWEVER, THIS DIVERSITY DOES NOT NEGATE UNITY AS THIS IS THE NATURE OF THE GODHEAD. FURTHER, THIS DIVERSITY IS INTENDED BY GOD, WITH GOD INTENTIONALLY PUTTING TOGETHER THE RELATIONSHIPS AS THEY WERE IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH. PRACTICALLY SPEAKING, THIS IS QUITE A STATEMENT IN THE CORINTHIAN CONTEXT, FOR IT IMPLIES THAT GOD DID NOT INTEND FOR THE CORINTHIANS TO AGREE ON EVERY ISSUE OF THEOLOGY OR PRAXIS (THEOLOGY APPLIED IN REAL LIFE) BUT SOMEHOW THESE DIVERSE POSITIONS WERE MEANT TO

CONTINUE EVEN AS THE CORINTHIANS EXPERIENCED A DEEP SENSE OF BELONGING WITH ONE ANOTHER.

IN ADDITION TO GIVING RISE TO THE SENSE THAT ONE DID NOT BELONG, DIVERSITY CAN ALSO GIVE RISE TO THE BELIEF THAT OTHERS WITH DIFFERING POSITIONS (AND GRACE GIFTS IN THIS INSTANCE) ARE UNIMPORTANT. HUMAN NATURE IS ONE WHICH IS HEAVILY SELF-CENTERED. THEREFORE, ONE'S OWN POSITION IS THE RIGHT AND ONLY NECESSARY POSITION. HOWEVER, PAUL NOTES THAT NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. THOSE POSITIONS (OR PEOPLE!) WHO SEEMED TO BE THE LEAST IMPORTANT COULD IN TURN BECOME THE MOST IMPORTANT. PAUL USES A METAPHOR WHICH REFERS TO GENITALIA AND PLAYS ON THE CORINTH'S STATUS AS AN OVERSEXUALIZED CITY. IN THE CONTEXT, PAUL'S ARGUMENT BASICALLY RUNS AS FOLLOWS: WHILE WE MIGHT BE ASHAMED OF OUR PRIVATE PARTS, YOU END UP GIVING THEM SPECIAL TREATMENT AND HONOR IN THE CITY OF CORINTH! HE REMINDS THEM THAT IT IS GOD WHO HAS PUT THE BODY TOGETHER. THEREFORE, THERE WERE TO BE NO RELATIONAL FAULT LINES IN THE CONGREGATION. RATHER, THE BELIEVERS WERE TO EXPRESS EQUAL CONCERN FOR ONE ANOTHER. IN LIVING IN THIS MANNER, UNITY EXPERIENCED IN AND THROUGH DIVERSITY, THE CORINTHIANS WOULD IN FACT EXPERIENCE LIFE AS CHRIST.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

HOW DOES ONE BECOME LIKE JESUS? I AM BEGINNING TO DISCOVER THE PROCESS DOESN'T LOOK ANYTHING LIKE WHAT I EXPECT IT TO LOOK. RATHER THAN CONSISTING OF VARIOUS STRATEGIES AND FORMULAS WHICH I FOLLOW TO LIVE LIKE JESUS, MY PATH TO CHRIST-LIKENESS CONSISTS OF ME OPENING MY LIFE IN AN EVER-INCREASING MANNER TO GOD. THE MORE I TURN MY LIFE TO HIS, THE MORE OF ME HE HAS TO WORK WITH, AND WORK WITH ME HE DOES.

WHILE I AM TEMPTED TO VIEW THIS AS A GOD-AND-ME KIND OF THING, AND WOULD PREFER IT TO BE SO, THE REALITY IS IT INVOLVES OTHERS. YOU SEE, I OPEN MY LIFE TO GOD BY OPENING MY LIFE TO OTHERS, BECAUSE THE GOD WHO IS IN ME IS ALSO IN THEM. I KNOW THIS IN MY HEAD, BUT I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO DO IN PRACTICE. PEOPLE SCARE ME. CHURCH PEOPLE SCARE ME, AND I AM ONE OF THEM. SO, I HIDE, BUT MAYBE I WOULDN'T IF THERE WERE SOME NON-SCARY CHURCH PEOPLE. YOU KNOW, THOSE PEOPLE WHO ARE ALWAYS LOVING, COMPLETELY KIND, TOTALLY THOUGHTFUL, NEVER JUDGMENT, OVERLY GENEROUS, AMAZINGLY WELCOMING PEOPLE. IF I COULD FIND THOSE CHURCH PEOPLE, I JUST MIGHT OPEN MY LIFE TO THEM. AS IT IS, I AM YET TO

FIND THOSE PEOPLE. ALL I CAN SEEM TO FIND IS OFTEN CRANKY, SOMETIMES UNRELIABLE, AT TIMES JUDGMENTAL, MANY TIMES SELF-CENTERED PEOPLE. AND I AM ONE OF THEM! HOW COULD IT DO ME ANY POSSIBLE GOOD TO OPEN MY LIFE TO PEOPLE LIKE THAT? I DON'T KNOW IF I EVEN WANT TO BE REAL WITH MYSELF! AND YET, SOMEHOW, GOD USES PEOPLE LIKE THIS TO MAKE ME LIKE HIM. GOD INTENDS TO USE IMPERFECT PEOPLE TO LEAD ME TO HIS PERFECT LIFE. HE HAS PERFECTLY BOOBY TRAPPED MY LIFE FOR PERFECTION BY FILLING IT WITH IMPERFECT PEOPLE. IT IS IN OUR IMPERFECTION WITH ONE ANOTHER THAT WE BECOME MORE AND MORE LIKE CHRIST.

HOW DOES IT WORK? HONESTLY, MUCH OF IT IS A MYSTERY TO ME. SOME OF IT INVOLVES SEEING MY OWN IMPERFECTION THROUGH THE IMPERFECTION OF OTHERS (MATTHEW 7.3-5). SOME OF IT MAY INCLUDE THE COUNTLESS INVITATIONS I HAVE TO PRACTICE BEING LIKE JESUS, LOVING THOSE WHO DO NOT LOVE ME BACK PERFECTLY (MATTHEW 5.43-48; JOHN 13.1-17). MOST OF IT IS JUST GRACE, A REMINDER THAT GOD CAN USE ANYTHING AND ANYONE FOR HIS PURPOSES (ROMANS 8.28), A REMINDER THAT IN THE END, IT IS ALL GRACE ON THE JOURNEY TO THE LIFE OF JESUS.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

THE JOURNEY TO CHRIST-LIKENESS INVOLVES OPENING OUR LIVES TO GOD, NOT TRYING THE LATEST SPIRITUAL LIFE HACK TO LIVE LIKE JESUS. THIS IS TRUE BECAUSE THE JOURNEY TO JESUS' LIFE IS INFUSED WITH GOD'S GRACE, AND OUR RESPONSE IS TO OPEN OURSELVES TO THE WORKING OF THAT GRACE. ONE WAY WE DO THIS IS BY OPENING OUR LIVES TO ONE ANOTHER. AT THIS POINT, MANY OF US SHUT DOWN. WE HAVE BEEN HURT, WOUNDED, FORSAKEN, AND BROKEN ONE TOO MANY TIMES BY PEOPLE WHO CLAIMED TO BE GOD'S PEOPLE. WHY WOULD WE EVER WANT TO OPEN OUR LIVES LIKE THAT AGAIN? THAT WE GET HURT OR THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CHRIST-FOLLOWERS ARE NOT ALWAYS EASY IS A MATTER WE WILL NOT CONTEST. THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE IMPERFECT; THAT IS, THEY ARE PERFECT MESSSES. PERFECT MESSSES MAKE MORE PERFECT MESSSES. HOWEVER, THE REALITY IS GOD USES THESE IMPERFECT PEOPLE TO LEAD US TO HIS IMPERFECT LIFE. IN FACT, GOD HAS INTENTIONALLY FILLED OUR LIVES WITH IMPERFECT PEOPLE FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE. HE HAS BOOBY-TRAPPED OUR LIVES WITH RELATIONAL DIFFICULTIES, AWKWARD MOMENTS, AND EVEN STRANGER PEOPLE ALL FOR THE PURPOSE OF MAKING US MORE LIKE HIM. WHILE WE WOULD PREFER TO FIND A CHURCH FILLED WITH "NORMAL" PEOPLE WHO CAUSE US NO PROBLEMS, NO SUCH CHURCH EXISTS. REAL CHURCHES ARE MESSY CHURCHES FILLED WITH IMPERFECT PEOPLE

WHOM GOD USES TO MAKE US PERFECT.

THESE IMPERFECT PEOPLE ARE GOD'S GIFT TO US. THROUGH THEIR IMPERFECTIONS WE SEE OUR OWN IMPERFECTIONS (MATTHEW 7.3-5). IN THEIR BUMBLINGS, STUMBLINGS, AND OUTRIGHT MAKE-US-MADDER-THAN-A-HORNET MOMENTS WE FIND OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE LOVE, GRACE, COMPASSION, PATIENCE, AND EVERY OTHER FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT. THESE ARE JUST THE BEGINNINGS. THE WONDERFUL DEPTHS OF CHARACTER GOD CAN DEVELOP IN US ARE TOO MANY TO DETAIL HERE. . . SHOULD WE CHOOSE TO OPEN OUR LIVES TO IMPERFECT PEOPLE. HEREIN LIES THE PROBLEM. WE DON'T WANT TO OPEN, BECAUSE IT GETS MESSY. . . FAST. YES, AND GOD WOULD HAVE IT NO OTHER WAY BECAUSE REAL CHURCHES ARE MESSY CHURCHES FILLED WITH IMPERFECT PEOPLE WHOM GOD USES TO MAKE US PERFECT. SO, WE CAN EXPECT THE MESS IF WE OPEN, BUT WILL WE OPEN OURSELVES TO OTHERS? OFTEN, WITH THE FIRST SIGN OF MESSINESS, WE ARE TEMPTED TO HIT THE ROAD OR WITHDRAW INTO OUR SHELL. THIS IS UNDERSTANDABLE, BUT WE CAN TAKE A NOTE FROM THE ANCIENT BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO FLED TO THE DESERT IN THE FOURTH-CENTURY. THESE MEN AND WOMEN CHOSE TO LIVE TOGETHER IN TIGHT COMMUNITIES CALLED CLOISTERS, THE ANCIENT PRECURSOR OF OUR MONASTERIES AND ABBEYS. THEY KNEW THAT IN LIVING TOGETHER THEY WOULD MOVE TO THE LIFE OF JESUS, BUT LIVING TOGETHER WAS OFTEN MESSY. SO, WHEN JOINING A CLOISTER THESE ANCIENT BELIEVERS TOOK A VOW OF STABILITY. THEY SIMPLY SAID THEY WOULD NOT LEAVE. THEY REMOVED EVERY OPTION OF HEADING DOWN THE ROAD, FORCING THEMSELVES TO LEARN TO LIVE WITH AND LOVE OTHERS IN AND THROUGH THE RELATIONAL MESSINESS. THESE PEOPLE ARE THOSE WE NOW CALL SAINTS, GREAT MEN AND WOMEN OF GOD, MANY WHO ARE SAID TO HAVE WORKED MIRACLES AND SOME WHO HAVE ARTICULATED FOR US SOME OF OUR MOST TREASURED THEOLOGICAL TENETS. WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TODAY TO TAKE A SIMILAR VOW? WHAT BENEFIT MIGHT RESULT FROM TAKING SUCH A VOW? PONDER THESE QUESTIONS THIS WEEK AND TALK TO GOD ABOUT HOW THEY MAKE YOU FEEL. ASK HIM HOW HE FEELS ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS.



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