



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

March 5, 2017

Discussion Guide

WHAT IS MY PURPOSE?

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

- DO YOU THINK IT IS NECESSARY TO HAVE A PURPOSE IN LIFE? 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 NATURE OF FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD.
- READ LUKE 6.27-36 ALOUD. PAUSE AND SEEK TO IMAGINE

YOURSELF HEARING JESUS SPEAK THESE WORDS FOR THE FIRST TIME. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE, SEEKING TO BE PRESENT, LISTENING TO JESUS. PAY ATTENTION TO ANY FEELINGS OR THOUGHTS WHICH HIS WORDS MIGHT ELICIT.

- ACCORDING TO JESUS, BLESSED PEOPLE LOVE. WHAT REACTIONS, IF ANY, DO HIS WORDS CREATE IN YOU? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- DESCRIBE THE LOVE WHICH BLESSED PEOPLE DEMONSTRATE. SEEK TO FIND AS MANY EXAMPLES IN THE TEXT AS POSSIBLE.
- DO YOU THINK THAT THIS IS THE WAY PEOPLE TYPICALLY LOVE OTHERS? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- WHAT ABOUT LOVING IN THIS MANNER WOULD BE EASY FOR YOU? WHAT MIGHT BE DIFFICULT? WHY MIGHT THIS BE?
- JESUS INDICATES THAT BLESSED PEOPLE LOVE BECAUSE GOD LOVES; THAT IS, BLESSED PEOPLE LIVE A LIFE WHICH MODELS GOD'S CHARACTER. WHAT MIGHT IT TAKE, OTHER THAN TRYING HARDER, TO DESIRE TO TAKE UP THIS LIFE WITH INTENTION AND OPENNESS?
- WHAT, IF ANYTHING, MIGHT CHANGE IN THE WAY YOU RELATE TO OTHERS IF YOU WERE TO LOVE AS JESUS DESCRIBES?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT LOVING IN THIS MANNER PROVIDE AVENUES OF HOPE AND RESTORATION WITHIN OUR WORLD?
- CONSIDER CLOSING WITH PRAYER, PRAYER WHICH HONESTLY GRAPPLES WITH LOVING AND LIVING AS GOD LOVES AND LIVES. SPEAK AUTHENTICALLY WITH GOD ABOUT DESIRES AND MOTIVES AS WELL AS INTENTION AND OPENNESS. ASK FOR HIS GRACE AS THE MEANS OF MOVING FROM WHERE YOU ARE TOWARD THE PLACE WE ARE INVITED TO BE.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP TOOK ON A MUCH DIFFERENT SHAPE THAN THEY DO IN OUR MODERN, WESTERN CONTEXT. IN OUR MODERN SETTING, THE CONCEPTS OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP ARE UNDERSTOOD TO INVOLVE INTERNAL REALITIES, AFFECTIONS AND FEELINGS WHICH LEAD TO OUTWARD ACTIONS. WHILE INTERNAL FEELINGS AND AFFECTIONS WERE NOT FOREIGN TO THE ANCIENT MIND, THEY WERE NOT NECESSARILY IN VIEW WITH THINGS LIKE LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP.

IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, PEOPLE WERE MUCH MORE EXTERNALLY FOCUSED UPON THE GROUP RATHER THAN INTROSPECTIVELY FOCUSED UPON THE INDIVIDUAL. WHAT MATTERED MOST WAS WHERE AND WITH WHICH GROUP A PERSON BELONGED. THOSE WHO MADE UP THE GROUP WITH WHOM A PERSON WAS CONNECTED WERE BY DEFINITION THOSE WHOM ONE LOVED AS HIS FRIENDS. HOWEVER, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THESE CONCEPTS OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP FUNCTIONED WITHIN THE REALM OF AN EXTERNAL CONSCIOUSNESS; THAT IS, LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP WERE DEFINED BY ONE'S ACTIONS RATHER THAN ONE'S FEELINGS.

IN THE ANCIENT MIND, LOVE WAS NOTHING OTHER THAN ACTIONS WHICH DEMONSTRATED FULL ATTACHMENT OR AFFILIATION TO A GROUP. ONE LOVED THOSE IN HIS GROUP WHEN HE DEMONSTRATED THROUGH HIS ACTIONS THAT HE WAS COMPLETELY FOR THEM. THEREFORE, BY DEFINITION, TO HATE WAS NOTHING OTHER THAN ACTIONS WHICH DEMONSTRATED DETACHMENT OR DISENGAGEMENT FROM A GROUP. BECAUSE LOVE WAS DEMONSTRATED IN ACTIONS OF AFFILIATION, FRIENDSHIP WITHIN THE GROUP WAS THE ACTIVE SEEKING OF THE WELL-BEING OF THOSE IN THE GROUP. HOWEVER, THIS WAS FAR FROM ALTRUISTIC IN NATURE. THE CONCEPT OF FRIENDSHIP WAS UNDERSTOOD TO BE RECIPROCAL IN NATURE; THAT IS, FRIENDSHIP WAS DEMONSTRATED WHEN WELL-BEING WAS MUTUALLY SOUGHT, ACTIONS WHICH IN TURN HELD THE GROUP TOGETHER. MANY ANCIENT AUTHORS AND PHILOSOPHERS MAKE PLAIN THAT FRIENDSHIP IN THE ANCIENT WORLD WAS BASED ON THIS QUID-PRO-QUO RELATIONSHIP. HESIOD NOTED THAT ONE WAS TO "LOVE THOSE WHO LOVE YOU, AND HELP THOSE WHO HELP YOU" (*WORK AND DAYS*, 353-54). SOPHOCLES STATED THAT "FAVOR BEGETS FAVOR" (OED. COL. 779), AND HERODOTUS NOTED THAT "FAVORS LAY UP A STORE OF GRATITUDE IN A PERSON'S HEART," (HERODOTUS 6.43; 7.178), A STATEMENT WHICH IMPLIES THE RETURN OF SUCH FAVOR. NEEDLESS TO SAY, FRIENDSHIP WAS ANYTHING

BUT ALTRUISTIC.

WHEN ONE TURNS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT, SHE CAN FIND NUMEROUS EXHORTATIONS TO LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP. DAVID AND JONATHAN READILY COME TO THE SURFACE (1 SAMUEL 20.12-17), AS DO EXHORTATIONS THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT TO LOVE AND KINDNESS TOWARD OTHERS (EXODUS 23.4-5; PROVERBS 17.5; 24.17; JOB 31.29-34), EXHORTATIONS ROOTED IN THE COMMAND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR (LEVITICUS 19.18). IT IS EASY TO READ THESE WITH A MODERN MINDSET AND THINK THAT SOMEHOW LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP WAS UNDERSTOOD DIFFERENTLY AMONG THE ISRAELITES. HOWEVER, UPON CLOSER INSPECTION, IT IS FAIRLY CLEAR THAT WHILE FEELINGS OF AFFECTION WERE PRESENT BETWEEN JONATHAN AND DAVID, THEIR FRIENDSHIP IS BASED UPON A RECIPROCAL COVENANT, AND WITHIN THE ISRAELITE EXPERIENCE, ONE'S NEIGHBOR WAS NOT THAT MUCH DIFFERENT THAN ONESELF BECAUSE OF THE CLOSED NATURE OF THEIR SOCIETY. WHILE THE WORDING MIGHT APPEAR TO BE DIFFERENT, THE EXPERIENCE WAS QUITE THE SAME WITH RESPECT OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP WITHIN THE ANCIENT WORLD. THEY WERE ANYTHING BUT ALTRUISTIC.

WITH THESE THINGS IN MIND, JESUS' COMMAND TO LOVE ALL PEOPLE IN AN ALTRUISTIC MANNER, INCLUDING ONE'S ENEMY, WOULD HAVE SHOCKED HIS AUDIENCE. SUCH THINGS WERE NOT DONE. SOME RABBIS EVEN TAUGHT OF THE NECESSITY OF CURSING ONE'S ENEMY. HOWEVER, JESUS NOTES THAT SUCH ALTRUISTIC LOVE, WHILE NOT A COMMON EXPERIENCE, WAS ROOTED IN GOD'S CHARACTER (LUKE 6.36). HERE, JESUS SEEMS TO BE ECHOING GOD'S OWN STATEMENT ABOUT HIS ESSENTIAL NATURE WHICH PRECEDED THE SECOND GIVING OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXODUS 34.5-7). THERE GOD CLEARLY NOTES THAT HIS NAME (CHARACTER) INCLUDES COMPASSIONATE LOVE WHICH IS GIVEN ALTRUISTICALLY. STATEMENTS OF GOD'S GRACIOUS LOVE ARE ECHOED THROUGHOUT THE PSALMS (PSALM 25.8; 34.8; 69.16; 136.1) AND PORTRAYED VIVIDLY IN THE PROPHETS (HOSEA 1-3). IN THE LAW, GOD DECLARED HIS ESSENTIAL NATURE OF ALTRUISTIC LOVE, A LOVE WHICH WAS SEEN IN JESUS' LIFE, A LIFE WHERE HE EXTENDED FRIENDSHIP EVEN TO THE ONE WHO BETRAYED HIM (MATTHEW 26.50). THEREFORE, TO LIVE IN GOD'S IMAGE IS TO MODEL THIS SAME ALTRUISTIC LOVE, A LOVE WHICH SEEKS TO ACCOUNT EVEN ONE'S ENEMY AS A FRIEND.

THE TEXT

LUKE 6.27-36: *THE WAY OF LOVE*

IN LUKE 6, JESUS EXPOUNDS UPON THE NATURE OF LIFE IN GOD'S KINGDOM, A LIFE WHICH VIVIDLY PORTRAYS GOD'S ESSENTIAL CHARACTER IN THE LIVES OF THOSE CREATED TO BEAR HIS IMAGE. JESUS' BEGINS HIS DISCUSSION WITH IDENTITY (LUKE 6.20-23)

AS IDENTITY SETS THE FOUNDATIONAL TRAJECTORY FOR THE REST OF LIFE. WHO ONE IS CREATES THE CAPACITY FOR WHAT ONE CAN DO AND WHERE SHE CAN GO. JESUS IS VERY CLEAR. AT THE HEART, THOSE WHO ARE WITHIN THE KINGDOM BEAR THE IDENTITY OF BLESSED. THEY BEAR THE FAVOR OF GOD. THEREFORE, THEY HAVE ACCESS TO THE BLESSED LIFE GOD INTENDED FOR PEOPLE, A LIFE MADE IN HIS IMAGE, EVEN IN THE MOST DIFFICULT AND UNLIKELY OF CIRCUMSTANCES (LUKE 6.20-23). HAVING LAID OUT THE IDENTITY OF THOSE WITHIN THE KINGDOM, THE QUESTION TURNS TO THAT OF ACTION. WHAT DO BLESSED PEOPLE DO? A MODERN UNDERSTANDING OF THIS QUESTION MIGHT INVOLVE PURPOSE? WHAT PURPOSE DO BLESSED PEOPLE HAVE? HOW DO THEY MOVE AND INTERACT WITH THE WORLD?

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT QUESTION TO ANSWER, AND ONE SHOULD EXPECT THAT IT WILL BE ROOTED IN GOD'S OWN PURPOSE AND IDENTITY. WITH THIS IN MIND, JESUS ADDRESSES HIS AUDIENCE, INVITING THEM TO LISTEN TO WHAT HE HAS TO SAY NEXT. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT TRANSITION BECAUSE IT SLOWS THE SERMON, GIVING TIME FOR THOSE LISTENING (AND READING!) TO CONSIDER WHERE THEY STAND WITH RESPECT TO INTENTION AND OPENNESS. TAKING UP THE CHARACTER OF GOD REQUIRES THE INTENTION TO DO SO AND THE OPENNESS TO CONSIDER HOW ONE'S PRESENT LIFE MIGHT NOT BE IN KEEPING WITH GOD'S LIFE. JESUS' CALL TO LISTEN PROVIDES HIS AUDIENCE TIME TO EVALUATE THEIR OWN LEVEL OF INTENTION AND OPENNESS. ARE THEY TRULY DESIROUS OF LIVING AS BLESSED PEOPLE, OR DO THEY SIMPLY WANT THE EXPERIENCE OF A BLESSED LIFE?

HAVING CALLED HIS AUDIENCE TO PAY ATTENTION (AND PERHAPS TO OBEDIENCE), JESUS NOTES THAT BLESSED PEOPLE HAVE ONE SIMPLE ACTION AS THEY MOVE THROUGH THE WORLD. THEY LOVE IN AN ALTRUISTIC MANNER, A LOVE WHICH RISKS AND DARES BOLDLY TO DEMONSTRATE THE LOVING CHARACTER OF GOD. JESUS MAKES THIS CLEAR BY NOTING THAT THE LOVE OF WHICH HE SPEAKS IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE LOVE WHICH PEOPLE TYPICALLY GIVE. IT IS A LOVE WHICH INCLUDES ONE'S ENEMY. IN KEEPING WITH THE ANCIENT CONCEPT OF LOVE, THIS LOVE FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON ACTIONS, ACTIONS WHICH DEMONSTRATED THE PURSUIT OF THE WELL-BEING OF THE OTHER. THIS PURSUIT INVOLVED EVERY LEVEL OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE: ATTITUDE, WORD, AND DEED. TO LOVE WAS TO DESIRE TO SEEK ATTACHMENT AND WELL-BEING (DO GOOD) OF ONE WHO HAD NO DESIRE TO BE ATTACHED TO YOU (HATE). TO LOVE WAS TO USE ONE'S WORDS (BLESS) TO SEEK THE WELL-BEING OF ONE WHO USED THEIR WORDS TO HARM (CURSE). TO LOVE WAS TO USE ONE'S ACTIONS TO SEEK THE WELL-

BEING (PRAY) OF THE ONE WHO USED THEIR ACTIONS TO HARM (MISTREAT). SIMPLY PUT, TO LOVE WAS TO SEEK THE WELL-BEING OF ALL PEOPLE IN EVERY LEVEL OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

SUCH A STATEMENT WOULD HAVE BEEN QUITE SHOCKING TO JESUS' AUDIENCE AS THIS WAS NOT PART OF THEIR NORMAL EXPERIENCE. LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP WERE RECIPROCAL, NOT ALTRUISTIC MATTERS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD. THEREFORE, JESUS PROVIDES THREE EXAMPLES AND A GUIDING PRINCIPLE FOR LOVING IN THIS MANNER. THE EXAMPLES ARE MOST LIKELY EXAGGERATED FOR EFFECT, BUT THEY DEMONSTRATE THE CONCLUDING GUIDING PRINCIPLE AT WORK, A PRINCIPLE WHICH INVOLVES THE ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT OF THE ONE LOVING WITH THE ONE RECEIVING LOVE. THE FIRST EXAMPLE INVOLVES PHYSICAL ASSAULT, THOUGH THE SCENE IN MIND MAY HAVE MORE TO DO WITH SHAMING RATHER THAN PHYSICAL HARM. WHEN HARMED, IN PERSON OR EGO, BLESSED PEOPLE DO NOT PASSIVELY WITHDRAW BUT THEY ACTIVELY PRESENT THEMSELVES TO THE PERSON ONCE MORE, PRESENTING THEMSELVES AS PRESENT FRIENDS, EVEN IF THIS MEANS BEING HARMED ONCE MORE. THE SECOND EXAMPLE INVOLVES A ROBBERY, ONE IN WHICH THE OUTER GARMENT IS BEING TAKEN, PERHAPS FORCIBLY. IN THIS CASE, THE BLESSED PERSON ACTIVELY ENGAGES THE PERSON WHO IS ROBBING THEM BY GIVING THEM EVEN MORE THAN IS SOUGHT, THEIR SHIRT THUS TURNING THE ROBBERY INTO AN OPPORTUNITY OF BLESSING. THE THIRD EXAMPLE INVOLVES ALMS GIVING, THOUGH IT MAY INVOLVE GENERAL LENDING PRINCIPLES AS WELL. IN THIS CASE, THE ONE WHO ASKS IS GIVEN TO FREELY AND GENEROUSLY, THE BLESSED PERSON STEPPING PAST ALL PREJUDICES AND PRECONCEPTIONS TO PROVIDE WHAT IS NEEDED. THESE EXAMPLES CLIMAX WITH A GUIDING PRINCIPLE WHICH IS AT WORK IN EACH ONE. TO LOVE ALTRUISTICALLY IS TO ACTIVELY SEEK TO DO TO OTHERS WHAT ONE WOULD DESIRE DONE FOR HERSELF. WHILE MANY VERSION OF THIS "GOLDEN RULE" EXIST OUTSIDE OF SCRIPTURE, THEY DO SO IN A NEGATIVE FORM. ONE IS TO NOT DO TO OTHERS WHAT THEY DO NOT WISH DONE TO THEM. HOWEVER, JESUS ADDRESSES THE ACTIVE NATURE OF ALTRUISTIC LOVE BY FRAMING THE STATEMENT POSITIVELY.

JESUS MOVES TO ADDRESS THE RESISTANCE OF LOVING IN SUCH A MANNER WITH A SERIES OF STATEMENTS WHICH EACH MAKE THE SAME POINT. TO LOVE IN KEEPING WITHIN THE CULTURAL STANDARD OF RECIPROCITY IS ACTUALLY NOT TO LIVE AS PEOPLE WITHIN GOD'S KINGDOM. RATHER, TO LOVE IN SUCH A MANNER IS TO LOVE AS THOSE WHO LIVE OUTSIDE OF GOD'S KINGDOM, CONTRARY TO HIS WAYS (SINNERS). HOWEVER, THOSE WHO LOVE ALTRUISTICALLY FIND THAT THEY ARE LEADING A LIFE WHICH ENDS WITH REWARD. HERE JESUS ECHOES HIS CONCLUSION OF HIS STATEMENT ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE (LUKE

6.23), THEREBY NOTING THAT IT IS THIS ALTRUISTIC LOVE WHICH IS REALLY WITHIN THE BLESSED LIFE. THIS IS SO BECAUSE TO LOVE IN THIS MANNER IS TO LOVE AS GOD LOVES. THE MANNER IN WHICH JESUS FRAMES THIS FINAL STATEMENT IS A STRONG ECHO OF LAW (LEVITICUS 19.2), PARTICULARLY THE STATEMENTS REGARDING THE REVEALING NATURE OF THE LAW REGARDING GOD'S CHARACTER. THE LAW WAS MEANT TO LEAD PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND WHO GOD WAS SO THAT THEY COULD MODEL HIS CHARACTER AS HIS DIVINE IMAGE BEARERS IN A WAY UNDERSTOOD BY THEIR CULTURE. THIS WAS THE BLESSED LIFE. HERE WE FIND JESUS RECLAIMING THAT PURPOSE AND REMINDING PEOPLE OF WHAT IT WAS TO LIVE AS GOD'S PEOPLE. IT WAS TO REFLECT GOD.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

WHO AM I? JESUS TELLS ME THAT I AM BLESSED. I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT. BLESSED. IT OPENS ENTIRELY NEW VISTAS OF LIFE FOR ME. THINGS I THOUGHT WERE POSSIBLE ARE NOW WITHIN MY REACH, THINGS LIKE CONTENTMENT, PEACE, HOPE, JOY, AND THESE IN THE MOST UNLIKELY OF CIRCUMSTANCES AND SITUATIONS. HOWEVER, TO BE BLESSED IS TO SET A TRAJECTORY NOT JUST FOR MY EXPERIENCE BUT FOR MY ACTION. BLESSED PEOPLE ACT IN BLESSED WAYS. THEY HAVE SPECIFIC THINGS THEY DO IN THE WORLD, A PURPOSE WE MIGHT SAY. SO, WHAT IS THAT PURPOSE? ACCORDING TO JESUS, THAT PURPOSE IS TO LOVE, TO LOVE FREELY, GENEROUSLY, AND ALTRUISTICALLY. OK. SOUNDS NICE. OH WAIT. JESUS SAYS THAT BLESSED PEOPLE LOVE EVERYONE THIS WAY, EVEN THEIR ENEMIES. OK. NOW I AM NOT SO ENTHUSED.

WHAT DO I GET OUT OF LOVING MY ENEMY? A WHOLE LOT OF HURT IF YOU ASK ME. MY ENEMY HAS NO DESIRE TO HELP ME OUT. LAST TIME I CHECKED, THOSE ON MY ENEMY LIST WERE DOING EVERYTHING THEY COULD TO RUN ME INTO THE GROUND, AND SOMETIMES, OUT OF TOWN. WHY ON EARTH WOULD I WANT TO LOVE THEM? WHY WOULD I DO ANYTHING, ANYTHING AT ALL TO HELP THEM, COMFORT THEM, OR SEE THAT THEY DID WELL? JESUS IS QUITE PLAIN. WE DO IT BECAUSE BLESSED PEOPLE LIVE THE LIFE GOD LIVES. THEY EXIST FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF SHOWING THE WORLD WHO GOD IS SO THAT ALL PEOPLE MIGHT BE INVITED INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. AT THE END OF THE DAY, GOD LOVES. HE LOVES FREELY, GENEROUSLY, AND ALTRUISTICALLY. HE DOESN'T KEEP SCORE. HE SIMPLY STEPS FORWARD AND ENGAGES IN LOVE WITH ALL PEOPLE. IF I AM GOING TO BE LIKE HIM, THEN I MUST DO THE SAME. IN FACT, THIS IS MY ONE PURPOSE IN LIFE, TO LIVE AS HE LIVES. YUCK! I DON'T LIKE THAT. TO BE HONEST, IT REALLY DOESN'T SOUND POSSIBLE. I SUPPOSE I CAN SUCK IT UP AND DO IT, BUT I AM NOT GOING TO BE HAPPY ABOUT IT. HOWEVER, WHEN I AM HONEST ONCE MORE, THIS REALLY ISN'T LOVE. IT IS JUST DUTY AND HEARTLESS MOTION. SO WHAT MIGHT IT TAKE TO REALLY LOVE? AS I HAVE BEEN PONDERING THIS, I WONDER IF IT MIGHT NOT TAKE CONSTANTLY REMEMBERING WHO I AM. I AM BLESSED. I HAVE WHAT I NEED. I HAVE A PROTECTOR. I HAVE A PROVIDER. I HAVE SAFETY AND SECURITY THAT COMES FROM GOD HIMSELF. IF THIS IS TRUE, THEN I DON'T NEED ANYTHING FROM ANYONE ELSE. I DON'T NEED PEOPLE TO

TREAT ME NICELY. I HAVE RESPECT AND WORTH AS A BLESSED PERSON. I DON'T NEED KINDNESS. I ALREADY HAVE KINDNESS AND WORTH AS A BLESSED PERSON. I DON'T NEED BLESSING. I AM ALREADY BLESSED. IF I HAVE THESE THINGS AND NO ONE GIVES THEM TO ME WHAT DIFFERENCE IS THIS TO ME? I ALREADY HAVE THEM. SO PERHAPS. MAYBE JUST MAYBE, I AM FREE TO LOVE.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHO ARE WE? WE ARE BLESSED PEOPLE. THIS SOUNDS WONDERFUL, AND IT IS. PEOPLE WHO BEAR THE IDENTITY OF BLESSED HAVE ACCESS TO A BLESSED LIFE, EVEN IN THE MOST UNLIKELY OF PLACES AND CIRCUMSTANCES. WE LIKE THIS PART, BUT THERE IS A SECOND PART. BLESSED PEOPLE DO NOT JUST RECEIVE. THEY GIVE. BLESSED PEOPLE LIVE BLESSED LIVES. THEY ENGAGE THE WORLD OUT OF THAT BLESSED IDENTITY. SO, WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE? ACCORDING TO JESUS, IT LOOKS LIKE LOVE, A LOVE WHICH IS FREE, BOLD, RISKY, AND ALTRUISTIC. SOUNDS WONDERFULLY TERRIBLE BECAUSE IT HAS NOTHING IN IT FOR US, BUT DOES IT NEED TO? IF WE ARE BLESSED, DO WE NOT ALREADY HAVE ALL WE NEED? IF WE HAVE ALL WE NEED, WHAT DO WE NEED TO EXPECT FROM OTHERS? IF OTHERS OWE US NOTHING, THEN WHAT KEEPS US FROM STEPPING FORWARD AND ENGAGING THEM IN LOVING WAYS? OH, WE MIGHT GET HURT. YES, THERE IS THAT. HOWEVER, IF WE ARE BLESSED, THEN DO WE NOT STILL HAVE ACCESS TO THE BLESSED LIFE EVEN IF WE ARE HURT? BEING BLESSED PEOPLE DOES NOT JUST CALL US TO LOVE. IT FREES US TO LOVE. WHEN WE LOVE IN THIS RADICAL AND FREE WAY WE TRULY LIVE THE BLESSED LIFE BECAUSE WE ARE LIVING GOD'S LIFE. HOW MIGHT WE MOVE TO THIS KIND OF LIFE? WE DON'T DO IT BY TRYING HARDER. THIS JUST MAKES A MOCKERY OF LOVE AND OF GOD. WE DO IT BY COMING BACK TO OUR IDENTITY OVER AND OVER AGAIN UNTIL IT IS SETTLED, OR AT LEAST MORE SETTLED. THEN WE ACT AND ENGAGE OUT OF THAT PLACE. THIS WEEK, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONTINUE PONDERING WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST. YOU ARE BLESSED. AFFIRM THIS IN YOURSELF AND IN OTHERS AS OFTEN AS IT COMES TO MIND THROUGHOUT THE WEEK. WHEN YOU ENGAGE WITH FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS, OR EVEN DIFFICULT CO-WORKERS OR NEIGHBORS, CONSIDER REAFFIRMING YOUR IDENTITY TO YOURSELF SILENTLY, THROUGHOUT YOUR TIME WITH THESE PEOPLE. AS YOU REAFFIRM YOUR BLESSED IDENTITY, SEEK TO ENGAGE PEOPLE FROM THAT PLACE. PAY ATTENTION TO ANY FREEDOMS OR CONSTRAINTS THIS PLACES UPON YOU. PAY ATTENTION TO ANY FEELINGS OR EMOTIONS WHICH ARISE. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER JOURNALING THESE AND PONDERING THEM WITH GOD AT THE END OF EACH DAY.



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