



# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

September 24, 2017

### Discussion Guide

#### Who Am I, and Why Am I Here?

##### 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

- IN YOUR MIND, WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING PURPOSE IN LIFE? HOW DOES ONE FIND THEIR PURPOSE?

##### 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.)

- READ GENESIS 1.1-2.3 ALOUD. PAUSE. READ GENESIS 1.26-28 ALOUD.
- ACCORDING TO THE TEXT, WHO ARE WE AS PEOPLE AND WHY ARE WE HERE? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY ANSWERS AS POSSIBLE.
- IN OUR MODERN WORLD, WE ARE TOLD WE MUST DETERMINE WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE WANT TO DO IN LIFE. IN GENESIS 1, WE SEE THAT CHRISTIANITY DECLARES THAT GOD DECLARES

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE ARE TO DO IN LIFE. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE, IF ANY, BETWEEN THE TWO?

- HOW MIGHT YOU SUMMARIZE, IN A SINGLE SENTENCE, YOUR IDENTITY AND PURPOSE, AS DECLARED BY GOD IN GENESIS 1?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO LIVE IN THIS WAY?
- WHAT MIGHT BE THE BENEFITS OF LIVING IN THIS WAY? DRAWBACKS?
- CONSIDER CONCLUDING YOUR TIME AS A GROUP BY DISCUSSING WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE TO EXPERIMENT LIVING OUT IDENTITY AND PURPOSE AS FOUND IN GENESIS 1. YOU MIGHT DISCUSS RECONNECTING IN SMALLER GROUPS TO DISCUSS THE EXPERIENCE.

### CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

#### *PURPOSE AND MEANING IN LIFE*

THE CONCEPT OF PURPOSE OR MEANING IN LIFE REFERS TO THE INNATE HUMAN LONGING FOR LIFE TO BE ABOUT MORE THAN SURVIVAL. ONE MIGHT EXPRESS THIS LONGING AS "SURVIVAL FOR THE SAKE OF \_\_\_\_\_." PEOPLE HAVE LONG NOTED THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE HAVING A HIGHER MEANING OR PURPOSE, SOMETIMES REFERRING TO IT AS SOMEONE'S MISSION, GOAL OR EVEN THEIR SWEET SPOT. AS MARK TWAIN FAMOUSLY QUIPPED, "THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT DAYS IN YOUR LIFE ARE THE DAY YOU ARE BORN AND THE DAY YOU FIND OUT WHY." DOCTORS NOTE THAT PEOPLE WHO LIVE WITH PURPOSE ARE HEALTHIER AND MORE RESISTANT TO DISEASE, AND PSYCHOLOGISTS DESCRIBE PEOPLE WITH PURPOSE AS BETTER-ADJUSTED PEOPLE WITH A CLEAR PATH TO GREATER WELL-BEING.

WHILE ANECDOTAL OBSERVATIONS POINT ONE TO THE NEED FOR PURPOSE, IT WAS VIKTOR FRANKL WHO FIRST APPROACHED THE ISSUE THROUGH THE LENS OF PSYCHOLOGY AND MEDICINE. FRANKL WAS A JEWISH PSYCHIATRIST AND NEUROLOGIST IN VIENNA DURING

THE TIME OF THE NAZI OCCUPATION OF AUSTRIA. FRANKL, ALONG WITH HIS PREGNANT WIFE AND PARENTS, WAS ARRESTED AND SENT TO A CONCENTRATION CAMP WHERE HE REMAINED FOR THREE YEARS, EMERGING WITH MOST OF HIS FAMILY, INCLUDING HIS WIFE, DEAD. DURING HIS INTERNMENT, FRANKL WORKED AS THE CAMP PSYCHIATRIST, COUNSELING HIS FELLOW INMATES WHO WERE CONTEMPLATING SUICIDE. FRANKL BEGAN TO NOTICE THAT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH FOR THESE PEOPLE COULD BE BOILED DOWN TO THE POSSESSION OF A MEANING OR PURPOSE FOR WHICH TO LIVE. IN HIS GROUNDBREAKING WORK DESCRIBING HIS EXPERIENCE AND OBSERVATIONS, *MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING*, FRANKL WROTE "A MAN WHO BECOMES CONSCIOUS OF THE RESPONSIBILITY HE BEARS TOWARD A HUMAN BEING WHO AFFECTIONATELY WAITS FOR HIM, OR TO AN UNFINISHED WORK, WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO THROW AWAY HIS LIFE. HE KNOWS THE 'WHY' FOR HIS EXISTENCE, AND WILL BE ABLE TO BEAR ALMOST ANY 'HOW.'"

ACCORDING TO FRANKL, DISCOVERING ONE'S PURPOSE OR MEANING FOR LIVING INVOLVED MORE THAN ASKING WHAT THEY EXPECTED FROM LIFE BUT WHAT LIFE EXPECTED FROM THEM.

*WOE TO HIM WHO SAW NO MORE SENSE IN HIS LIFE, NO AIM, NO PURPOSE, AND THEREFORE NO POINT IN CARRYING ON. HE WAS SOON LOST. THE TYPICAL REPLY WITH WHICH SUCH A MAN REJECTED ALL ENCOURAGING ARGUMENTS WAS, "I HAVE NOTHING TO EXPECT FROM LIFE ANY MORE." WHAT SORT OF ANSWER CAN ONE GIVE TO THAT?*

*WHAT WAS REALLY NEEDED WAS A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE. WE HAD TO LEARN OURSELVES AND, FURTHERMORE, WE HAD TO TEACH THE DESPAIRING MEN, THAT IT DID NOT REALLY MATTER WHAT WE EXPECTED FROM LIFE, BUT RATHER WHAT LIFE EXPECTED FROM US. WE NEEDED TO STOP ASKING ABOUT THE MEANING OF LIFE, AND INSTEAD TO THINK OF OURSELVES AS THOSE WHO WERE BEING QUESTIONED BY LIFE — DAILY AND HOURLY. OUR ANSWER MUST CONSIST, NOT IN TALK AND MEDITATION, BUT IN RIGHT ACTION AND IN RIGHT CONDUCT. LIFE ULTIMATELY MEANS TAKING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO FIND THE RIGHT ANSWER TO ITS PROBLEMS AND TO FULFILL THE TASKS WHICH IT CONSTANTLY SETS FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL.*

LATER PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES HAVE UNDERScoreD THE REALITY OF FRANKL'S OBSERVATIONS. A RECENT STUDY IN THE *JOURNAL OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY* REPORTED THAT IN OUR MODERN WORLD HAVING MEANING TRUMPS EVEN THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. PARTICIPANTS WENT SO FAR AS TO DESCRIBE PEOPLE WHO WERE HAPPY BUT LIVED WITHOUT PURPOSE AS SHALLOW AND SELF-ABSORBED. MARTIN E.P. SELIGMAN, A LEADING PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENTIST, HAS STATED THAT PEOPLE FIND A MEANINGFUL LIFE WHEN "YOU USE YOUR HIGHEST STRENGTHS AND TALENTS TO BELONG TO AND SERVE SOMETHING YOU BELIEVE IS LARGER THAN YOURSELF." RESEARCH SEEMS TO POINT, UNANIMOUSLY, TO THE REALITY THAT PEOPLE NEED TO LIVE FOR SOMETHING WHICH TRANSCENDS THEMSELVES IF THEY ARE TO LIVE AT ALL. APART FROM POSSESSING

PURPOSE OR MEANING PEOPLE BECOME DISILLUSSIONED, DISTRACTED AND EVENTUALLY FALL INTO DESPAIR.

WHILE ALL EVIDENCE SEEMS TO POINT TO THE NEED TO POSSESS MEANING AND PURPOSE, OTHER STUDIES REPORT THAT POSSESSING SUCH PURPOSE PROVES TO BE ELUSIVE. IN THEIR 2014 *HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW* ARTICLE ENTITLED "FROM PURPOSE TO IMPACT," NICK CRAIG AND SCOTT SNOOK REPORT THAT FEWER THAN 20% OF LEADERS HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF THEIR INDIVIDUAL PURPOSE IN LIFE AND THAT EVEN FEWER CAN VERBALIZE THIS PURPOSE. THEY FURTHER NOTED THAT WHEN PRESSED, LEADERS OFTEN FALL BACK ON A PURPOSE WHICH IS GENERIC OR NEBULOUS. IN HER 2013 ARTICLE "THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN BEING HAPPY," IN *THE ATLANTIC*, EMILY SMITH NOTED THAT AT LEAST 25% OF PEOPLE IN AMERICA DO NOT HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF WHAT MAKES THEIR LIFE MEANINGFUL. IT APPEARS THAT PEOPLE WITHIN MODERN AMERICAN CULTURE STRUGGLE TO FIND THAT THING WHICH TRANSCENDS THEM FOR WHICH TO LIVE. SOME DOCTORS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS POINT TO THE RISING USE OF DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND EVER-INCREASING RATES OF DEPRESSION AS EVIDENCE OF THIS REALITY.

FINDING TRANSCENDENT PURPOSE OR MEANING IS DIFFICULT IN MODERN AMERICAN SOCIETY BECAUSE OF THE REJECTION OF A HIGHER STANDARD WHICH TRANSCENDS PEOPLE. WITH THE REJECTION OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, ONE REJECTS A SOURCE FROM WHICH MEANING AND PURPOSE MIGHT BE FOUND. AS DAVID BROOKS NOTED IN HIS MAY 5, 2015 *NEW YORK TIMES* OP-ED, UNTIL ABOUT 50 YEARS AGO, THIS REALITY WAS AMELIORATED BY TURNING TO PUBLIC FIGURES LIKE REINHOLD NIEBUHR, RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, AND HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK. HOWEVER, MORE RECENTLY, PUBLIC FIGURES ARE VIEWED WITH GREAT DISTRUST. THEREFORE, AMERICANS ARE LEFT WITH NO HIGHER STANDARD TO GIVE THEM DIRECTION. PEOPLE MUST THEREFORE FIND THEIR OWN MEANING OR PURPOSE IN LIFE, SOMETHING WHICH HAS BECOME A CENTRAL FOCUS OF MANY SELF-HELP BOOKS. HOWEVER, THE PATH IS CONFUSING BECAUSE PUBLIC DISCOURSE HAS BECOME HIGHLY POLITICIZED, STRIPPED OF ALL MORAL CONTENT, LEAVING PEOPLE UNSURE OF HOW TO MOVE FORWARD BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK UPON WHICH TO BASE A DECISION. WHEN PEOPLE, AS THE EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHERS URGED, DO CONCEIVE OF THEIR OWN PURPOSE, IT IS OFTEN TOO GRANDIOSE OR GENERAL TO ACCOMPLISH, AND IT MAY RUN COUNTER TO THE PURPOSE OF OTHERS SO THAT ALL EFFORTS TO FULFILL ONE'S PURPOSE ARE THWARTED. THIS LEADS TO GREAT FRUSTRATION IN LIFE, AND CAN CONTRIBUTE TO A SENSE OF HELPLESSNESS IN LIFE. THEREFORE, THE PRIME QUESTION CONCERNING PURPOSE AND MEANING IS NOT "DO WE NEED THEM" BUT "WHERE DO WE FIND THEM?"

## The Text

### Genesis 1.26-28: People and Purpose

THE OPENING CHAPTER OF GENESIS IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE, LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR UNDERSTANDING THE ENTIRE REDEMPTIVE NARRATIVE OF GOD. HOWEVER, RIGHTLY INTERPRETING THIS TEXT HAS LED TO MUCH CONTROVERSY. MOST RECENTLY, THESE CONTROVERSIES CENTER UPON THE LITERALNESS OF THE CREATION ACCOUNT AS FOUND IN THIS CHAPTER; THAT IS, IS GENESIS 1 A SCIENTIFICALLY ACCURATE NARRATIVE DETAILING HOW GOD CREATED? MUCH OF THIS DEBATE ASSUMES THE AUTHOR OF GENESIS SET OUT TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION. HOWEVER, ASKING THIS QUESTION WOULD CERTAINLY SHOCK ANY ANCIENT PERSON. IN ANCIENT RELIGIOUS TEXTS, INCLUDING ANCIENT JEWISH TEXTS SUCH AS GENESIS, THE PURPOSE OF CREATION ACCOUNTS WAS NOT TO DETAIL THE "HOW?" OF CREATION BUT THE THEOLOGICAL "WHY?": WHILE ONE MIGHT DRAW SOME INSIGHT INTO GOD'S MEANS OF CREATION—GOD CREATED BY SPEAKING THINGS INTO BEING—ONE CANNOT PRESS THE TEXT FOR DETAILS WITHOUT ABUSING IT, MAKING IT SAY WHAT THE READER WISHES IT TO SAY. IN REALITY, GENESIS 1 IS AN ANCIENT HYMN CELEBRATING GOD'S CREATION, DETAILING THE PURPOSES BEHIND GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITIES. THE POETICAL STRUCTURE IS READILY APPARENT IN THE STRUCTURING OF THE DAYS WHICH PROGRESS RHYTHMICALLY—DAYS 1-3 MIRROR DAYS 4-6—WITH THE ACCOMPANYING REFRAIN NOTING GOD'S PLEASURE (GENESIS 1.10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

STUDYING GENESIS 1 REVEALS A GREAT DEAL ABOUT GOD, WHICH IN TURN EXPOSES SOME OF HIS PURPOSES FOR CREATION. AS GOD CREATES, HE DOES SO IN A WAY THAT GENERATES INCREDIBLE VARIETY AND BEAUTY POINTING TO GOD POSSESSING A CREATIVE NATURE WHICH DELIGHTS IN BEAUTY. FURTHER, ONE CAN DISCERN THAT GOD NOT ONLY DELIGHTS IN HIS CREATIVE PROCESS, BUT IN HIS CREATION ITSELF POINTING TO A CHARACTER OF JOY (GENESIS 1.10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THESE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD, IT IS EVIDENT THAT GOD DOES NOT DESIRE UNIFORMITY OR CONFORMITY FOR HIS CREATION, BUT HE DOES DESIRE JOY WHICH COMES AS HE ENGAGES WITH HIS CREATION.

IN THIS HYMN, GOD'S CREATION OF PEOPLE RECEIVES SPECIAL ATTENTION AS PEOPLE ARE PRESENTED AS THE CLIMAX OF GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITIES. THE CREATION OF PEOPLE BEGINS WITH GOD STATING HIS DESIRE TO CREATE PEOPLE IN HIS IMAGE. LITERALLY, THE PRONOUN IS PLURAL LEADING TO QUESTIONS AS TO WHOM GOD IS REFERRING. SOME HAVE ARGUED THAT GOD IS SPEAKING TO HIS ANGELS WHILE THE TRADITIONAL ANSWER IS THAT THIS IS THE FIRST REFERENCE TO THE TRINITY. WHILE THE FIRST ANSWER MAKES SENSE WITHIN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF ANCIENT RELIGIOUS MYTH AND LITERATURE, IT DOES NOT MAKE SENSE OF THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AS THE ANGELIC COURT HAS NO ROLE IN CREATION. IT IS THEREFORE BEST TO UNDERSTAND THIS AS A REFERENCE TO ANOTHER ASPECT OF GOD'S CHARACTER, THE REALITY THAT HE COEXISTS AS ONE GOD AND THREE PERSONS.

IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE WORD "IMAGE" IS ACTUALLY THE WORD "IDOL." IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, IDOLS WERE UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE PHYSICAL REPRESENTATION OF A GOD UPON EARTH. THE IDOL POSSESSED NOT JUST THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE GOD (IN A MUTED DEGREE) BUT THE IDOL EXPRESSED THE CONTROL OF THE GOD WHEREVER IT MIGHT BE LOCATED. THIS CONTEXT LEADS TO THE UNDERSTANDING THAT GOD DESIRED TO CREATE PEOPLE IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY EXPERIENCED LIFE AS HE EXPERIENCED LIFE, AND THAT THEY MIGHT SERVE AS HIS REPRESENTATIVE WITHIN CREATION, EXERTING HIS CONTROL AND INFLUENCE. GOD MAKES THE LATER UNDERSTANDING EXPLICIT IN HIS STATEMENT REGARDING HIS DESIRE FOR PEOPLE TO RULE HIS CREATION.

HAVING STATED HIS DESIRE TO CREATE, GOD THEN CREATES PEOPLE, MEN AND WOMEN, IN HIS IMAGE. THAT BOTH GENDERS ARE REPRESENTED INDICATES THAT MALENESS AND FEMALENESS ARE NOT TO BE USED IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WORTH OR VALUE. ALL PEOPLE ARE CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE. HOWEVER, MALE AND FEMALENESS ARE PART OF THE EXPRESSION OF GOD'S IMAGE INsofar AS GENDER CREATES THE POSSIBILITY OF ONENESS FROM TWO, AN ECHO OF THE TRIUNE LIFE OF GOD (GENESIS 2.18-25).

AFTER HE CREATED PEOPLE, GOD BLESSED THEM AND ENCOURAGED THEM TO MULTIPLE SO THEY MIGHT RULE OVER CREATION. CLEARLY, GOD INTENDED THAT PEOPLE EXERT HIS REIGN OVER AND BRING HIS PRESENCE TO ALL OF CREATION. WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IS WRAPPED UP IN THE BLESSING OF GOD. PRIOR TO BLESSING PEOPLE, GOD BLESSED THE LIVING CREATURES OF HIS CREATION (GENESIS 1.22). WHEN COMBINED WITH HIS BLESSING OF PEOPLE, THIS INDICATES THAT GOD DESIRES TO INTERACT WITH THE LIVING BEINGS HE HAS CREATED THROUGH BLESSING. IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, BLESSING WAS A SPEECH ACT WHICH BROUGHT GOOD UPON SOMEONE OR SOMETHING. IT WAS AKIN TO PROPHECY IN THAT IT LOOKED TO THE FUTURE, BUT IS DISTINCT FROM PROPHECY IN THAT THE PERSON SPEAKING BRINGS THE DESCRIBED FUTURE INTO EXISTENCE THROUGH THEIR WORDS. BLESSING IS THEREFORE A GIFT, BOTH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL, WHICH ONE PLACES UPON ANOTHER. JACOB'S BLESSING OF HIS SONS IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THIS BESTOWAL OF SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL GIFTS THROUGH WORDS (GENESIS 49). IN LIGHT OF THIS, IT IS APPARENT THAT GOD DESIRES TO BESTOW PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL GOODNESS UPON HIS CREATION. THE REST OF THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE BEARS THIS OUT, PERHAPS MOST CLEARLY IN JESUS' BEATITUDES, DECLARATIONS OF THE OUTPOURING OF GOD'S SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL FAVOR UPON PEOPLE (MATTHEW 5.1-12; SEE ALSO JOB 42.12.). THEREFORE, FOR PEOPLE TO REPRESENT GOD IMPLIES THAT THEY INTERACT WITH THE LIVING CREATURES OF CREATION, PARTICULARLY HUMANITY, THROUGH BLESSING. IT APPEARS, AT LEAST IN THIS HYMN, THAT GOD'S INTENDED PURPOSE FOR PEOPLE WAS TO MOVE THROUGH LIFE BESTOWING GOODNESS UPON OTHER PEOPLE. THIS PURPOSE IS UNDERScoreD IN GOD'S CALLING OF ABRAHAM, A CALLING WHICH POINTED ABRAHAM

OF A HIGHER PURPOSE OF BLESSING PEOPLE (GENESIS 12.1-3).

THIS LIFE OF BLESSING, AS INTENDED BY GOD, IS WITNESSED IN THE LIFE OF JESUS. IN JESUS, WE DISCOVER WHAT IT IS TO BE AUTHENTICALLY HUMAN, TO LIVE AS ONE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD (COLOSSIANS 1.15). IMPORTANTLY, BLESSING WAS A CENTRAL PART OF JESUS' LIFE. JESUS BROUGHT SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL GOODNESS TO OTHERS THROUGH BOTH HIS ACTIONS AND HIS WORDS. THE APOSTLE PAUL RECOGNIZED THIS AND CALLED GOD'S PEOPLE TO LIVE IN THE SAME MANNER, BLESSING OTHERS, INCLUDING ONE'S ENEMIES (ROMANS 12.14). ONE MIGHT THEREFORE NOTE THAT PEOPLE BEAR THE IDENTITY AS WONDERFUL CREATIONS OF GOD, CREATURES WITH INNATE WORTH AND VALUE DECLARED AND GIVEN BY GOD APART FROM PERFORMANCE OR ACHIEVEMENT. FURTHER, GOD CREATED PEOPLE TO REPRESENT HIM, INTERACTING WITH CREATION BY MEANS OF BLESSING.

## REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

IS CHRISTIANITY STILL RELEVANT? It is, IF IT CAN PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR LIFE THAT WORKS, REALLY WORKS. PERHAPS ONE OF THE GREATEST THINGS I NEED FROM CHRISTIANITY IS DIRECTION IN LIFE. SOMETIMES THIS IS EXPRESSED IN TERMS OF IDENTITY, PURPOSE, AND MEANING. I NEED TO KNOW WHO I AM AND WHERE I AM GOING, OR AM SUPPOSED TO GO. HERE IS WHERE I GET STUCK BECAUSE IN MY WORLD AND EXPERIENCE IDENTITY, PURPOSE, AND MEANING ARE WRAPPED UP IN A BIG MESSY KNOT. IN MY WORLD, I WAS TAUGHT THAT I AM WHAT I DO. THIS CREATES ALL KINDS OF PROBLEMS. IF I AM WHAT I DO, IF I DO THE RIGHT THINGS I FIND OUT WHO I AM, BUT IF I DON'T KNOW WHAT I AM SUPPOSED TO DO (PURPOSE) I CAN'T FIND OUT WHO I AM. ALL I CAN DO IS GO ROUND AND ROUND, DOING THINGS UNTIL I HIT ON SOMETHING THAT MAKES ME FEEL GOOD, BUT THIS CREATES ITS OWN PROBLEMS BECAUSE LIFE DOES NOT ALWAYS FEEL GOOD.

CONFUSED YET? I KNOW I AM. I HAVE JUST BOILED IT DOWN TO THE INFURIATING BASICS. IT FEELS LIKE I AM LIVING IN ALICE'S WONDERLAND WHERE NOTHING MAKES SENSE BECAUSE I AM TALKING TO THE MAD HATTER. CULTURE ISN'T VERY HELPFUL. IT ACKNOWLEDGES THAT I NEED TO KNOW WHO I AM AND WHAT I AM TO DO IN LIFE, BUT IT SAYS I HAVE TO FIND IT FOR MYSELF. THAT ISN'T REALLY WORKING ON A NUMBER OF LEVELS. I DON'T KNOW WHEN I HAVE, OR IF I HAVE, FOUND MY PURPOSE. PEOPLE WORK AGAINST MY PURPOSE, OR AT LEAST IT APPEARS THEY DO. WHAT I WANT TO DO OFTEN IS SO NEBULOUS THAT I CAN'T DO IT ANYWAY. HAVE YOU EVER "TRIED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?" WHAT DOES THAT MEAN ANYWAY?

I AM COMING TO LEARN THAT I DON'T NEED IMPORTANT MISSION STATEMENTS LIKE "I RESOLVE TO LIVE A KICK-BUTT LIFE," FIVE YEAR PLANS, OR EVEN A PASSION FOR JUSTICE OR THE LIKE. IF I WANT TO KNOW WHO I AM AND WHAT I AM TO DO, I NEED TO TURN TO GOD. HE MADE ME SO ONLY HE KNOWS WHO I AM AND WHY I AM HERE. WHEN I LISTEN TO GOD THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE. I AM HIS PRECIOUS CREATION WHOM HE MADE TO BLESS OTHERS; THAT IS, GOD MADE ME TO MOVE THROUGH LIFE SEEKING THE GOOD OF OTHERS SO THAT THROUGH ME

OTHERS EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE OF GOD. FOR ME, THIS RESOLVES A GREAT DEAL OF TENSION. I AM NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ENDING WORLD HUNGER OR RESOLVING THE NORTH KOREAN CRISIS. I DON'T HAVE TO COME UP WITH A MOTIVATING STATEMENT. I SIMPLY MOVE THROUGH LIFE, SEEKING THE GOOD OF WHOEVER IS RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME, EXTENDING GOD'S PRESENCE WHEREVER I HAPPEN TO BE. I AM TRYING TO DISCOVER WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN REAL LIFE. I THINK IT IS PROBABLY A WHOLE LOT SIMPLER THAN I AM TRYING TO MAKE IT. BUT I KEEP FOCUSING ON THE PERSON IN FRONT OF ME, AND ASKING FOR GRACE WHEN I DON'T/CAN'T. HONESTLY, IT FEELS FREEING, THOUGH IT ISN'T EASY, BUT WHO SAID DOING WHAT YOU WERE MADE TO DO WOULD EVER BE EASY?

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

IS CHRISTIANITY RELEVANT? IF CHRISTIANITY CAN PROVIDE A MEANINGFUL FRAMEWORK FOR LIFE THAT WORKS, REALLY WORKS, THEN THE ANSWER IS A RESOUNDING "YES!" CAN CHRISTIANITY LIVE UP TO THE CHALLENGE? CAN IT HELP US WITH OUR MOST FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS, LIKE, THOSE WE ASK ABOUT IDENTITY, PURPOSE, AND MEANING? IT IS MORE THAN EVIDENT THAT WE NEED TO KNOW WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE ARE TO DO IN LIFE. WITHOUT THESE, WE QUICKLY BECOME DISTRACTED, DISCOURAGED, AND FIND OURSELVES IN THE PIT OF DESPAIR. OUR CULTURE TELLS US THAT WE ARE ON OUR OWN IN FINDING OUR PURPOSE AND IDENTITY, AND A WHOLE INDUSTRY HAS SPRUNG UP DEVOTED TO AIDING US IN THE TASK. HOWEVER, SOMEHOW, BECOMING THE "NINJA WARRIOR OF PASTORING" JUST DOESN'T FIT. OK. NOT FOR YOU EITHER? HOW ABOUT RESOLVING TO LIVE A "COMMANDO, TAKE NO PRISONERS, LIFE?" FEELING IT YET? I DIDN'T THINK SO.

WE NEED MORE THAN WHAT OUR CULTURE OFFERS US WHEN IT COMES TO FINDING PURPOSE AND MEANING. WE NEED AN OUTSIDE SOURCE TO TELL US WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE ARE MADE TO DO. CHRISTIANITY OFFERS JUST THIS. CHRISTIANITY DECLARES THAT WE ARE THE BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN OF GOD, CREATED TO LIVE LIVES OF BLESSING SO THAT ALL OF CREATION MIGHT EXPERIENCE THE GLORIOUS PRESENCE OF GOD. IT IS BIG. IT LEAVES A LEGACY. IT CAN TAKE ON NINJA WARRIOR STATUS, BUT HOW DO WE DO IT? IT IS A WHOLE LOT SIMPLER THAN WE MAKE IT. IT IS MOVING THROUGH LIFE GRASPING OUR INHERENT WORTH/VALUE AS WE SEEK THE GOOD OF WHOMEVER WE FIND RIGHT IN FRONT OF US. SOMETIMES THIS IS BIG. SOMETIMES IT IS SMALL. ALL THE TIME IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE. THIS WEEK, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO EXPERIMENT WITH WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE TO LIVE IN THIS WAY AS YOU MOVE THROUGH LIFE. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER FINDING A FRIEND TO JOIN YOU, MEETING REGULARLY TO TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP

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