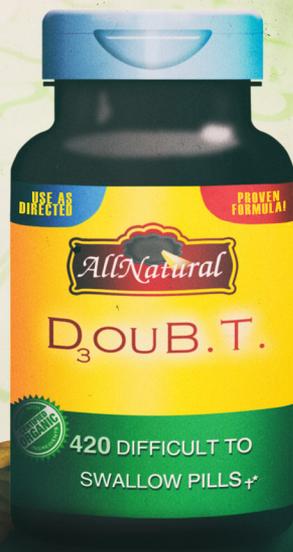


GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

July 17, 2016

THE BENEFIT OF THE



Discussion Guide

May I ASK A Question?

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

- IS IT POSSIBLE FOR FAITH AND DOUBT TO COEXIST? 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.)

- USING THE NOTES, DISCUSS THE DEFINITION OF DOUBT. TALK ABOUT HOW DOUBT IS THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT WE EXPECT AND WHAT WE EXPERIENCE. NOTICE AREAS IN WHICH THIS GAP EXISTS IN LIFE AND THE JOURNEY WITH GOD.
- READ JOHN 20.24-29 ALOUD. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE SEEKING TO EXPERIENCE IT AS THOMAS.
- WHAT GAPS (DOUBT) BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCE DID THOMAS EXPERIENCE?
- IN WHAT WAYS DID JESUS ADDRESS THOMAS' DOUBT?
- READ JUDE 22. IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DOES JESUS' APPROACH MODEL THIS VERSE? WHAT WAS THE RESULT?
- IN WHAT WAYS DO PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH TYPICALLY APPROACH PERSONS WHO EXPRESS DOUBT? COULD YOU ELABORATE? WHAT IS OFTEN THE RESULT?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO BE MERCIFUL WITH THOSE WHO DOUBT? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO BE MERCIFUL WITH OURSELVES WHEN WE DOUBT?
- DOUBT HAS OFTEN BEEN VIEWED AS BEING OPPOSED TO FAITH, BUT THIS IS ONLY TRUE IF FAITH CONSISTS OF CERTAINTY ABOUT A SET OF FACTS. IF FAITH IS ACTUALLY ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP AND NOT FACTS, HOW MIGHT DOUBT FIT WITH FAITH?
- REACT TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT BY ALFRED LORD TENNYSON: "YOU TELL ME DOUBT IS DEVIL-BORN. THERE LIVES MORE FAITH IN HONEST DOUBT, BELIEVE ME, THAN IN HALF THE CREEDS." COULD YOU ELABORATE ON YOUR REACTION?

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

DOUBT

AT ITS ROOT, DOUBT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF UNCERTAINTY. ONE MIGHT SAY THAT DOUBT IS A QUESTIONING ATTITUDE WITH RESPECT TO A SPECIFIC PROPOSITION. FOR INSTANCE, ONE MIGHT "DOUBT" THE CLAIMS MADE BY THE HOST OF A LATE NIGHT INFOMERCIAL. IN THIS SCENARIO, ONE QUESTIONS THE CLAIMS (PROPOSITIONAL TRUTHS) MADE BY THE HOST. WHILE THIS SEEMS STRAIGHT FORWARD, DOUBT IS ACTUALLY A BIT MORE COMPLEX. THE PRESENCE OF DOUBT COMES NOT JUST AS A REACTION TO A SINGLE PROPOSITION OR CLAIM BUT IS RATHER A RESPONSE TO COMPETING PROPOSITIONS AND CLAIMS; THAT IS, DOUBT IS A MIND SUSPENDED BETWEEN TWO CONTRADICTORY/COMPETING PROPOSITIONS, UNABLE TO ASSIGN A LEVEL OF SURETY TO EITHER PROPOSITION. IN THE EXAMPLE OF THE INFOMERCIAL HOST, ONE MIGHT DOUBT THE CLAIMS OF THE HOST BECAUSE HE HAS HEARD COMPETING CLAIMS FROM ANOTHER HOST. TYPICALLY, DOUBT IN THIS FORM ARISES NOT FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF COMPETING CLAIMS BUT FROM THE GAP THAT EXISTS BETWEEN WHAT HAS BEEN PROPOSED TO BE TRUE AND WHAT WE HAVE EXPERIENCED TO BE TRUE. THUS, WE MIGHT DOUBT THE HOST'S CLAIMS THAT HIS PRODUCT REMOVES EVERY STAIN BECAUSE WE HAVE EXPERIENCED THE FRUSTRATION OF STUBBORN STAINS WHICH CANNOT BE REMOVED.

DOUBT IS A COMMON EXPERIENCE AND IT TAKES MANY FORMS. DOUBT MIGHT BE PRACTICAL SUCH AS IN THE CASE OF A RELATIONSHIP OR OUR INFOMERCIAL EXAMPLE, BUT DOUBT MIGHT ALSO BE PHILOSOPHICAL OR RELIGIOUS HAVING TO DO WITH OUR UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE ITSELF. IN THE LATTER, WE MIGHT UNDERSTAND DOUBT TO TAKE TWO FORMS: SKEPTICAL DOUBT AND PROVISIONAL DOUBT. SKEPTICAL DOUBT IS THE ATTITUDE THAT NO ANSWER EXISTS WITH RESPECT TO THE CONFLICTING CLAIMS; THAT IS THE DILEMMA CREATED BY THESE COMPETING CLAIMS CANNOT BE SOLVED AND THUS DISBELIEF AND REJECTION ARE THE ONLY POSSIBLE RESPONSES. PROVISIONAL DOUBT UNDERSTANDS THE DILEMMA CREATED BY COMPETING CLAIMS BUT BELIEVES THAT A SOLUTION DOES EXIST EVEN IF THAT SOLUTION IS NOT READILY AVAILABLE OR DISCOVERABLE. THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE AND SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES VIEW DOUBT TO BE PROVISIONAL. WITH MORE INFORMATION, THE DILEMMA OF COMPETING CLAIMS CAN BE SOLVED. SKEPTICAL DOUBT TYPICALLY FINDS ITS HOME IN A FORM OF PHILOSOPHY CALLED SKEPTICISM.

FOR THE BELIEVER, DOUBT IS EXPERIENCED WHEN WHAT ONE BELIEVES ABOUT GOD (OR LIFE) CONFLICTS WITH WHAT ONE EXPERIENCES IN LIFE OR WITH GOD. THIS CONFLICT BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE CREATES A QUESTION ABOUT WHAT IS TRUE, ONE'S BELIEF OR ONE'S EXPERIENCE. IN MORE RECENT TIMES, THIS EXPERIENCE OF DOUBT HAS BEEN SHUNNED, WITH PEOPLE ARGUING THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF THIS CONFLICT IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE LIFE OF FAITH. HOWEVER, SUCH AN UNDERSTANDING IS BASED UPON A MISREADING OF A HANDFUL OF SCRIPTURAL TEXTS. THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, WE FIND NUMEROUS EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE WRESTLING WITH DOUBT. ABRAHAM'S CONVERSATION WITH GOD REGARDING THE SLOWNESS OF GOD IN FULFILLING HIS PROMISE FOR AN HEIR IS A WONDERFUL EXAMPLE (GENESIS 15.1-3). ABRAHAM FOUND HIMSELF CAUGHT BETWEEN WHAT HE BELIEVED ABOUT GOD, THAT GOD WOULD GIVE HIM AN HEIR, AND WHAT HE WAS EXPERIENCING, HE WAS OLD AND HAD NO SON. THOMAS' REACTION TO THE RESURRECTION IS ANOTHER WONDERFUL EXAMPLE (JOHN 20.24-29). THOMAS FOUND HIMSELF CAUGHT BETWEEN CLAIMS OF THE RESURRECTION AND WHAT HE HAD EXPERIENCED IN LIFE. PEOPLE DO NOT RISE FROM THE DEAD. IN BOTH INSTANCES, GOD MEETS THESE MEN WITHOUT REPROACH AND THEIR FAITH GROWS BECAUSE THEY ACKNOWLEDGED THEIR DOUBT. SIMPLY PUT, THESE MEN WRESTLED WITH THEIR DOUBT AND A STRONGER FAITH WAS THE RESULT. WE COULD GO ON WITH OTHER EXAMPLES FROM THE PSALMS OR JOB, BUT THE PATTERN REMAINS THE SAME. THE PRESENCE OF DOUBT SEEMS TO BE A REALITY FOR PEOPLE WHO JOURNEY WITH GOD BECAUSE WHAT THEY EXPERIENCE IN LIFE AND WHAT THEY BELIEVE ABOUT GOD DO NOT ALWAYS LINE UP. THIS IS THE NATURE OF EVERY RELATIONSHIP AS OUR EXPERIENCES WITH PEOPLE DO NOT ALWAYS LINE UP WITH WHAT WE THINK TO BE TRUE ABOUT PEOPLE. RATHER THAN REJECTING THIS EXPERIENCE, WE VIEW THEM AS OPPORTUNITIES TO DEEPEN OUR RELATIONSHIP BY DISCOVERING OR REDISCOVERING DEEPER TRUTHS ABOUT THE ONE WITH WHOM WE ARE RELATING. IN THE SAME WAY, RELIGIOUS DOUBT PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCOVER DEEPER TRUTHS AND REALITIES OF GOD SHOULD WE BE WILLING TO

DEAL HONESTLY WITH OUR DOUBT. PERHAPS THIS IS WHAT ALFRED LORD TENNYSON WAS SAYING WHEN HE WROTE, "YOU TELL ME DOUBT IS DEVIL-BORN. THERE LIES MORE FAITH IN HONEST DOUBT, BELIEVE ME, THAN IN HALF THE CREEDS."

THE TEXT

IS DOUBT FORBIDDEN? JAMES 1.2-5

TWO TEXTS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT ARE USED, PRIMARILY, TO ARGUE THAT DOUBT AND FAITH ARE INCOMPATIBLE. THE FIRST OF THESE IS FOUND IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF JAMES. AFTER A BRIEF GREETING, JAMES OPENS HIS LETTER BY OUTLINING THE THREE THEMES HE WILL DISCUSS IN THE LETTER: FAITH, WISDOM, AND SUFFERING (JAMES 1.2-18). WHILE THESE THEMES ARE INTERTWINED IN JAMES' RESPONSE TO THIS CONGREGATION, THEY DO REPRESENT SEPARATE THEMES BETWEEN WHICH JAMES MOVES. IF WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND JAMES' INTENT, WE MUST BE CLEAR AS TO THE THEME ABOUT WHICH JAMES IS WRITING AT ANY GIVEN TIME BECAUSE IT WILL INFLUENCE OUR INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT.

JAMES BEGINS HIS LETTER WITH THE THEMES OF FAITH AND SUFFERING. HE ENCOURAGES HIS AUDIENCE TO RESPOND WITH JOY AT THE EXPERIENCE OF SUFFERING BROUGHT ABOUT THROUGH DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES (TRIALS). THIS REJOICING IS NOT TO BE FOCUSED UPON THE DIFFICULTY OF THE TRIAL BUT UPON THE BENEFIT TRIALS PROVIDE THE PERSON OF FAITH. THE PERSON OF FAITH WHO WALKS THROUGH DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES FINDS HIS FAITH STRETCHED AND IN THE END THIS BRINGS ABOUT A TENACITY TO ONE'S FAITH. THIS TENACIOUS QUALITY, IN TURN, LEADS THE PERSON OF FAITH ALONG THE PATH TOWARD GREATER MATURITY. HERE WE FIND SOMETHING OF A THEME STATEMENT WHICH JAMES WILL LATER EXPAND UPON IN HIS LETTER.

JAMES NEXT INTRODUCES THE THEME OF WISDOM. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT FOR THE MOMENT, JAMES HAS LEFT THE TOPIC OF FAITH. THEREFORE, WHAT FOLLOWS IS NOT OPPOSED TO FAITH BUT IS CERTAINLY NOT FOCUSED UPON IT SPECIFICALLY. JAMES ENCOURAGES HIS READERS TO ASK GOD FOR WISDOM. THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, WISDOM IS THE UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO NAVIGATE LIFE SUCCESSFULLY. SUCH WISDOM CAN COME FROM TWO SOURCES: GOD OR PEOPLE. HERE JAMES IS EXHORTING HIS READERS TO SEEK OUT GOD FOR GUIDANCE ON HOW TO NAVIGATE LIFE SUCCESSFULLY, PARTICULARLY A LIFE OF SUFFERING SUCCESSFULLY. JAMES NOTES THAT GOD GIVES THIS GUIDANCE FREELY, NOT HOLDING SUCH WISDOM BACK FROM THOSE WHOSE PATHS HAVE BEEN LESS THAN STRAIGHT! HOWEVER, JAMES STATES THAT THOSE WHO ASK SHOULD BELIEVE AND NOT DOUBT. HERE WE FIND A FAVORITE TEXT, OFTEN QUOTED AS PROOF THAT DOUBT IS FORBIDDEN AND THUS INCOMPATIBLE WITH FAITH. HOWEVER, THE CONTEXT IS WISDOM NOT FAITH. IN THE CONTEXT, BELIEF BEARS THE MEANING OF ACCEPTANCE WHILE THE WORD USED FOR DOUBT REFLECTS A MIND UNABLE TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN POSITIONS. IN OTHER WORDS, JAMES IS ADMONISHING HIS READERS TO BE FIRMLY DECIDED THAT GOD'S WAY IS THE BEST WAY. HOWEVER, HE IS DESCRIBING A PERSON WHO IS ASKING GOD FOR

GUIDANCE BUT WHO IS NOT COMMITTED TO THIS WAY; THAT IS, HE IS SIMPLY SEEING WHICH WAY HE LIKES BEST, THE WISDOM OF GOD OR THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD. JAMES ARGUES THAT THIS PERSON IS NOT FULLY WITH THE WORLD OR WITH GOD BUT IS TRYING TO LIVE IN BOTH CAMPS AT THE SAME TIME WHICH LEADS TO AN UNSTABLE LIFE.

WHEN WE TAKE THESE VERSES IN THEIR PROPER CONTEXT AND READ THEM WITH JAMES' INTENT, IT IS EASY TO SEE THAT JAMES IS NOT FORBIDDING DOUBT, A QUESTIONING ATTITUDE. RATHER, HE IS FORBIDDING THE APPROACH TO LIFE WHICH SEEKS TO HONOR THE WAYS OF GOD AND THE WAYS OF THE WORLD AT THE SAME TIME.

JOHN 20.24-29

THE SECOND TEXT USED TO ARGUE THAT FAITH AND DOUBT ARE INCOMPATIBLE IS FOUND NEAR THE END OF JOHN'S GOSPEL. THE TEXT CONCERNS THOMAS' RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF JESUS' RESURRECTION. ON SUNDAY, MARY MAGDALENE HAD DISCOVERED JESUS' TOMB TO BE EMPTY BUT SUBSEQUENTLY HAD A PHYSICAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN JESUS WHICH SHE REPORTED TO THE DISCIPLES (JOHN 20.11-18). THAT EVENING, JESUS APPEARED TO HIS

DISCIPLES WHO WERE HIDING BEHIND LOCKED DOORS DEMONSTRATING THE VERACITY OF HIS RESURRECTION (JOHN 20.19-23). HOWEVER, THOMAS, FOR UNKNOWN REASONS, WAS NOT PRESENT. WHEN THE OTHER DISCIPLES INFORMED THOMAS OF THEIR ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS, HE RESPONDED WITH A MEASURE OF SKEPTICISM. HE COULD NOT ACCEPT THAT JESUS HAD RISEN FROM THE DEAD WITHOUT PHYSICAL PROOF. HERE WE FIND AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF DOUBT. THOMAS FINDS HIMSELF CAUGHT BETWEEN WHAT HE HEARS TO BE TRUE (JESUS IS ALIVE) AND WHAT HE KNOWS TO BE TRUE (PEOPLE DO NOT RISE FROM THE DEAD). HIS DOUBT MIGHT BE LABELED AS PROVISIONAL DOUBT. THOMAS IS CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO PROPOSITIONS BUT HE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT MORE INFORMATION CAN RESOLVE THE TENSION HE IS EXPERIENCING. IT IS IMPORTANT TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE CONTEXT AT THIS POINT AS IT INVOLVES A SPECIFIC ISSUE, RESURRECTION. THOMAS IS NOT CLAIMING TO HAVE NO FAITH. HE IS CLAIMING HE STRUGGLES TO ACCEPT THE REALITY OF RESURRECTION. HE DOUBTS/QUESTIONS THIS BUT HIS RESPONSE IS TELLING. HE IS WILLING BOTH TO ADMIT AND TO LEAN INTO THIS DOUBT. HE IS WILLING TO HAVE IT RESOLVED.

A WEEK LATER, JESUS APPEARS ONCE MORE TO HIS DISCIPLES WHO ARE STILL HIDING BEHIND LOCKED DOORS! THIS TIME, JESUS APPROACHES THOMAS AND OFFERS HIM THE PROOF HE DESIRES TO RESOLVE HIS DOUBT, ENCOURAGING THOMAS TO STOP DOUBTING AND TO BELIEVE. HERE WE FIND THE TEXT TO WHICH MANY GRAVITATE, CLAIMING DOUBT AND FAITH ARE INCOMPATIBLE. HOWEVER, SUCH AN INTERPRETATION IS TO TAKE THE TEXT OUT OF CONTEXT. JESUS IS NOT JUXTAPOSING FAITH AND DOUBT AND OPPOSITES BUT IS URGING THOMAS TO MOVE FROM A QUESTIONING STANCE REGARDING THE RESURRECTION TO AN ACCEPTING STANCE. IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT NO WORDS OF REBUKE ARE PRESENT FROM JESUS, NOR ARE THERE WORDS OF REPENTANCE FROM THOMAS. THIS IS SIMPLY AN EXPERIENCE IN WHICH JESUS AND THOMAS LEAN INTO THE EXPERIENCE OF DOUBT AND THE RESULT IS A

DEEPER PROCLAMATION OF FAITH BY THOMAS. HE NOW SEES JESUS AS LORD AND GOD!

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

WHAT IS DOUBT? DOUBT IS THE GAP WE EXPERIENCE BETWEEN WHAT WE EXPECT AND WHAT WE EXPERIENCE. IT IS THE QUESTIONS WE RAISE WHEN LIFE DOESN'T GO AS WE THINK IT SHOULD. DOUBT CONSISTS OF OUR "WHYS?" AND "HOW COMES?" AND "WHAT ABOUTS?" WE ALL EXPERIENCE DOUBT. EVERY DAY ON EVERY LEVEL WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH GAPS BETWEEN WHAT WE EXPECT AND WHAT WE EXPERIENCE AND WE ACCEPT THEM UNTIL WE COME TO FAITH. WHEN IT COMES TO FAITH SUDDENLY DOUBT IS OFF LIMITS. FAITHFUL PEOPLE DO NOT DOUBT, AT LEAST THIS IS WHAT I WAS ALWAYS TOLD. YET, I DOUBTED. ON A REGULAR BASIS I ENCOUNTERED GAPS BETWEEN WHAT I BELIEVED ABOUT GOD AND EXPECTED OF HIM AND WHAT I EXPERIENCED IN LIFE OR WITH HIM. I BELIEVED GOD ANSWERED PRAYERS AND YET I DIDN'T HEAR HIM ANSWER MINE. I BELIEVED GOD HEALED AND YET FRIENDS I LOVED WERE NOT HEALED. I BELIEVED GOD PROVIDED MY EVERY NEED AND YET I WAS A PENNILESS STUDENT WHO HAD VERY REAL UNMET NEEDS. THESE WERE JUST THE PERSONAL ONES. I COULD GO ON WITH EXAMPLES LIKE THE GAPS BETWEEN WHAT MY PASTOR SAID ABOUT CREATION AND WHAT MY PROFESSORS SAID ABOUT EVOLUTION, OR WHAT I HEARD ABOUT GOD'S KINGDOM COMING AND WHAT I READ IN THE PAPERS. THE GAPS BETWEEN WHAT I BELIEVED AND EXPECTED AND WHAT I WAS EXPERIENCING MULTIPLIED, BUT THIS CREATED A DILEMMA. YOU SEE, I WAS TOLD I WASN'T ALLOWED TO NOTICE THE GAPS. IN FACT, I WAS TO PRETEND THERE WERE NO GAPS. I WAS NOT ALLOWED TO DOUBT, TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GAPS. SOUNDS NICE AND TIDY, BUT IT FORCED ME INTO AN EITHER-OR POSITION. EITHER I MUST ACCEPT WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT GOD TO BE TRUE, SOMETHING CALLED FAITH, OR I MUST REJECT IT. I COULDN'T QUESTION. I COULDN'T DOUBT. SOME OF MY FRIENDS BAILED ON THE JOURNEY OF FAITH. SOME OF THEM BAILED ON THEIR QUESTIONS. BOTH WERE CRUSHED IN THE PROCESS, ONE BY DENYING THEIR DEEP CONVICTIONS ABOUT GOD, THE OTHER BY DENYING THE REALITY OF LIFE. BUT THERE WERE NO OTHER OPTIONS. . .OR WERE THERE? I HAPPENED TO BE ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO CLUNG TO BOTH MY EXPERIENCE AND MY FAITH NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO WITH EITHER, FEELING PULLED IN TWO VERY DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS UNTIL I REALIZED THAT THE TENSION WAS ONE OF MY OWN MAKING. THE TENSION I WAS EXPERIENCING WAS CREATED BY MY DEFINITION OF FAITH. I WAS TAUGHT THAT FAITH CONSISTED OF A SERIES OF PROPOSITIONS, TRUTHS ABOUT GOD. I COULD NOT QUESTION THESE TRUTHS BECAUSE TO QUESTION THEM DENIED FAITH.

BUT WHAT IF FAITH WAS MORE THAN PROPOSITIONS? WHAT IF FAITH WASN'T ABOUT PROPOSITIONS AT ALL? WHAT IF FAITH WAS ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP? IF THAT WAS TRUE THEN QUESTIONS WERE NATURAL AND ALLOWABLE. IF FAITH WAS ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP THEN MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WAS LIKE ANY OTHER RELATIONSHIP. THERE WERE TIMES WHEN WHAT I EXPECTED WOULD NOT MEASURE UP TO WHAT I EXPERIENCED IN THE RELATIONSHIP, BUT THESE WERE

OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN MORE, TO DEEPEN THE RELATIONSHIP BY LEANING INTO THE QUESTIONS. MORE AND MORE I HAVE FOLLOWED THIS APPROACH AND WHAT I HAVE DISCOVERED IS FREEING FOR MY FAITH. BECAUSE FAITH IS A RELATIONSHIP, I CAN GO TO GOD AND SAY, "HEY, WHY THIS?" AND "WHAT ABOUT THAT?" SOMETIMES I GET AN ANSWER. SOMETIMES I DON'T, BUT WHAT I NEVER GET IS A REPROACH OR A REBUKE. I SIMPLY GET A FATHER WHO WELCOMES ME, THANKFUL FOR TIME TO TALK WITH HIS SON.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHAT IS DOUBT? DOUBT IS THE GAP WE EXPERIENCE BETWEEN WHAT WE EXPECT AND WHAT WE EXPERIENCE. IT CONSISTS OF THE QUESTIONS THIS GAP RAISES IN OUR MINDS. WHILE DOUBT IS A NORMAL PART OF OUR DAILY EXPERIENCE, FOR MANY OF US, IT HAS BEEN TABOO FOR THE JOURNEY OF FAITH. HOWEVER, EVERY ONE OF US EXPERIENCES THESE GAPS ON THE FAITH JOURNEY. WE BELIEVE SOMETHING ABOUT GOD BUT EXPERIENCE SOMETHING DIFFERENT. WHAT ARE WE TO DO? IF DOUBT IS FORBIDDEN THEN WE MUST EITHER EMBRACE OUR DOUBT OR OUR FAITH. WE CANNOT EMBRACE BOTH. HOWEVER, THIS IS THE CASE ONLY BECAUSE OF THE WAY WE HAVE DEFINED FAITH. FOR MANY OF US, FAITH IS ABOUT CERTAINTY. IT IS ABOUT HAVING THE ANSWERS. IT IS ABOUT KNOWING THE FACTS ABOUT GOD. IF WE QUESTION THE FACTS WE ARE QUESTIONING FAITH. EITHER THEY ARE TRUE OR THEY ARE NOT! BUT FAITH IS NOT ABOUT FACTS. FAITH IS ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR FATHER THROUGH JESUS. IN EVERY RELATIONSHIP WE EXPERIENCE GAPS BETWEEN WHAT WE EXPECT AND WHAT WE EXPERIENCE. THESE ARE NORMAL AND PROVIDE US WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO DISCOVER DEEPER TRUTHS ABOUT THE ONE WITH WHOM WE ARE RELATING. IN THIS UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH, DOUBT IS NOT ONLY ALLOWABLE BUT IT IS NECESSARY, A WONDERFUL CATALYST FOR PLUMBING THE DEPTHS OF GOD. THIS WEEK WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO PONDER WHAT IT MIGHT BE TO NOTICE THE GAPS, TO ALLOW YOURSELF TO ASK QUESTIONS OF GOD. CONSIDER USING A POST-IT NOTE TO JOT DOWN A QUESTION OR MULTIPLE NOTES FOR MULTIPLE QUESTIONS. YOU CAN DISPLAY THESE IN A CONSPICUOUS PLACE OR YOU CAN BRING THEM TO UNION CENTER TO DISPLAY WITH THOSE WRITTEN BY OTHERS. AS YOU VIEW THEM, CONSIDER VIEWING THEM AS INVITATIONS TO GET TO KNOW GOD MORE INTIMATELY, TO DISCOVER WHO HE IS. WHAT MIGHT THIS LOOK LIKE? HOW MIGHT YOU PURSUE THIS IN COMMUNITY? HOW MIGHT THIS DEEPEN YOUR FAITH?



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