



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

April 30, 2017

Discussion Guide

A COMMUNITY CALLED HUMILITY

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 EVER FEEL DIFFERENT OR THE NEED TO BE DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?

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 CONCEPT OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.
- READ ROMANS 3.21-30 ALOUD. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT OUT LOUD ONCE MORE.
- ACCORDING TO PAUL, IN WHAT WAYS ARE ALL BELIEVERS THE SAME? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY ANSWERS AS POSSIBLE.
- IN PAUL'S MIND, WHAT IS TO BE THE RESULT OF OUR "SAMENESS?" WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DO YOU SEE BELIEVERS SEEKING TO BE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER BELIEVERS? WHAT IS THE RESULT OF THIS DESIRE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO EMPHASIZE OUR "SAMENESS" AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST? WHAT MIGHT BE THE RESULT? WHAT, IF ANYTHING, KEEPS US FROM ACTING IN THIS WAY?
- USING PAUL'S LINE OF THOUGHT, IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD THE SAME AS THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THIS "SAMENESS?" WHAT MIGHT BE THE RESULT?
- AS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF A GROUP, CONSIDER IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, YOU MIGHT HAVE EMPHASIZED YOUR DISTINCTIVENESS RATHER THAN YOUR "SAMENESS" WITH OTHER MEMBERS AND THE RESULT THIS MIGHT HAVE HAD IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP. CONSIDER COMING TOGETHER AS A GROUP AND CONFESSING THESE TO ONE ANOTHER, OFFERING FORGIVENESS AND SEEKING RESTORATION.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

THE TERM RIGHTEOUSNESS IS CENTRAL TO THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL. CLASSICALLY, THE TERM WAS USED TO REFER TO LAW AND PUNISHMENT, CONCEPTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE GODDESS DIKE. OVER TIME, GREEK PHILOSOPHERS LIKE ARISTOTLE AND PLATO BEGAN TO USE THE TERM TO REFER TO AN UNSHAKABLE FOUNDATION FOR LIFE WHICH ITSELF WAS BASED ON LAW AND JUSTICE. THEREFORE, A RIGHTEOUS PERSON WAS A PERSON WHOSE BEHAVIOR FIT WITHIN THE SOCIAL FRAMEWORK OF LAW AND JUSTICE.

WHILE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ITS COGNATES THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE HAVE SOME OVERLAP WITH THE CLASSICAL USE OF THE TERM, ONE FINDS SOME ADDITIONAL CONCEPTS ADDRESSED WITH THE TERM. THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT, RIGHTEOUSNESS CAN BE USED TO REFER TO SPECIFIC ORDINANCES OR STATUTES; THAT IS, RIGHTEOUSNESS IS USED TO REFER TO THE LAW ITSELF. THE TERM CAN ALSO BE USED TO REFER TO JUST PUNISHMENT FOR THE BREAKING OF LAW (EXODUS 23.7; PSALM 7.9-17), AND IT CAN BE USED TO REFER TO ACTING IN AN UPSTANDING MANNER (GENESIS 18.25; DEUTERONOMY 32.4; PSALM 11.7). HOWEVER, THE PREDOMINANT USE OF THE TERM IS FOUND WITH RESPECT TO THE APPROPRIATE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE. IN THIS VEIN, TO BE RIGHTEOUS OR TO BEHAVE RIGHTEOUSLY IS TO ACT AS ONE SHOULD PROPERLY ACT ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE.

THE NATURE OF ACTING RELATIONALLY WITH COVENANT FAITHFULNESS (RIGHTEOUSNESS) WITH RESPECT TO PEOPLE IS FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE TO AND REVERENCE OF GOD (EXODUS 20.3). THE NATURE OF ACTING RELATIONALLY WITH COVENANT FAITHFULNESS WITH RESPECT TO GOD IS THE REDEMPTION/SALVATION OF PEOPLE (ISAIAH 45.21; 56.1; 62.1; 1 SAMUEL 12.6-11; PSALM 9.7-9; 51.14). THUS, IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE "RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD" IS ALMOST ALWAYS ASSOCIATED WITH HIS REDEMPTIVE ACTION.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE TERM RIGHTEOUSNESS IS USED BY ALMOST EVERY AUTHOR USING EVERY SENSE FOUND WITHIN THE OLD TESTAMENT. IT IS OFTEN TEMPTING TO REDUCE THE TERM TO A SINGLE MEANING SUCH AS "JUSTICE," AND THEN READ THIS MEANING INTO EVERY INSTANCE OF THE TERM. HOWEVER, TO DO SO SKEWS THE INTENDED MEANING OF THE AUTHOR AND THEREFORE THE MEANING OF THE TEXT IN VIEW. IT IS BEST TO KNOW THE RANGE OF MEANING WHICH THE TERM HAS AND USE THE CONTEXT TO DETERMINE THE AUTHOR'S INTENDED MEANING. FURTHER, IT CAN BE TEMPTING TO LOAD THE TERM

WITH EVERY POSSIBLE MEANING OF THE TERM IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THAT THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE DOES, THINKING THAT THIS ADDS DEPTH OR LAYERS OF MEANING TO THE TEXT IN VIEW. HOWEVER, WORDS ARE NOT VESSELS WHICH CAN CARRY AN ENTIRE RANGE OF MEANING. WORDS CAN ONLY BEAR A SINGLE MEANING WITHIN THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY ARE FOUND.

IT IS WITHIN THE LETTERS OF PAUL THAT WE FIND THE CLOSEST USE OF THE PREDOMINANT OLD TESTAMENT USAGE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AS THE APPROPRIATE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT PAUL DOES NOT USE THE TERM IN OTHER WAYS, BUT HIS PREDOMINANT USE IS NOT FAR REMOVED FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT USAGE, A FACT MOST LIKELY DUE TO HIS INTENSE TRAINING WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A PHARISEE. WITH THIS IN MIND, WHEN PAUL REFERS TO THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD, HE OFTEN HAS THE REDEMPTIVE/SALVIFIC ACTION OF GOD IN MIND. ALTHOUGH, IT IS SOMETIMES BEST TO INTERPRET THE PHRASE AS THE "COVENANT FAITHFULNESS" OR "COVENANT JUSTICE" OF GOD, PARTICULARLY IN CASES LIKE 2 CORINTHIANS 5.21 WHEN PAUL USES THE PHRASE TO REFER TO PEOPLE BECOMING LIKE GOD IN THEIR ACTIONS.

PAUL USES THE TERM REPEATEDLY IN ROMANS 3.21-26 AS HE SEEKS TO DESCRIBE THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL. IN THIS PASSAGE, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS CONTRASTED WITH THE WRATH OF GOD (ROMANS 1.18). THE WRATH OF GOD IS WHAT CONSIGNS PEOPLE TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR SIN, WHILE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS HIS REDEMPTIVE WORK TO RESCUE PEOPLE FROM THESE CONSEQUENCES. THE POINT PAUL IS TRYING TO MAKE IS THAT WHILE PEOPLE DESERVE DEATH BECAUSE OF THEIR SIN, GOD REMAINS FAITHFUL TO HIS COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM TO RESCUE ALL PEOPLE (GENESIS 12.1-3). THEREFORE, IN CHRIST, GOD DEALS WITH SIN SO THAT PEOPLE MIGHT BE DELIVERED FROM ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THE TEXT

ROMANS 3.21-30: *NO ROOM FOR BOASTING*

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN ROME HAS OFTEN BEEN IDENTIFIED AS PAUL'S SYSTEMATIC EXPLANATION OF THE GOSPEL. WHILE PAUL CERTAINLY DOES DELVE DEEPLY INTO THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST, THIS LETTER IS NOT WHAT WE MIGHT REFER TO AS SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY. RATHER, THIS LETTER IS TASK THEOLOGY; THAT IS, PAUL IS DESCRIBING THE GOSPEL FROM A SPECIFIC ANGLE FOR THE PURPOSE OF ADDRESSING A SPECIFIC ISSUE WITHIN THE ROMAN CHURCH.

PAUL WROTE THE LETTER OF ROMANS AS HE NEARED THE END OF HIS MINISTRY AND BEGAN TO TURN HIS EYES TOWARD SPAIN AS A

POSSIBLE MISSION FIELD. BECAUSE OF ITS PROXIMITY TO SPAIN AND BECAUSE OF STRIFE IN CHURCHES LIKE CORINTH, PAUL WAS HOPING TO FIND SUPPORT FOR THIS NEW VENTURE FROM THE ROMAN CHURCH (ROMANS 15.23-24). HOWEVER, PRESENTLY, A GREAT DIVISION EXISTED WITHIN THE ROMAN BELIEVERS, A DIVISION WHICH PAUL BREAKS DOWN INTO TWO CAMPS WHICH HE REFERS TO AS WEAK AND STRONG (ROMANS 14.1-15.13). WHILE PAUL NEVER FULLY IDENTIFIES THESE GROUPS, IT APPEARS THAT THE DIVISION INVOLVED THE KEEPING OF JEWISH PURITY LAWS (ROMANS 14). THEREFORE, IT MAY BE THAT THESE TWO GROUPS CONSISTED OF PEOPLE WHO FELT CERTAIN PARTS OF THE TORAH SHOULD BE KEPT AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST IN AN EFFORT TO BE PART OF GOD'S PEOPLE, AND A GROUP WHICH FELT NO COMPULSION TO KEEP THESE LAWS. THE RESULTING DISAGREEMENT LED TO FEELINGS OF CONTEMPT (ROMANS 14.10), JUDGMENT (ROMANS 14.13) AND DISUNITY (ROMANS 14.19). THIS WAS NOT A CHURCH WHICH WAS READY TO SUPPORT ANY MISSION ENDEAVOR MUCH LESS PAUL'S PROPOSED MISSION TO SPAIN. THEREFORE, PAUL WROTE THE LETTER OF ROMANS TO UNIFY THE CONGREGATION BY EXPLAINING THAT THE GOSPEL MADE IT PLAIN THAT NO GROUP WAS ABOVE THE OTHER, BUT THAT DUE TO THE COMMON PROBLEM OF SIN AND THE GENERAL NEED FOR REDEMPTION, ALL BELIEVERS WERE EQUAL AND THEREFORE SHOULD BE UNIFIED.

THE THEME OF PAUL'S LETTER IS FOUND IN ROMANS 1.16-17: THE GOSPEL IS THAT SALVATION COMES AS A WORK OF GOD RECEIVED AND LIVED OUT THROUGH FAITH. WITH THIS IN MIND, PAUL BEGINS TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE NEED OF SALVATION BY DESCRIBING THE GENERAL NATURE OF MANKIND. PEOPLE ARE UNDER GOD'S WRATH BECAUSE OF THEIR WILLFUL REJECTION OF GOD (ROMANS 1.18-31). THEREFORE, PEOPLE ARE RIGHTLY UNDER GOD'S JUDGMENT (ROMANS 2.1-16). WHILE THE JEWS MIGHT BELIEVE THEY ARE EXEMPT FROM THIS STANDING BECAUSE THEY ARE RECIPIENTS OF THE LAW OF MOSES, IT WOULD ONLY BE THAT THEY WOULD BE EXEMPT IF THEY PERFECTLY KEPT THE LAW, WHICH THEY DO NOT (ROMANS 2.17-29). THEREFORE, ALL PEOPLE, JEW AND GENTILE ALIKE, ARE UNDER GOD'S WRATH WITH NO RECOURSE FOR DELIVERANCE BECAUSE MANKIND WAS NOT CAPABLE OF ACTING IN COVENANT FAITHFULNESS WITH GOD, NOT EVEN THOSE WHO HAD THE LAW (ROMANS 3.20). HOWEVER, THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IS THAT GOD HAS REMAINED FAITHFUL TO THE COVENANT. HE ACTS RIGHTEOUSLY BY KEEPING HIS PROMISE TO ABRAHAM TO DELIVER ALL PEOPLE (GENESIS 12.1-3), AND HE DOES THIS ON HIS OWN RATHER THAN EXPECTING PEOPLE TO KEEP THE MOSAIC LAW. WHILE THIS

REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT OF GOD IS NOT BY MEANS OF LAW—GOD DOES NOT EXPECT PEOPLE TO KEEP A SPECIFIC CODE—IT IS NOT OPPOSED TO LAW BECAUSE THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF GOD IS POINTED TO IN THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS. GOD'S COVENANT FAITHFULNESS WHICH IS TO BEHAVE REDEMPTIVELY MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE TO BE RIGHTEOUS (TO BEHAVE WITH COVENANT FAITHFULNESS) WHICH IS TO HONOR AND REVERENCE GOD, BUT THIS IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS TO ALL WHO ACCEPT THIS MEANS.

THE NEED FOR GOD TO MOVE REDEMPTIVELY IN KEEPING WITH HIS COVENANT PROMISE TO ABRAHAM IN ORDER TO RESTORE THE ABILITY OF PEOPLE TO ACT IN COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM (RIGHTEOUSNESS) IS SEEN IN THE PRESENCE OF SIN IN ALL PEOPLE. BOTH JEW AND GENTILE SIN; THAT IS THEY DO NOT MEASURE UP TO THE LIFE GOD INTENDED FOR THEM, A LIFE WHICH IS MARKED BY HIS GLORY OR CHARACTER (GENESIS 1.26-28). THIS IS WHY GOD HAS CHOSEN TO RESTORE APPROPRIATE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP FREELY BY GRACIOUSLY APPLYING THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF JESUS TO THE RELATIONSHIP PEOPLE HAVE WITH GOD.

PAUL PILES UP A SERIES OF METAPHORS TO DESCRIBE THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF GOD IN CHRIST. FIRST, IT IS DESCRIBED AS A SACRIFICE OF ATONEMENT WHICH MIGHT BE RECEIVED BY FAITH. THERE HAS BEEN MUCH DEBATE AS TO THE MEANING OF THIS STATEMENT RESULTING IN DEBATES ABOUT EXPIATION (COVERING OF SIN) AND PROPITIATION (SATISFYING OF WRATH) AS THE WORD ATONEMENT CAN BE TRANSLATED EITHER WAY. CERTAINLY, THE DEATH OF JESUS DOES MORE THAN COVER OVER SIN, BUT THE IDEA OF SATISFYING WRATH IS PAGAN IN ITS ORIGIN. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE USE OF WRATH IN THE PRECEDING VERSES, IT IS PREFERABLE TO UNDERSTAND THAT SOMEHOW THE DEATH OF JESUS DEALS WITH THE WRATH OF GOD, BUT IT IS IN A WAY THAT IS OTHER THAN THE PAGAN IDEA OF APPEASEMENT. SECOND, THE WORK OF GOD IS AN EXAMPLE, ONE WHICH DISPLAYS GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS COVENANT PROMISE TO ABRAHAM. HIS WORK THROUGH JESUS ON THE CROSS DEMONSTRATES THAT HE IS AN UPSTANDING GOD WHO WAS RIGHT TO OVERLOOK SINS BEFORE THE TIME OF CHRIST; THAT IS, GOD WAS NOT BEING UNJUST IN NOT PUNISHING SIN. AT THE SAME TIME, GOD IS DEMONSTRATING THAT SIN MUST BE DEALT WITH AND THAT HE IS BEING FAITHFUL BY REDEEMING PEOPLE, RESTORING THEM TO COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIMSELF.

UP TO THIS POINT, PAUL HAS BEEN DRIVING HOME A SIMPLE MESSAGE. SALVATION IS COMPLETELY THE WORK OF GOD IN CHRIST. THE SINFUL STATE OF PEOPLE MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE TO BE IN RIGHT COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD APART FROM GOD BEING FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISE TO ABRAHAM TO RESCUE

ALL PEOPLE. BECAUSE THIS IS THE CASE, THE DISUNITY IN ROME IS POINTLESS. BOTH GROUPS ARE CLAMORING TO BE "MORE RIGHT" IN GOD'S SIGHT, PARTICULARLY THE GROUP WHO WISHES TO HOLD TO JEWISH PURITY LAWS. IN THEIR MIND, THIS MAKES THEM, IN SOME WAY, MORE FAITHFUL TO GOD AND HIS COVENANT. PAUL DISPELS THIS IDEA BY SAYING NO ONE IS ABLE TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE COVENANT APART FROM THE WORK OF GOD. THIS IS TRUE FOR BOTH THE JEW AND THE GENTILE.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

WHO IS THE GREATEST? IT SEEMS LIKE A POINTLESS ARGUMENT, BUT IT IS ONE WHICH IS REGULARLY HAD. WE ARGUE ABOUT WHO IS THE GREATEST WITH OUR SIBLINGS. WE DICER ON THE PLAYGROUND ABOUT WHO IS THE FASTEST. WE SNIPE IN HIGH SCHOOL ABOUT WHO IS THE PRETTIEST. WE GOSSIP IN THE OFFICE ABOUT WHO WORKS (OR DOESN'T WORK) THE HARDEST. YOU WOULD THINK THAT SUCH POINTLESS ARGUING WOULD ONLY BE FOUND OUTSIDE THE CHURCH. TRAGICALLY, WE CONTINUE OUR BICKERING AND LADDER-CLIMBING TENDENCIES WITHIN THE CHURCH.

OUR ARGUING ABOUT WHO IS THE GREATEST DOESN'T TAKE THE FORM OF OUTRIGHT DEBATING. USUALLY, IT TAKES THE FORM OF BOASTING, LETTING OTHER PEOPLE KNOW HOW GREAT WE ARE BY MAKING SURE PEOPLE KNOW HOW HOLY OR SPIRITUAL OR DEVOTED WE ARE. IT COMES IN STATEMENTS LIKE "I WAS TALKING WITH GOD THIS MORNING, AND HE SAID. . ." OFTEN, THE ONLY REASON THIS IS SAID FOR OTHERS TO HEAR IS THE DESIRE TO LET OTHERS KNOW THAT GOD SPEAKS TO US. . . AND NOT OTHERS. WE ARE GREATER. I MYSELF HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THESE SILLY GAMES FROM TIME TO TIME, BUT MOSTLY I PLAY THIS GAME BY A DIFFERENT SET OF RULES. I GO AROUND COMPARING MYSELF TO OTHERS LOOKING FOR ALL THE WAYS THEY ARE GREATER THAN ME. SHE PRAYS MORE ELOQUENTLY THAN ME. SHE IS GREATER. HE KNOWS MORE THEOLOGY THAN ME. HE IS GREATER. THEY SERVE MORE THAN ME. THEY ARE GREATER. FOR SOME REASON, BE IT MY BACKGROUND OR MY PERSONALITY, I GO AROUND PLAYING THE GAME IN REVERSE. I KNOW. IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE AND IT CERTAINLY DOESN'T MAKE ME FEEL BETTER ABOUT MYSELF. INTERESTINGLY, THIS LITTLE GAME HAS A PROFOUND IMPACT ON HOW I RELATE TO OTHER BELIEVERS. THIS LITTLE GAME MAKES ME WITHDRAW AND HIDE. WHY WOULD I WANT TO BE AROUND PEOPLE WHO ARE BETTER THAN ME? THEY WILL PROBABLY JUST POINT OUT ALL THE WAYS I AM NOT ENOUGH.

HOWEVER, I AM COMING TO A POINT WHERE I AM PLAYING THIS GAME LESS AND LESS. WHY? BECAUSE, I AM COMING TO REALIZE THAT NO ONE IS BETTER. THE GOSPEL TELLS ME SO! THE GOSPEL PROCLAIMS THAT GOD HAS MOVED TO REDEEM US IN AND THROUGH CHRIST, BECAUSE WE ARE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT. WE ARE ALL CAUGHT IN OUR SIN, UNABLE TO SAVE OURSELVES. IN OTHER WORDS, THE GOSPEL PROCLAIMS WE ARE ALL THE SAME. WE ARE ALL CAUGHT IN THE SAME SITUATION.

WE ARE ALL IN NEED OF THE SAME DELIVERANCE, AND WE ARE ALL RECIPIENTS OF THE SAME GRACE THROUGH FAITH. WE ARE THE SAME. IF WE ARE THE SAME, THEN NO ONE IS BETTER, NOT REALLY. WE MAY BE DIFFERENT, BUT WE ARE NOT BETTER. WHEN NO ONE IS BETTER, IT IS EASIER TO APPROACH AND RELATE TO OTHERS IN AN UNGUARDED WAY. IT IS EASIER TO BE UNITED AND TO RECEIVE OTHERS WITH GRACE, BECAUSE WE ARE ALL THE SAME

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

DISUNITY IN LIFE IS AN ISSUE. DISUNITY IN THE CHURCH IS A MAJOR PROBLEM. WHEN THE CHURCH IS NOT UNIFIED IT CANNOT DO WHAT IT IS MEANT TO DO IN THE WORLD, THE WORK OF GOD. IN MOST CASES, DISUNITY WITHIN THE CHURCH COMES WHEN ONE GROUP (OR MORE!) BEGINS TO THINK THEY HAVE IT RIGHT OR ALL TOGETHER. THEY ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS! WHEN WE ARE BETTER (OR FEEL WE ARE WORSE) THAN OTHERS, WE IMMEDIATELY RESPOND BY DISTANCING OURSELVES FROM THOSE WE VIEW AS DIFFERENT. HOWEVER, THE GOSPEL ADDRESSES THIS CAUSE OF DISUNITY. THE GOSPEL REMINDS US THAT WE ARE ACTUALLY ALL THE SAME. WE ARE ALL TRAPPED IN OUR SIN AND ALL IN NEED OF GOD'S SAVING WORK. WE ARE THE SAME. NO ONE IS BETTER! BECAUSE NO ONE IS BETTER IT IS POSSIBLE TO DROP THE PRETENSE OF BEING RIGHT OR HAVING IT TOGETHER AND BEGIN TO SEE OUR FELLOW BELIEVER AS SOMEONE WHO IS THE SAME AS WE ARE, SOMEONE IN NEED OF GRACE, WHO JUST HAPPENS TO SEE SOMETHING ABOUT A SPECIFIC ISSUE DIFFERENTLY THAN WE DO. THE GOSPEL LEADS US TO BE HUMBLE, AND AS WE LEARN TO BE HUMBLE WITH ONE ANOTHER WE LEARN TO BE HUMBLE WITH THE WORLD AROUND US, BECAUSE WHEN WE REALLY THINK ABOUT IT, WE ARE THE SAME. WE ARE ALL PEOPLE IN NEED OF GRACE.

THIS WEEK, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE WAYS YOU MIGHT DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM OTHER BELIEVERS. CONSIDER THE REASONS WHY THIS MIGHT BE AND IF ONE OF THE REASONS MIGHT BE THAT IN SOME WAY YOU VIEW YOURSELF AS BEING BETTER, RIGHT, OR HAVING IT TOGETHER. IF THIS IS THE CASE, PONDER YOUR OWN NEED FOR GRACE AND ASK IF YOUR NEED IS ANY GREATER OR LESS THAN YOUR FELLOW BELIEVER'S NEED, THE ONE FROM WHICH YOU DISTANCE YOURSELF. ARE YOU ANY LESS TRAPPED BY SIN? ARE YOU ANY MORE FREE FROM GOD'S WRATH? ARE YOU ANY LESS IN NEED OF GOD'S GRACE? AT THE BASE LEVEL, ARE YOU BETTER, WORSE, OR THE SAME AS YOUR FELLOW BELIEVER? IF THIS IS THE CASE, THEN WHAT MIGHT BE THE APPROPRIATE WAY TO RESPOND AND RELATE TO YOUR FELLOW BELIEVER? YOU MIGHT CONSIDER JOURNALING YOUR THOUGHTS.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP