



# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

September 10, 2017

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## Discussion Guide

### Is THIS ALL THERE IS?

#### 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 BELIEVE IT IS POSSIBLE FOR RELIGION IN GENERAL, CHRISTIANITY SPECIFICALLY, TO HAVE A RELEVANT PLACE IN MODERN SOCIETY? COULD YOU EXPLAIN? WHY MIGHT THIS BE AN IMPORTANT QUESTION TO CONSIDER?

#### 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 MODERN QUESTION CONCERNING THE MODERN RELEVANCE OF CHRISTIANITY.
- ONE OF THE BIG QUESTIONS WE ASK IS WHETHER WHAT

WE SEE AND EXPERIENCE IS ALL THERE IS. OUR PRESENT POSTMODERN SOCIETY RESPONDS THAT WHAT WE SEE IS ALL WE HAVE. WE HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15.1-8, 20-22. WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY'S ANSWER TO THIS LIFE QUESTION? WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THIS ANSWER? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY IN THE TEXT AS POSSIBLE.

- TAKE SOME TIME TO COMPARE AND CONTRAST THESE TWO ANSWERS. HOW ARE THEY ALIKE? HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT?
- THINK FOR A MOMENT ABOUT THE TRAJECTORIES CREATED BY THESE TWO ANSWERS. HOW MIGHT EACH ANSWER LEAD US TO NAVIGATE RELATIONSHIPS? THE SEARCH FOR PURPOSE AND MEANING? THE PURSUIT OF JOY? THE EXPERIENCE OF SUFFERING?
- CONSIDER THE LONGINGS IN YOUR HEART RELATED TO THESE AREAS? WHAT IS YOUR DEEPEST DESIRE? WHICH ANSWER TO THIS LIFE QUESTION MOST EFFECTIVELY LEADS YOU TO THE FULFILLMENT OF THESE DESIRES? HOW MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- CONSIDERING THE DIFFERING ANSWERS AND THE PATHS THEY CREATE, TO WHICH ANSWER TO PEOPLE MOST OFTEN TURN? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO TURN TO CHRISTIANITY'S ANSWER IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT BECAME RELEVANT TO ALL OF LIFE? WHAT, IF ANYTHING, KEEPS US FROM MAKING THIS RESPONSE?
- CONSIDER CLOSING YOUR TIME AS A GROUP BY PRAYING FOR GOD'S WISDOM AND GRACE AS WE EXPLORE AS A FAMILY OF FAITH THE RELEVANCE OF CHRISTIANITY?

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### RELEVANCE OF CHRISTIANITY

TO BE RELEVANT MEANS THAT WHAT IS IN VIEW IS CLOSELY RELATED OR APPROPRIATE TO WHAT IS BEING DONE OR THOUGHT ABOUT. IN OTHER WORDS, SOMETHING WHICH IS RELEVANT IS MORE THAN A MATTER OF CONTEMPORARY INTEREST BUT A MATTER WHICH GIVES MEANING TO OUR PRESENT LIVES. MORE AND MORE, OUR CULTURE IS COMING TO THE DECISION THAT CHRISTIANITY, AND RELIGION AS A WHOLE, DOES NOT FIT WITHIN THIS DEFINITION.

THE SHIFT IN WESTERN CULTURE'S VIEW OF RELIGION CAME AS A COMBINED RESULT OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION. AS SCIENTISTS BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND THE WORKINGS OF THE WORLD AROUND THEM AND AS PEOPLE WERE ABLE TO MOVE BEYOND A SUBSISTENCE-BASED SOCIETY BY MANUFACTURING THEIR OWN GOODS THUS CREATING A MEASURE OF SECURITY, PEOPLE GRADUALLY BEGAN TO QUESTION THE NEED FOR OR EVEN EXISTENCE OF GOD. ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS LIKEN THIS CHANGING VIEW TO THE CASTING AWAY OF A CHILD'S SECURITY BLANKET. UP TO THIS POINT, RELIGION HAD PROVIDED A MEASURE OF SECURITY AND PEACE OF MIND AS PEOPLE FACED STRESSORS BEYOND THEIR CONTROL, SUCH AS A FAILED CROP OR SUDDEN ILLNESS. IN THIS WORLD, GOD SERVED AS THE SAFETY NET FOR LIFE. HOWEVER, WHEN THE NEED FOR SUCH A SAFETY NET DISAPPEARED, SO TOO DID THE NEED FOR GOD OR RELIGION. IT WAS NO LONGER RELEVANT FOR EVERYDAY LIFE EXCEPT PERHAPS TO AID ONE IN FINDING A MEASURE OF RELAXATION OR STRESS REDUCTION.

AS THIS SHIFT BEGAN TO HAPPEN, PHILOSOPHERS STRUGGLED WITH WESTERN CIVILIZATION'S SUDDEN PUTTING DOWN OF RELIGION, QUESTIONING ITS RELEVANCE. PERHAPS THE MOST FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER TO DO SO WAS FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE IN HIS OFT-QUOTED, OFT-MISUNDERSTOOD STATEMENT THAT "GOD IS DEAD." IN HIS WORK, *THE GAY SCIENCE* PUBLISHED IN 1882, NIETZSCHE WROTE:

*GOD IS DEAD. GOD REMAINS DEAD. AND WE HAVE KILLED HIM. HOW SHALL WE COMFORT OURSELVES, THE MURDERERS OF ALL MURDERERS? WHAT WAS HOLIEST AND MIGHTIEST OF ALL THAT THE WORLD HAS YET OWNED HAS BLED TO DEATH UNDER OUR KNIVES: WHO WILL WIPE THIS BLOOD OFF US? WHAT WATER IS THERE FOR US TO CLEAN OURSELVES? WHAT FESTIVALS OF ATONEMENT, WHAT SACRED GAMES SHALL WE HAVE TO INVENT? IS NOT THE GREATNESS OF THIS DEED TOO GREAT FOR US? MUST WE OURSELVES NOT BECOME GODS SIMPLY TO APPEAR WORTHY OF IT?—THE GAY SCIENCE, 125, THE MADMAN*

WHILE THE COMMON BELIEF IS THAT NIETZSCHE WAS "KILLING GOD," THIS IS NOT THE CASE. NIETZSCHE WAS RECOGNIZING WESTERN CULTURE'S ABANDONMENT OF RELIGION AND WAS AGONIZING OVER THE CONSEQUENCES. WITHOUT RELIGION,

NIETZSCHE REASONED, WESTERN SOCIETY LACKED A HIGHER MORAL ORDER WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY GIVEN MEANING AND ORDER TO SOCIETY. WITHOUT THIS HIGHER ORDER, NIETZSCHE FEARED SOCIETY WOULD PLUNGE INTO CHAOS. WHILE NOT ARGUING FOR RELIGION, NIETZSCHE RECOGNIZED THAT RELIGION, PARTICULARLY CHRISTIANITY HAD SERVED AS MORE THAN A SAFETY BLANKET FOR PEOPLE. IT HAD SOMEHOW GIVEN MEANING TO SOCIETY, AS A WHOLE.

SOME PHILOSOPHERS WERE UNPREPARED TO WRESTLE WITH NIETZSCHE'S OBSERVATION BECAUSE THEY WERE UNWILLING TO RECOGNIZE THE SHIFTING CULTURE AROUND THEM, UNWILLING TO ADMIT THAT PEOPLE WERE LETTING GO OF GOD. SOME PHILOSOPHERS, LIKE ALBERT CAMUS, ARGUED THAT THE CULTURAL SHIFT NIETZSCHE RECOGNIZED WAS INCONSEQUENTIAL. IN HIS ARTICLE, *THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS*, CAMUS ARGUED THAT LIFE WAS, IN REALITY, ABSURD, WITHOUT ANY REAL MEANING. HE USED THE GREEK MYTH OF SISYPHUS BECAUSE IN IT SISYPHUS EXPERIENCES AN ETERNAL EXISTENCE WHERE HE REPEATEDLY PUSHES A ROCK UP A HILL ONLY TO HAVE IT COME DOWN AGAIN. IN THE FACE OF SUCH ABSURDITY, RELIGION MIGHT COMFORT PEOPLE, BUT CAMUS POSITED RELIGION WAS ITSELF AN ABSURD ILLUSION. EITHER GOD DID NOT EXIST OR, IN LIGHT OF THE PAIN AND SUFFERING PRESENT IN THE WORLD, HE WAS A POOR EXCUSE FOR A GOD. CAMUS THOUGHT THAT PEOPLE COULD LEAD A GOOD MORAL LIFE WITHOUT THE EXISTENCE OF A DIVINE BEING AND THE THREAT OF WRATH. HOWEVER, CAMUS ALSO NOTED THAT SUICIDE POSED A SEVERE PROBLEM TO HIS VIEW OF THE WORLD. IF THE WORLD AND LIFE WITHIN IT WAS TRULY ABSURD, OF NO MEANING, THEN THE ONLY REAL OPTION WAS SUICIDE. IT WAS THEREFORE UP TO MAN TO IMAGINE SISYPHUS AS HAPPY; THAT IS, PEOPLE WERE TO MAKE THEIR OWN MEANING OUT OF A MEANINGLESS LIFE. HOWEVER, AS CAMUS HIMSELF RECOGNIZED, THIS WAS PROBLEMATIC. IMPLICITLY, CAMUS, LIKE NIETZSCHE, RECOGNIZED THAT TO LOSE RELIGION WAS IN PART TO LOSE ONE'S ABILITY TO NAVIGATE LIFE BECAUSE RELIGION HAD SERVED AS A MORAL COMPASS AND SOURCE OF MEANING.

SUBSEQUENT PHILOSOPHERS HAVE CONTINUED CAMUS' LINE OF THOUGHT, ARGUING THAT MEANING IS NEEDED IN LIFE AND THAT MAN, ON HIS OWN, CAN SUPPLY THIS MEANING, CREATING HIS OWN REALITY. THIS HAS LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF WHAT IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS POSTMODERNISM, BUT IN FACT ONE MIGHT MORE CORRECTLY REFER TO THIS LINE OF THINKING AS POSTCHRISTIAN, A WORLD WHERE CHRISTIANITY NO LONGER PROVIDES A FRAMEWORK FOR MEANING.

IT IS APPARENT THAT CHRISTIANITY, AT LEAST UP UNTIL THE LATE-19TH CENTURY, PROVIDED MORE THAN A SAFETY BLANKET FOR SOCIETY, PROVING RELEVANT IN PROVIDING MEANING AND DIRECTION. ALTHOUGH, ANTHROPOLOGISTS ARE MOST LIKELY CORRECT IN THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE UNDERLYING REASONS FOR THE MODERN SETTING ASIDE OF RELIGION. THE REAL QUESTION

IS WHETHER RELIGION, PARTICULARLY CHRISTIANITY, CAN PROVIDE MORE THAN A SAFETY BLANKET BUT SERVE ONCE MORE AS A FRAMEWORK FOR LIFE, PROVIDING GUIDANCE AND MEANING FOR THE MODERN INDIVIDUAL. THIS QUESTION CAN PERHAPS BE BEST CONSIDERED IN APPROACHING CHRISTIANITY THROUGH THE LENS OF WORLDVIEW RATHER THAN SPECIFIC DOCTRINES WHICH THE MODERN PERSON CAN DISREGARD. ONE'S WORLDVIEW CONSISTS OF HOW ONE ANSWERS THE MAJOR QUESTIONS OF LIFE, THE UNDERLYING NARRATIVE WHICH GUIDES AND DIRECTS ONE'S THOUGHT. THE MODERN, NIHILISTIC WORLDVIEW ESPOUSED BY MODERN PHILOSOPHERS PROVIDES SPECIFIC ANSWERS TO THESE MAJOR QUESTIONS AND THESE MIGHT BE COMPARED WITH ANSWERS TO THE SAME QUESTIONS PROVIDED BY CHRISTIANITY. IN THIS COMPARISON, ONE CAN THEN EVALUATE CHRISTIANITY NOT JUST ON ITS ABILITY TO COMFORT BUT IN ITS ABILITY TO MAKE BETTER SENSE OF THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE.

## The Text

### I Corinthians 15.1-8:

#### *Do all men stay dead?*

IN HIS FIRST LETTER TO CORINTH, PAUL SOUGHT TO UNITE FACTIONS WHICH HAD BEEN CREATED WITHIN THE CHURCH. SOME OF THESE FACTIONS HAD COME INTO EXISTENCE DUE TO LINGERING ATTACHMENTS TO FORMER LEADERS (1 CORINTHIANS 1.10-17). HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THAT THE LARGEST ISSUE AMONG THESE FACTIONS WAS A HYPER-SPIRITUALIZED UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIANITY WHICH HAD LED TO PRACTICAL ISSUES IN DAILY LIFE AND WORSHIP. FOR EXAMPLE, WORSHIP HAD BECOME CHAOTIC (1 CORINTHIANS 12-14) AND ONE PERSON WAS SEXUALLY INTIMATE WITH HIS STEP-MOTHER (1 CORINTHIANS 5).

IN CHAPTER 15, PAUL ADDRESSES THE EFFECTS THE CORINTHIAN'S HYPER-SPIRITUALIZED APPROACH TO FAITH HAD UPON THE ESSENTIAL TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL, PARTICULARLY THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS. SOME IN THE CHURCH HAD BEGUN TO QUESTION THE REALITY OF A CORPOREAL (BODILY) RESURRECTION. PAUL ADDRESSES THIS BELIEF, NOTING THE LOGICAL CONCLUSION OF SUCH AN APPROACH, THE VERY DENIAL OF RESURRECTION FOR ALL PEOPLE.

PAUL BEGINS HIS ARGUMENT BY REAFFIRMING THAT THE CORPOREAL RESURRECTION OF JESUS WAS PART OF THE GOSPEL HE HAD PREACHED AMONG THE CORINTHIANS. PAUL REMINDS THE CORINTHIANS THAT HE HAD PREACHED A GOSPEL WHICH THEY HAD RECEIVED AND CHOSEN TO BASE THEIR LIVES. HE REMINDED THEM THE GOSPEL WAS APPLICABLE AS A FOUNDATION FOR LIFE BECAUSE IT SAVED (RESCUED) LIFE IN THE PRESENT, NOT JUST THE FUTURE; THAT IS, THE GOSPEL MADE A MEANINGFUL DIFFERENCE IN EVERYDAY LIFE. THIS WAS THE CASE ONLY INsofar AS THE CORINTHIANS HELD FIRMLY (BASED THEIR LIVES) UPON THIS

GOSPEL, SOMETHING THEY WERE NOT NOW DOING.

PAUL REDUCES THE GOSPEL TO ITS BARE BONES IN AN EFFORT TO REMIND THE CORINTHIANS OF HIS MESSAGE. IT IS CLEAR IN HIS OTHER LETTERS THAT PAUL BELIEVED THE GOSPEL WAS ROOTED IN A LARGER NARRATIVE. THEREFORE, WE SHOULD NOT UNDERSTAND HIS STATEMENTS HERE TO NEGATE THE REST OF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE WHICH REACHES BACK TO CREATION ITSELF. RATHER, WE MUST UNDERSTAND PAUL TO BE ASSUMING KNOWLEDGE OF THIS NARRATIVE BY THE CORINTHIANS. HOWEVER, AT ITS CORE, THE GOSPEL FOCUSED UPON THE OBJECTIVE DEATH OF JESUS AS A MEANS OF ATONING FOR MANKIND'S SIN. THIS WAS IN KEEPING WITH GOD'S REVEALED PURPOSES IN SCRIPTURE. WHILE UNSTATED, PAUL MOST LIKELY HAS IN MIND PASSAGES LIKE ISAIAH 53 AND HOSEA 6. SECOND, THE DEATH JESUS DIED WAS A REAL DEATH NECESSITATING A BURIAL. FINALLY, THE GOSPEL WAS THE MESSAGE THAT GOD HAD RAISED JESUS, RETURNING HIM TO LIFE AND THAT THIS RESURRECTION WAS CORPOREAL AND WITNESSED FIRST-HAND FIRST BY PETER AND THEN THE REST OF THE DISCIPLES. AT THIS POINT, PAUL PROVIDES INFORMATION NOT FOUND IN THE FOUR GOSPELS, NOTING THAT JESUS HAD PHYSICALLY APPEARED TO A LARGE CROWD OF BELIEVERS, MANY OF WHOM WERE STILL ALIVE, AND THAT HE HAD APPEARED TO JAMES AND THE INITIAL LARGER GROUP OF BELIEVERS, PROBABLY IN JERUSALEM (ACTS 1.15). PAUL EVEN DECLARES THAT ALTHOUGH NOT BORN IN TIME TO EXPERIENCE JESUS IN HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY, HE TOO HAD PHYSICALLY ENCOUNTERED JESUS INDICATING JESUS' CONTINUED CORPOREAL EXISTENCE. PAUL'S POINT IN THE LISTING OF THESE SIGHTINGS IS LESS ABOUT PROOF, ALTHOUGH IT MAY BE TAKEN AS SUCH, BUT AS REASON FOR THE GOSPEL TRADITION CONCERNING JESUS' RESURRECTION.

PAUL ADDRESSES THOSE WHO ARGUE AGAINST JESUS' PHYSICAL RESURRECTION WITH ARGUMENTS OF LOGIC TO DEMONSTRATE THE ABSURDITY OF FAITH WITHOUT A PHYSICAL RESURRECTION. HE THEN ARGUES POSITIVELY THAT THE PHYSICAL RESURRECTION OF JESUS MEANS THAT SUCH A RESURRECTION MIGHT BE EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE OF FAITH. HE SPEAKS OF JESUS' RESURRECTION AS A FIRSTFRUIT; THAT IS, IT IS A SIGN OF MORE TO COME. PAUL NOTES THIS IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE AS WITH ADAM, JESUS MADE A WAY FOR PEOPLE TO LIVE. ADAM'S WAY LED TO DEATH. HOWEVER, AS SEEN IN THE RESURRECTION, JESUS' WAY LED TO LIFE AND LIFE AFTER DEATH. THEREFORE, PEOPLE WHO CHOSE THE LIFE JESUS OFFERED THEM WERE CERTAIN TO EXPERIENCE THE RESURRECTION JESUS HAD EXPERIENCED.

## REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

IS CHRISTIANITY STILL RELEVANT? AS A PASTOR, I WOULD LIKE TO ARGUE THAT IT IS. AFTER ALL, MY LIVELIHOOD DEPENDS ON IT! HOWEVER, I AM INCREASINGLY ENCOUNTERING A BELIEF THAT IT IS NOT. CHRISTIANITY AT ITS BEST WAS A SAFETY BLANKET FOR THOSE WHO

DO NOT UNDERSTAND THEIR WORLD. NOW THAT WE HAVE MASTERED OUR WORLD, WE NO LONGER NEED A GOD TO HELP US MAKE SENSE OF LIFE AND ALL OF WHICH IT CONSISTS. AT LEAST, THIS IS WHAT I HAVE BEEN TOLD. LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT, A BLANK CANVAS READY TO BE FILLED WITH WHATEVER MEANING YOU WISH TO SUPPLY. IT SOUNDS WONDERFUL. I WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO MAKE LIFE AS I SEE FIT. THERE IS ONLY ONE PROBLEM. IT DOESN'T WORK.

UNDERNEATH THE POSTMODERN APPROACH OF "LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT" IS SOMETHING CALLED NIHILISM. NIHILISM IS JUST A FANCY WORD WHICH REFERS TO THE IDEA THAT LIFE IS VOID OF MEANING. IF LIFE HAS NO MEANING, IT IS THEREFORE UP TO PEOPLE TO FILL IT WITH MEANING. HOWEVER, WHEN PEOPLE FILL LIFE WITH COMPETING MEANINGS IT LEADS TO MORE THAN ITS SHARE OF PROBLEMS AS PEOPLE PUSH AND PULL FOR A LIFE WHICH IS BEING INFRINGED BY THE LIVES OF OTHERS. NIHILISM COMES FROM THE IDEA THAT THIS LIFE IS ALL WE HAVE AND WHEN WE LOOK AT IT HONESTLY, IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE. LIFE IS BASICALLY ABSURD. IN OTHER WORDS, NIHILISM LOOKS AT LIFE AND ANSWERS ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL OF QUESTIONS NEGATIVELY AND IT LEADS TO A NEGATIVE VIEW OF LIFE. WHEN ASKED IF THIS LIFE IS ALL THERE IS, NIHILISM SAYS "YES, AND ISN'T IT A BIG FAT MESS?"

I BUMP INTO PEOPLE WHO ARE ESSENTIALLY NIHILISTS EVERY DAY. SO DO YOU. THEY ARE PEOPLE WHO SEE THAT THIS LIFE WE HAVE IS ALL WE HAVE. IF THIS IS ALL WE HAVE THEN YOU HAVE TO MAKE THE MOST OF WHAT YOU HAVE. THE PROBLEM IS HOW TO MAKE SOMETHING OUT OF THE LIFE YOU HAVE BECAUSE THIS LIFE IS A BIG FAT MESS. THERE IS POLITICAL MESS WITH NORTH KOREA. THERE IS EMOTIONAL, FINANCIAL, AND PHYSICAL MESS WITH HURRICANE HARVEY. THERE IS AN ANXIOUS MESS WITH HURRICANE IRMA. SHALL WE GO ON TO ADDRESS THE 1/3 OF ALL CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED OR THE VETERANS WHO ARE SUFFERING WITH PTSD? WE ARE ONLY JUST HITTING THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG. LIFE IS A MESS. HOW DO YOU MAKE SOMETHING MEANINGFUL AND FULFILLING OUT OF SUCH A MESS? WE CAN SEEK PLEASURE AND SAFETY, BUT TO DO SO WE MUST USE AND ABUSE OTHERS THUS ROBBING US OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL DESIRE FOR RELATIONSHIP, AND IN THE END, WE MESS MUCH OF THE PLEASURE AND SAFETY WE PURSUE. IN ALL OF THIS, I HEAR, CHRISTIANITY IS NO LONGER RELEVANT! I WONDER.

CHRISTIANITY ALSO ANSWERS THE QUESTION WE ALL ASK. IS THIS ALL THERE IS? CHRISTIANITY SAYS, "NO. THERE CAN BE LIFE AFTER DEATH." BECAUSE THERE CAN BE LIFE AFTER DEATH, THERE CAN BE LIFE BEFORE DEATH. LIFE AFTER DEATH MEANS THIS IS NOT ALL THERE IS. YES, THERE IS PAIN. YES, THERE IS SUFFERING. YES, IT IS HARD TO MAKE SENSE OF IT ALL. HOWEVER, LIFE IS NOT ONLY THESE THINGS. THERE IS SOMETHING BEYOND THESE THINGS, SOMETHING BETTER. WHILE SOME ARGUE THIS IS ESCAPIST THINKING, IT IS THE ONLY KIND OF THINKING THAT MAKES SPACE FOR PEACE, JOY, AND RELATIONSHIPS IN OUR WORLD. IT CREATES SPACE FOR REFRAMING OUR EXPERIENCE WITHIN A LARGER NARRATIVE RATHER THAN SEEKING TO WRITE OUR OWN NARRATIVE.

THE STRUGGLE IS TO LIVE WITHIN THIS LARGER NARRATIVE. IN OUR CULTURE, I FEEL THE CONSTANT NIHILISTIC DRAW IN MY URGE TO THROW UP MY HANDS AND JUST GIVE UP EVERY TIME I OPEN UP THE PAPER LATELY, OR TO GIVE UP ON MYSELF AS I EXPERIENCE MY OWN TRIALS. IF ALL I WILL EVER HAVE IS GREATER AND GREATER PAIN FROM MY DEGENERATIVE ARTHRITIS, WHY GO ON LIVING? LET'S END IT NOW. HOWEVER, IF THERE IS MORE THAN WHAT I SEE AROUND ME, THEN LIFE IS AND CAN BE ABOUT SOMETHING MORE. IT IS POSSIBLE NOT ONLY TO SEE THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS MORE, BUT IT IS POSSIBLE TO BEGIN TO EXPERIENCE IT, NOW.

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

IS THIS ALL THAT THERE IS? PAIN. SUFFERING. POLITICAL FIGHTING. RELATIONAL STRUGGLES. IS THERE MORE TO LIFE? OUR CULTURE SAYS THIS IS ALL WE HAVE. WE LIVE. WE DIE. NO MORE. WE HAVE WHAT WE HAVE AND WE HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT. SOMETIMES THAT IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE. HOW DO YOU MAKE THE BEST OF THE MESS THAT IS THE WORLD AROUND US? CHRISTIANITY HAS AN ANSWER. THE ANSWER IS THAT THERE IS MORE TO LIFE. WE LIVE. WE DIE. WE CAN LIVE AGAIN. IN OTHER WORDS, THERE IS MORE TO LIFE THAN WHAT WE SEE, SOMETHING BETTER THAN WHAT WE SEE. WITH THIS ANSWER TO ONE OF LIFE'S FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION WE FIND SPACE TO REFRAME AND REORIENT OURSELVES AND OUR LIVES BECAUSE WE ARE PART OF A LARGER NARRATIVE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR CREATING OUR OWN NARRATIVE.

SO, WHAT ARE WE TO DO? ARE WE TO BELIEVE CULTURE'S NIHILISTIC CLAIM THAT THIS MESS IS ALL WE'VE GOT OR ARE WE TO HOLD TO A DIFFERENT STORY, A STORY CALLED RESURRECTION? PHILOSOPHICALLY, WE COULD CONSIDER THIS QUESTION BY ASKING WHETHER IT IS POSSIBLE TO TRULY EXPERIENCE THINGS SUCH AS JOY, HAPPINESS, OR EVEN REAL RELATIONSHIPS APART FROM THE CHRISTIAN NARRATIVE. HOWEVER, WE NEED MORE THAN REASON. WE NEED EXPERIENCE. HOW DO WE EXPERIENCE THE REALITY OF RESURRECTION? WE LOOK TO JESUS, THE FIRST TO RISE FROM THE DEAD, THE IMAGE OF WHAT LIFE CAN BE, WHAT LIFE IS FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE HIS PATH. WE PONDER JESUS AND IN OUR PONDERING WE FIND HOPE. WE SEE PHYSICAL PROOF OF A LARGER NARRATIVE, A NARRATIVE WHICH WE ARE INVITED TO JOIN. HOPE IS SOMETHING WE CAN EXPERIENCE. WE MAY ALSO CONSIDER OUR LONGING, OUR LONGING FOR SOMETHING MORE. WE LONG FOR MORE THAN WHAT IS. WE LONG FOR SOMETHING BIGGER. FROM WHERE DOES THIS LONGING COME? IS IT SIMPLY WISHFUL THINKING OR COULD IT BE THAT THERE IS SOMETHING MORE FOR WHICH WE WERE MADE? PONDER THIS LONGING AND CONSIDER WHETHER CHRISTIANITY MAKES THE MOST SENSE OF THIS LONGING.



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PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
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