



# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

August 20, 2017

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## Discussion Guide

### I AM FOR YOU

#### 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

- LIFE IS DIFFICULT, FILLED WITH THE PERIODIC, AND SOMETIMES CONSTANT EXPERIENCE OF HURT AND PAIN. WHEN LIFE HURTS, DO YOU FIND IT EASIER OR MORE DIFFICULT TO SEE GOD AT WORK IN YOUR 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 CONCEPT OF PREDESTINATION. TRY TO AVOID DOGMATIC POSITIONS, ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THE IDEA ITSELF INVOLVES GOD'S GRACIOUS MOVEMENT IN WAYS BEYOND OUR UNDERSTANDING.
- READ ROMANS 8.22-31 ALOUD. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE, SLOWLY.
- ACCORDING TO PAUL, IN WHAT WAYS IS GOD PRESENT IN OUR TIMES OF DIFFICULTY AND DISTRESS? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY WAYS AS POSSIBLE.
- DO ANY OF THESE WAYS SURPRISE YOU? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- WHAT DO YOU THINK PEOPLE UNDERSTAND ABOUT GOD BEING PRESENT IN TIMES OF DIFFICULTY AND DISTRESS? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DO THEIR ACTIONS REVEAL THESE BELIEFS?
- CONSIDER THE VARIOUS WAYS PAUL HAS SAID GOD IS PRESENT AND READ ROMANS 8.31 ALOUD. WHAT DEEPER OR NEW WEIGHT, IF ANY, DOES THIS VERSE BEAR FOR YOU? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- HOW MIGHT THE EXPERIENCE OF DIFFICULTY CHANGE IN LIGHT OF GOD'S PRESENCE?
- EXPERIENCING ANY DIFFERENCE IN OUR PERIODS OF DISTRESS RESTS UPON THE ABILITY TO SEE AND EXPERIENCE GOD IN THESE TIMES. WHAT MIGHT NOTICING GOD IN THESE SEASONS LOOK LIKE? CONSIDER THE OPTION PROVIDED IN THE REAL LIFE FOR YOU SECTION. WHAT MIGHT THIS PRACTICE LOOK LIKE IN YOUR LIFE? WHAT, IF ANYTHING, KEEPS YOU FROM

SEEKING TO NOTICE GOD?

- CONSIDER CLOSING BY ENGAGING IN THE RECOMMENDED NOTICING EXERCISE COUPLED WITH A PRAYER OF THANKS.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### PREDESTINATION

THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION IS THE BIBLICAL TEACHING THAT OUR SOVEREIGN GOD WHO IS ETERNAL AND ALL-POWERFUL ESTABLISHES AND EXECUTES HIS PLANS AND PURPOSES WHICH FAR EXCEED ANY WHICH PEOPLE MIGHT DEVISE. THE CLASSIC FORMULATIONS OF THIS DOCTRINE ARE FOUND IN THE WRITINGS OF AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO AND JOHN CALVIN, ALTHOUGH VARIOUS PATRISTIC, MEDIEVAL, REFORMATION, AND MODERN SCHOLARS HAVE ALSO WRITTEN UPON THE TOPIC. THIS DOCTRINE OFFERS MANY VEXING LOGICAL DIFFICULTIES WHICH IN TURN BRING ABOUT SEVERE PASTORAL DIFFICULTIES, PARTICULARLY IN COMFORTING THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED BEREAVEMENT OR TRAUMA. THIS HAS LED TO MUCH DEBATE AND CONFLICT OVER THE DOCTRINE WITH SOME CHRISTIANS REJECTING IT OUTRIGHT IN ANY FORM. FOR INSTANCE, JOHN WESLEY THE FOUNDER OF METHODISM REJECTED ALL FORMS OF THIS DOCTRINE AND MARTIN LUTHER, THOUGH STRONG IN HIS FEELINGS THAT THE DOCTRINE WAS BIBLICAL, REJECTED STRONGER FORMS LIKE THOSE FOUND IN THE WRITINGS OF AUGUSTINE AND CALVIN.

ON THE WIDEST LEVEL, PREDESTINATION IS GOD'S GRACIOUS ORDERING OF ALL THAT COMES TO PASS (EPHESIANS 1.11, 22; PSALM 2). IN A NARROW VIEW, PREDESTINATION INVOLVES GOD'S CHOOSING OF A SELECT PEOPLE FOR HIMSELF. SOME SCHOLARS HAVE ASSOCIATED THE DOCTRINE OF REPROBATION, THE WILLFUL LEAVING OF PEOPLE IN SIN (ROMANS 8.29-30), WITH THIS NARROW VIEW BECAUSE IT REFLECTS THE LOGICAL OPPOSITE END OF THE CONTINUUM, BUT ONE NEED NOT DO SO AS THIS CREATES NUMEROUS LOGICAL AND BIBLICAL CONUNDRUMS INVOLVING THE AVAILABILITY OF REDEMPTION AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE ON THE CROSS.

PART OF THE DIFFICULTY WITH PREDESTINATION IS THAT WHILE IT IS CLEARLY FOUND IN BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS, THERE IS NO SINGLE WORD USED TO SPEAK OF THE CONCEPT. SOMETIMES THE CONCEPT REFERS TO GOD'S GRACIOUS ORDERING AS CALLING, COUNSELING, FOREKNOWING, OR CONSCIOUS CHOOSING (JEREMIAH 49.20; 50.45; ISAIAH 14.24; NUMBERS 16.5, 7; EZEKIEL 20.5; ROMANS 8.29-30; EPHESIANS 1.5, 11; MATTHEW 24.22; COLOSSIANS 3.12). BECAUSE THERE IS NO SINGLE WORD, THERE EXISTS NO SINGLE SEMANTIC RANGE UPON WHICH TO BUILD AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT, BUT RATHER, INTERPRETERS MUST SEEK TO FIND COMMON THEMES ACROSS THESE VARIOUS TEXTS, EACH HAVING ITS OWN UNIQUE CONTEXT. SECOND, THE

VERY IDEA OF AN ETERNAL AND POWERFUL DIVINITY MAKING PLANS AND PURPOSES WHICH FAR EXCEED OUR OWN MAKES THE POSSIBILITY OF UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PURPOSES AND USE OF PREDESTINATION DIFFICULT AT BEST. WE ARE ONLY ABLE TO KNOW GOD'S PLANS INSOFAR AS HE REVEALS THEM, AND EVEN THEN MANY TIMES WE STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT HE HAS REVEALED BECAUSE GOD IS NOT LIMITED TO THAT WHICH BOUNDS US, SUCH AS PHYSICS, LOGIC, TIME AND SPACE.

PERHAPS THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY WITH THE WIDER UNDERSTANDING OF PREDESTINATION OCCURS WHEN ONE PUSHES THE DOCTRINE TO ITS LOGICAL END WHICH LEADS TO A DETERMINISTIC POSITION WHICH BORDERS ON FATE. GOD BECOMES THE AUTHOR OF EVIL AND EVERY TRAUMA ENDURED BY HUMANITY. THIS ENGENDERS A SENSE OF HELPLESSNESS IN PEOPLE AND DIRECTLY CONTRADICTS GOD'S GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL NATURE. NO GOOD SOLUTION EXISTS FOR THIS POSITION OTHER THAN TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT GOD IS GOOD AND THAT HE IS GRACIOUSLY ORDERING EVENTS IN A WAY THAT EXCEEDS OUR ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND, AND TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WHILE GOD CAN CONTROL EVERYTHING, AT TIMES HE DOES LIMIT HIMSELF WHICH MEANS THAT IN THE CASE OF TRAUMA AND EVIL WE MAY BE EXPERIENCING THE LOGICAL RESULTS OF SIN AND NOT GOD'S WILL. HOWEVER, THIS POSITION CREATES ITS OWN DILEMMAS WHICH ARE TAKEN UP IN DEBATES CONCERNING THE NATURE OF EVIL (THEODICY).

THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY WITH THE NARROW UNDERSTANDING OF PREDESTINATION OCCURS WHEN ONE ENTERTAINS ANY VERSION OF THE DOCTRINE OF REPROBATION. ANY UNDERSTANDING OF PREDESTINATION LINKED WITH REPROBATION CREATES A GOD WHO WILLFULLY CREATES PEOPLE ONLY TO WILLFULLY PUNISH THEM ETERNALLY IN HELL. THEOLOGIAN KARL BARTH SOUGHT TO RESOLVE THIS BY ARGUING THAT GOD HAS "CHOSEN" OR PREDESTINED ALL PEOPLE FOR SALVATION. HOWEVER, WHILE ASSUAGING OUR CONSCIOUS OF SERVING A CRUEL GOD, THIS POSITION DIRECTLY CONTRADICTS TEXTS LIKE ROMANS 8.29-30. PERHAPS A BETTER POSITION IS FOUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT PRESENTATION OF GOD CHOOSING ISRAEL. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, GOD CHOSE AN ENTIRE PEOPLE, APART FROM ANY MERIT ON THEIR OWN, AND ENSURED THEIR REDEMPTION SO THAT THROUGH THEM GOD MIGHT REACH AND BLESS THE REST OF HUMANITY (GENESIS 12.1-3; DEUTERONOMY 7.6-10). IN THIS VIEW, ELECTION HAS TO DO WITH REDEMPTION AND IT DOES INVOLVE GOD WILLINGLY CHOOSING SOME PEOPLE FOR REDEMPTION. HOWEVER, IT AVOIDS THE ISSUES OF REPROBATION BECAUSE IT DEMONSTRATES THAT GOD'S CHOOSING INVOLVES A WIDER DESIRE TO REDEEM ALL OF CREATION AND HIS WILLINGNESS TO WORK THROUGH HUMANITY TO DO THIS. THIS VIEW IS POSSIBLE WHEN SURVEYING THE SCRIPTURES AS A WHOLE AND NOT JUST BUILDING AN UNDERSTANDING OF PREDESTINATION SOLELY UPON THE WRITINGS OF PAUL.

## The Text

### Romans 8.22-31: *God is there in the pain*

ROMANS 8 MARKS AN IMPORTANT TRANSITION IN PAUL'S LETTER, MOVING THE DISCUSSION FROM HUMANITY UNDER THE POWER OF SIN TO HUMANITY BEING RENEWED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. LIFE WITH THE SPIRIT FREES ONE FROM THE CONDEMNATION DESERVED UNDER SIN (ROMANS 8.1) AND FREES ONE FROM OLD PATTERNS OF BEING SO THAT A NEW LIFE PATTERNED ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST MIGHT BE TAKEN UP (ROMANS 8.2-17). THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THOSE WHO ARE LED BY THE SPIRIT IN THIS MANNER WILL ONE DAY SHARE IN THE GLORY OF CHRIST HIMSELF, THE OVERARCHING THEME OF THE ENTIRE CHAPTER, PEOPLE EXPERIENCING THE GLORY OF GOD. HOWEVER, PAUL NOTES THAT THOSE WHO TAKE UP THE LIFE OF CHRIST EXPERIENCE THE FULLNESS OF HIS LIFE WHICH INCLUDED SUFFERING. PAUL DOES NOT TOUCH UPON THE REASON FOR SUFFERING ALTHOUGH HE WILL LATER MAKE ALLUSIONS TO THE FALL (GENESIS 3). WHAT HE DOES SAY IS THAT BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT EXPECT TO LIVE LIVES FREE FROM SUFFERING. THEY ARE PURSUING THE LIFE OF CHRIST. CHRIST SUFFERED. THEREFORE, THEY TOO WILL SUFFER (ROMANS 8.17). THESE SUFFERINGS INVOLVE MORE THAN PERIODIC TRIALS BUT INVOLVE THE COMMON SUFFERINGS OF HUMANITY: BEREAVEMENT, FINANCIAL SETBACKS, TRAUMA, AND FRUSTRATION.

THE EXPERIENCE OF SUFFERING IS NOT LIMITED TO HUMANITY BUT EXTENDS TO THE ENTIRETY OF CREATION. AT THIS POINT, PAUL APPEARS TO ALLUDE TO GOD'S CURSING OF THE EARTH (GENESIS 3.17-18), A POINT WHICH IS UNDERSCORED WITH HIS ALLUSION TO PAINS OF CHILDBIRTH (ROMANS 8.22; GENESIS 3.16). WHEN HUMANITY FELL, GOD LINKED CREATION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF HUMANITY UNDER SIN. THERE HAS BEEN SOME DEBATE AS TO GOD'S REASONING BUT IT LIKELY INVOLVES GOD'S DESIRE TO PLACE CREATION UNDER HUMANITY'S CARE AND DOMINION (GENESIS 1.26).

PAUL DESCRIBES THE SUFFERING OF BOTH CREATION AND HUMANITY AS GROANING, A WORD WHICH IMPLIES DEEP INTERNAL FRUSTRATION, AN INTERNAL SIGH BEYOND WORDS. HE NOTES THAT THIS DEEP FRUSTRATION IS FELT BY THOSE WHO HAVE THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE SPIRIT, A PHRASE WHICH REFERS TO THE INITIAL EXPERIENCE OF REDEMPTION, THE VERY POSSESSION AND SEALING BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (EPHESIANS 1.13-14). HAVING THE SPIRIT, BELIEVERS KNOW THAT LIFE IS MEANT TO BE MORE AND THAT THIS MORE INVOLVES THE COMPLETE REDEMPTION OF THEIR BODIES, A COMPLETE RENEWAL OF THE MORAL, SPIRITUAL, AND PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS. THIS IS THE HOPE (ASSURANCE OF A CERTAIN FUTURE) POSSESSED BY BELIEVERS, BUT IT IS JUST THAT, A HOPE. BY DEFINITION, HOPE IS SOMETHING WHICH IS YET TO COME, NOT SOMETHING PRESENTLY HAD. THEREFORE, BELIEVERS ARE CAUGHT IN AN IN-BETWEEN STATE

WHERE THEY HAVE TASTED WHAT IS COMING BUT ARE LEFT WAITING FOR ITS FULLNESS, A WAITING MARKED BY DEEP PAIN AND FRUSTRATION IN LIFE.

EVER THE PASTOR, PAUL MOVES TO PROVIDE COMFORT TO THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE THIS NOW-BUT-NOT YET WAY OF LIFE. HIS COMFORT CONSISTS OF THE ASSURANCE THAT GOD IS PRESENT IN THIS STRUGGLE, PARTICULARLY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF PAIN. PAUL NOTES THAT THE SPIRIT HELPS "IN THE SAME WAY." THE MOST LOGICAL ANTECEDENT IS THE REFERENCE TO SIGHING, THE DEEP PAIN AND FRUSTRATION BELIEVERS FEEL, A POINT EMPHASIZED IN THE FOLLOWING REFERENCE TO THE SPIRIT'S SIGHING. WITH THIS PHRASE, PAUL MAKES AN INCREDIBLE CLAIM CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE NOT COMMONLY FOUND. THIS CLAIM IS THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WHICH POSSESSES THE BELIEVERS HAS SO UNITED HIMSELF WITH THEM THAT HE FEELS THEIR PAIN. THIS IS MORE THAN AN EMPATHY BUT A LITERAL SHARING IN THE EXPERIENCE. AS BELIEVERS ARE DEEPLY FRUSTRATED AND PAINED BY THE DIFFICULTY OF LIFE, SO TOO DOES THE SPIRIT FEEL AND SHARE IN THIS EXPERIENCE. HOWEVER, MORE THAN JUST SHARING IN THIS EXPERIENCE, THE SPIRIT MOVES TO HELP. WHILE THE NORMAL EXPERIENCES OF LIFE OFTEN LEAVE THE BELIEVER MUDDLED IN THEIR THINKING, UNSURE OF THE "BEST" SOLUTION TO ASK OF GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT KNOWS THE VERY WILL OF THE FATHER FOR PEOPLE AND HIS GROANING INVOLVES A DEEP INTERCESSION BEYOND WORDS FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THIS WILL IN THE LIFE OF BELIEVERS. WHAT PAUL CLAIMS HERE ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS SIMPLY AMAZING, FOR HE CLAIMS NOT ONLY THAT THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE SHARES OUR PAIN, THUS UNDERSTANDING OUR DILEMMA, BUT HE KNOWS AND CALLS OUT FOR THE SOLUTION IN WAYS WE CANNOT EVEN IMAGINE. SIMPLY PUT, HE WANTS WHAT IS BEST FOR US.

PAUL CONTINUES THAT THE FATHER KNOWS AND UNDERSTANDS THE DESIRES OF THE SPIRIT AND WORKS IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DESIRES OF THE SPIRIT IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE FOR THE GOOD (REDEMPTIVE PURPOSE) OF THOSE WHO ARE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. THIS IS NOT A STATEMENT THAT GOD UNDERSTANDS ALL SITUATIONS TO BE GOOD, BUT IS A DECLARATION OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE ACTIVITY IN EVERY SITUATION. WHILE PAUL'S CLAIM IS ENCOURAGING ON ITS FACE, EXPERIENCE SEEMS TO DICTATE OTHERWISE. BELIEVERS OFTEN SEE NO PURPOSE OR PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE BITTERNESS OF DAILY LIFE. PAUL UNDERSTANDS THIS AND NOTES THAT GOD'S PURPOSES EXTEND BEYOND THE PRESENT EXPERIENCE OF THE BELIEVER. GOD'S ACTIVITY AND PRESENCE BEGAN IN GOD'S GRACIOUS CHOOSING OF THE BELIEVER FOR REDEMPTION AND THEN BRINGING ABOUT THE FIRST PARTS OF THIS REDEMPTION AS HE CALLED AND JUSTIFIED THEM. THESE ACTIONS, FULLY RELIANT UPON THE POWERFUL SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD SPEAK TO THE CERTAINTY OF GOD FINISHING HIS WORK OF FULLY REDEEMING THE BELIEVER, BRINGING THEM TO THE EXPERIENCE OF GLORY. THUS,

THE BELIEVER HAS ASSURANCE THAT GOD IS WORKING AND WILL WORK REDEMPATIVELY IN THE PRESENT BY LOOKING AND SEEING HIS REDEMPITIVE PRESENT IN THE PAST.

## REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

THIS PAST YEAR HAS BEEN THE HARDEST YEAR OF MY LIFE. I BELIEVE I HAVE SAID THAT BEFORE, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT. I SPENT THE BETTER PART OF THE PAST YEAR BEING A SINGLE DAD BECAUSE OF RACHEL'S THREE SURGERIES, TWO ON HER BACK, EVEN AS I WRESTLED WITH MY OWN DECLINING MOBILITY AS I EXPERIENCED THE ONSET OF STILL'S DISEASE AND ITS VICIOUS PARTNER, INFLAMMATORY ARTHRITIS. JUST THIS PAST WEEK, I HAD TO BUY A "WALKING STICK"—I AM NOT YET READY TO SAY "CANE"—TO HELP ME WALK ON MY LESS-THAN-BETTER DAYS. NEEDLESS TO SAY, I HAVE HAD MY MOMENTS OF DISCOURAGEMENT OVER THE PRECEDING MONTHS. I WON'T SAY I WAS DESPONDENT, BUT SOME DAYS DESPAIR LOOKED LIKE THE ONLY VIABLE OPTION. DEEP INSIDE, I LONGED, AND STILL LONG FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT. I WANT TO FEEL WHOLE, STRONG, TO RUN AGAIN. THAT THESE ARE GONE HURTS IN A WAY THAT IS BEYOND DESCRIPTION. PERHAPS YOU KNOW WHAT THIS HURT FEELS LIKE EVEN IF YOU CAN'T DESCRIBE IT. WE ALL DO. YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH A DEGENERATIVE ARTHRITIS OR HAD THE BAD RUN OF CARDS I HAVE TO HURT IN THIS MANNER. LIFE JUST HAPPENS, AND LIFE IS HARD FOR ALL OF US, AND IT HURTS. THE QUESTION IS, PARTICULARLY IN THESE SEASONS, WHERE IS GOD? WHERE IS GOD WHEN IT HURTS?

I AM LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND THAT GOD IS WITH ME, THERE, EVEN WHEN IT HURTS. THAT I HURT IN A WAY I CANNOT DESCRIBE DOES NOT MEAN GOD HAS LEFT ME. HURTING LIKE THIS IS PART OF LIVING IN A FALLEN WORLD. JESUS HURT LIKE THIS. WE WANT TO BE LIKE HIM. SO, SHOULD WE BE SURPRISED THAT WE TOO HURT? HOWEVER, GOD IS WITH US IN OUR HURT, AND NOT JUST WITH US. GOD IS PART OF OUR HURT. WHAT I MEAN IS, GOD HAS SO UNITED HIMSELF WITH US THAT HE FEELS WHAT WE FEEL. HE SHARES OUR PAIN. HE IS SO WITH US THAT HE WANTS TO EXPERIENCE LIFE WITH US, TO SHARE THE LOAD. THIS SHARING OF THE LOAD IS NOT ABOUT MAKING IT LIGHTER OR HAVING THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND OUR PAIN. HIS SHARING OF THE LOAD ENABLES HIM TO KNOW WHAT IS NEEDED THE MOST, AND HE BEGINS TO WORK FOR WHAT IS NEEDED THE MOST, EVEN WHEN I CAN'T SEE IT. THAT I AM A CHILD OF GOD DEMONSTRATES THE ACTIVE WORK OF REDEMPTION ON MY BEHALF, A REDEMPTION WHICH INVOLVES MY BODY AND NOT JUST MY SOUL. SO, THE GOD WHO HAS WORKED IS THEREFORE STILL WORKING. IF I WILL PAY ATTENTION, CAREFUL ATTENTION, I CAN SEE HIM, WORKING IN MY HURT, FOR MY GOOD.

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

IN THE FAMOUS WORDS OF M. SCOT PECK, "LIFE IS DIFFICULT." IN OUR LIVES, WE ARE MET BY AN ASSORTMENT OF DIFFICULTIES RANGING FROM THE MILDLY FRUSTRATING TO THE DEEPLY TRAUMATIC. MANY TIMES THESE DIFFICULTIES SURPRISE US, ALTHOUGH A CAREFUL CONSIDERATION OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST AND OUR DESIRE TO TAKE UP HIS LIFE SHOULD REMIND US THAT JESUS EXPERIENCED MORE THAN HIS SHARE OF DIFFICULTIES. REMEMBER THE CROSS? SO, DIFFICULTY AND THE HURT IT BRINGS ABOUT IS A PART OF LIFE, BUT WE LONG FOR IT TO BE DIFFERENT. IN OUR LONGING, WE OFTEN WANT TO KNOW WHAT GOD IS DOING ABOUT IT.

THE TRUTH IS THAT GOD IS THERE, WITH US, IN OUR HURT. HE HAS SO UNITED HIMSELF WITH US THAT HE SHARES OUR PAIN AND WORKS FOR THE FULL REDEMPTION OF OUR BODIES, NOT JUST OUR SOULS. IT IS PERHAPS IN OUR MOMENTS OF GREATEST DIFFICULTY THAT WE CAN SEE HIM AT WORK IF WE ARE WILLING TO LOOK. SO, HOW DO WE GO ABOUT LOOKING? THE EASIEST WAY IS TO LOOK BACKWARDS RATHER THAN TRYING TO CATCH HIM IN THE MOMENT, THOUGH THIS IS POSSIBLE WHEN YOU HAVE PRACTICED LOOKING LONG ENOUGH. CONSIDER ENDING YOUR DAY BY SETTING ASIDE 10 MINUTES TO BE QUIET AND ALONE. WHEN YOU SETTLE YOURSELF, CONSIDER ASKING GOD TO SHOW YOU WHERE HE WAS THROUGHOUT YOUR DAY. IT MIGHT SURPRISE YOU THAT EXPERIENCES FROM THE DAY WILL COME TO MIND, A SMILE FROM A FRIEND, A SMALL KINDNESS FROM A STRANGER, THE LAUGHTER OF A CHILD. THESE AND MANY OTHERS WILL BEGIN TO PARADE THROUGH YOUR MIND, A SERIES OF "I WAS THERE, AND THERE, AND THERE" MOMENTS. THIS IS NOT A TIME FOR THE CONVICTION OF SIN, ALTHOUGH YOU MAY FEEL A SENSE OF CONDEMNATION. THESE FEELINGS ARE NOT OF GOD AS HE DOES NOT CONDEMN US (ROMANS 8.1). THANK GOD FOR SHOWING UP AND FOR BEING PART OF YOUR DAY. THE MORE YOU DO THIS THE MORE YOU WILL BEGIN TO NOTICE THAT GOD SHOWS UP EVEN WHEN YOU HURT, OR PERHAPS ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU HURT.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP

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