



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

October 1, 2017

Discussion Guide

How do we fix it?

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 PEOPLE CAN CHANGE? 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 OUR MODERN APPROACH TO FIXING WHAT IS BROKEN IN OUR LIVES.
- READ EPHESIANS 2.1-7 ALOUD. THIS TEXT WAS WRITTEN TO EXPLAIN THE DEEP WORK OF REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED BY GOD THROUGH JESUS. TRY TO HEAR WITH EARS TO UNDERSTAND THE EXTENT TO WHICH GOD'S SAVING WORK MUST GO TO BE EFFECTIVE IN US. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE ALOUD.
- ACCORDING TO PAUL, WHY ARE WE IN NEED OF GOD'S

SAVING WORK? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY ANSWERS AS POSSIBLE. WHAT CAN GOD DO THAT PEOPLE CANNOT DO?

- PAUL STATES THAT APART FROM THE POWERFUL INTERVENTION OF GOD IN OUR LIVES (GRACE) WE ARE INCAPABLE OF LIVING FULLY HUMAN LIVES. WE ARE "DEAD." IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DO PEOPLE INNATELY RECOGNIZE THIS AND SEEK TO ADDRESS IT?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, ARE THE APPROACHES PEOPLE TAKE TO ADDRESSING THE DESIRE TO LIVE A FULLY HUMAN LIFE SIMILAR OR DISSIMILAR TO THE APPROACH PAUL DESCRIBES?
- DO YOU FEEL IT IS EASY OR DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE NEEDING SOMETHING OUTSIDE YOURSELF IN ORDER TO MOVE TOWARD A FULLY HUMAN LIFE? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- NEEDING SOMETHING OUTSIDE OURSELVES TO MOVE TO A FULLY HUMAN LIFE MEANS WE CANNOT CHANGE OURSELVES, BUT IT ALSO IMPLIES THAT WE MUST OPEN OURSELVES TO THAT WHICH IS OUTSIDE US. WHAT MIGHT THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE? DO YOU FIND THIS EASY OR DIFFICULT? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT ARE AREAS IN YOUR LIFE IN WHICH YOU NEED TO EXPERIENCE CHANGE? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO OPEN YOUR LIFE TO GOD SO THAT YOU MIGHT EXPERIENCE THIS CHANGE? HOW MIGHT THIS GROUP BE PART OF THE PROCESS OF OPENING YOUR LIFE IN THIS MANNER?

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

FINDING LIFE (REAL LIFE) IN AMERICA

A NATURAL DESIRE IN LIFE IS TO IMPROVE ONE'S QUALITY OR STATE OF LIFE. THERE SEEMS TO EXIST AN INNATE DESIRE TO REACH FOR AN EXPERIENCE OF LIFE WHICH IS NOT NOW PART OF ONE'S COMMON EXPERIENCE; THAT IS, PEOPLE ARE NOT NATURALLY SATISFIED WITH LIFE AS THEY LIVE IT BUT HAVE IN THEIR MINDS AN IMAGE OF LIFE AS THEY WOULD LIKE TO LIVE IT. SOMETIMES THIS DESIRE COMES FROM

A FEELING THAT LIFE IS OUT OF BALANCE OR OVERWHELMING IN SOME WAY. HOWEVER, NOT ALL PEOPLE FEEL THEIR LIVES ARE SOMEHOW BAD OR BROKEN, BUT RATHER THAT LIFE CAN BE "MORE" THAN IT NOW IS. ONE MIGHT SAY, INNATE TO THE HUMAN CONDITION IS A DESIRE FOR THIS "MORE" IN LIFE, A DESIRE TO MOVE TO A GREATER/BETTER EXPERIENCE OF LIFE.

HOW ONE MOVES TO THIS GREATER/BETTER EXPERIENCE OF LIFE DIFFERS AMONG CULTURES AND PERIODS OF TIME. IN AMERICA, THE MOST COMMON APPROACH TO REACHING FOR THIS DESIRED "MORE" IN LIFE IS THE THERAPEUTIC APPROACH. A THERAPEUTIC APPROACH MIGHT BE BROADLY DEFINED AS A PROCESS OF INVESTIGATING OR IDENTIFYING AREAS OF LIFE WHICH MIGHT BE IMPROVED SO A NEW AND BETTER PATH FORWARD MIGHT BE DEVELOPED. THESE AREAS MIGHT INVOLVE ANYTHING FROM TROUBLE SLEEPING, A FEELING OF STUCKNESS IN A CAREER, THE DESIRE TO IMPROVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS, OR ADDRESSING A TROUBLED RELATIONSHIP. THE IDEA IS THAT IF THIS AREA OF LIFE IS IMPROVED, THE PERSON MIGHT EXPERIENCE A GREATER WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF LIFE.

ONCE A LIFE AREA IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED, A PERSON HAS A NUMBER OF CHOICES OF HOW TO INVESTIGATE AND CHART A NEW PATH FORWARD. ONE MIGHT CHOOSE TO SPEAK WITH A THERAPIST OR HIRE A LIFE-COACH. HE MIGHT PURCHASE A SELF-HELP BOOK, JOIN A SELF-HELP GROUP, OR TURN TO AN EXISTING PEER OR SOCIAL NETWORK. WHILE EACH OF THESE APPROACHES UTILIZES DIFFERENT TOOLS AND THEORIES, THEY EACH ARE SIMILAR IN THAT THEY PROVIDE THE PERSON WHO DESIRES TO IMPROVE HER LIFE, A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR IDENTIFYING WHAT IS "WRONG," STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THESE WRONGS, AND A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR IMPLEMENTING LIFE CHANGES.

PERHAPS THE TWO MOST POPULAR APPROACHES ARE THE USE OF SELF-HELP BOOKS AND GROUPS. SELF-HELP GROUPS PROVIDE A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY WHO SHARE A COMMON PROBLEM AND GOAL, WORKING TOWARD THIS GOAL TOGETHER. OFTEN THIS WORK IS DONE USING A SYSTEM SUCH AS THE TWELVE STEPS. MEMBERS OF THE GROUP WORK THE SYSTEM TOGETHER WITH OLDER MEMBERS MENTORING AND ENCOURAGING YOUNGER MEMBERS TO THE GROUP. SELF-HELP BOOKS ARE EXTREMELY POPULAR WITH OVER ONE HALF OF ALL AMERICANS HAVING PURCHASED AT LEAST ONE SUCH BOOK. THESE BOOKS CAN TRACE THEIR ORIGIN TO CONDUCT OR ETIQUETTE BOOKS OF THE 19TH CENTURY WITH DALE CARNEGIE'S 1936 BESTSELLER, HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE, SERVING AS THE PRECURSOR OF WHAT IS NOW A \$10 BILLION A YEAR INDUSTRY. WHILE EXISTING AS A MODERN PHENOMENA, THE CONCEPT OF A SELF-HELP BOOK CAN BE FOUND IN THE ANCIENT WORLD WITH CICERO'S ON FRIENDSHIP AND OVID'S ART OF LOVE. THESE BOOKS ARE HIGHLY POPULAR BECAUSE THEY CLAIM TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION FROM HIGHER SOURCES SUCH AS PSYCHOLOGISTS, DOCTORS, OR OTHER FIELD EXPERTS IN AN UNDERSTANDABLE AND APPLICABLE MANNER. FURTHER, THESE

BOOKS OFFER A LESS EXPENSIVE APPROACH TO CHANGE, BRINGING THE COMMON PERSON INTO CONTACT WITH A FIELD EXPERT WITHOUT ANY OF THE FEES WHICH OTHERWISE MIGHT ACCOMPANY SUCH A RELATIONSHIP. WHILE TOOLS AND THEORIES VARY WIDELY ACROSS THE VARIOUS THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES TO CHANGE, THE MODERN THERAPEUTIC APPROACH FOLLOWS A BASIC UNDERSTANDING THAT A MOTIVATED INDIVIDUAL WHO IS EXPOSED TO INFORMATION CONCERNING WHAT IS WRONG AND THEREAFTER PROVIDED WITH A SUFFICIENTLY SUPPORTED STRATEGY FOR CHANGE CAN EXPERIENCE CHANGE. ONE MIGHT CALL THIS THE AMERICAN EQUATION FOR CHANGE. MOTIVATION (M) + INFORMATION (I) + STRATEGY/SUPPORT (SS) = CHANGE (C). THIS EQUATION FOR CHANGE ASSUMES A POSITIVE APPROACH TO CHANGE, POSITING PEOPLE ARE SUFFICIENTLY CAPABLE OF ENGAGING IN THE CHANGE PROCESS DRAWING UPON THEIR OWN INNER RESERVES WHEN GIVEN ENOUGH INSIGHT AND EXTERNAL SUPPORT.

WHILE THIS APPROACH WORKS IN THEORY, MANY PEOPLE STRUGGLE TO EXPERIENCE TRUE AND LASTING CHANGE FOLLOWING THIS APPROACH. WHILE A HIGHLY-MOTIVATED PERSON ARMED WITH INFORMATION AND A STRONG SUPPORT NETWORK AND STRATEGY MIGHT EXPERIENCE A CHANGE IN THEIR BEHAVIOR, IN TIME, THEY CAN ALSO (AND OFTEN DO) EXPERIENCE A REVERSAL OF THIS CHANGE, SOMETIMES SUDDENLY. THIS CAN BE SEEN IN GROUPS LIKE AA WHEN PEOPLE "FALL OFF THE WAGON" OR WITH PEOPLE WHO "YO-YO DIET." BECAUSE TRUE CHANGE IS DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN, MANY CHANGE APPROACHES URGE PARTICIPANTS TO "KEEP WORKING THE SYSTEM" OR ENCOURAGE CLIENTS TO "COME BACK FOR A TUNE UP" WHEN NECESSARY. WHILE ANY TRUE CHANGE PROCESS IS PROCESS-ORIENTED INCLUDING STEPS FORWARD AND BACKWARD, THE NEED TO KEEP WORKING A SYSTEM SEEMS TO POINT TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHANGE AS BEHAVIORISTIC OR MECHANISTIC; THAT IS, WHAT IS BEING CHANGED THROUGH THE THERAPEUTIC APPROACH IS EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR AND SUPPORT IS NEEDED TO MAINTAIN THIS BEHAVIOR.

CRITICISM OF THIS APPROACH CAN BE RIGHTLY MADE THAT A BEHAVIORISTIC APPROACH TO CHANGE CAN PROVIDE THE APPEARANCE OF CHANGE BUT IT CANNOT BE EQUATED WITH CHANGE. TRUE CHANGE INVOLVES A CHANGE IN PATTERNS OF THOUGHT AND WAYS OF BEING WHICH GIVE RISE TO BEHAVIORS SO THAT A PERSON CAN MAINTAIN A NEW WAY OF BEING WITHOUT EXTERNAL SUPPORTS. SOME CHANGE THEORISTS REFER TO THIS KIND OF CHANGE AS TAMING THE ELEPHANT. IN THEIR VIEW, CHANGE IS NOT UNLIKE A RIDER TRYING TO REDIRECT AN ELEPHANT. INFORMATION AND A SYSTEM ARE LIKE A STICK, BUT THEY ARE LESS THAN EFFECTIVE IN REDIRECTING SOMETHING SO LARGE. INSTEAD, A DIFFERENT APPROACH IS NEEDED TO "CHANGE THE MIND" OF THE ELEPHANT; THAT IS, REAL CHANGE REQUIRES ADDRESSING DEEPER SYSTEMS THAT ARE AT PLAY, SYSTEMS WHICH INFORMATION OR STRUCTURES CANNOT ADDRESS. SOMETIMES THIS IS REFERRED TO AS INNER-CHANGE OR CHANGE FROM THE INSIDE-OUT. VARIOUS COUNSELING APPROACHES ATTEMPT TO MAKE SUCH CHANGE AS DO VARIOUS RELIGIOUS APPROACHES. THESE INNER-CHANGE APPROACHES

DO NOT NEGATE THE NEED FOR EXTERNAL SUPPORTS, MOTIVATION, OR INFORMATION, BUT ARGUE THAT DEEPER WAYS OF THINKING AND BEING MUST ALSO BE ADDRESSED IF TRUE CHANGE IS TO BE EXPERIENCED.

The Text

EPHESIANS 2.1-7: HOW TO LIVE (REALLY LIVE)

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS IS IN FACT A CIRCULAR LETTER INTENDED FOR A NETWORK OF CHURCHES IN ASIA MINOR AND NOT JUST THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS. THIS IS SEEN IN THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION FOR EPHESIANS WHICH INCLUDES MANUSCRIPTS WITH "IN EPHESUS" MISSING, ALLOWING FOR READERS TO SUPPLY THEIR OWN LOCATION (EPHESIANS 1.1). THE LETTER IS PAUL'S MOST GENERAL LETTER, THE CLOSEST WE HAVE TO WHAT MIGHT BE IDENTIFIED AS A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO THEOLOGY. PAUL WAS NOT A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIAN; THAT IS, PAUL DID NOT IDENTIFY A THEOLOGICAL TOPIC HE WISHED TO EXPLORE SO THAT HE MIGHT EDUCATE A CONGREGATION. THIS IS A MORE MODERN UNDERSTANDING AND APPROACH TO THINKING ABOUT GOD. PAUL IS MORE OF A TASK-THEOLOGIAN; THAT IS, PAUL RECOGNIZED AND ADDRESSED REAL CONGREGATIONAL ISSUES BY APPLYING THOUGHTS ABOUT GOD TO THESE SITUATIONS IN HIS LETTERS. WHILE WE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO ENVISION PAUL STRETCHING HIS SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIAN MUSCLES IN EPHESIANS, THE LETTER IS MOST LIKELY ISSUE-DRIVEN, AS ARE ALL OF PAUL'S LETTERS. RATHER THAN BEING ROOTED IN A SINGLE CONGREGATION, THIS ISSUE SEEMS TO BE A REGIONAL ISSUE. ONE MIGHT POINT TO COLOSSIANS, PENNED AT THE SAME TIME, TO ARGUE THAT PAUL IS ADDRESSING WHAT CAME TO BE IDENTIFIED AS GNOSTICISM. READING EPHESIANS THROUGH THE LENS OF COLOSSIANS CAN LEAD TO SOME INSIGHT AND MAY IN FACT BE PAUL'S TRUE INTENT. HOWEVER, READING EPHESIANS ON ITS OWN LEADS ONE TO IDENTIFY AN ISSUE WHICH MIGHT BETTER BE DESCRIBED AS A DISCIPLESHIP ISSUE. THE CONGREGATIONS TO WHICH PAUL ADDRESSES THIS LETTER ARE STRUGGLING TO RIGHTLY UNDERSTAND THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD'S REDEMPTION AND THEIR DAILY LIVES (EPHESIANS 4.1). THIS MAY BE ROOTED IN THE LACK OF A FIRM GRASP OF WHAT GOD'S REDEMPTION INVOLVES ON BOTH THE COGNITIVE AND EXPERIENTIAL LEVEL (EPHESIANS 1.15-23; 3.14-21), OR IT MAY SIMPLY BE A NATURAL GROWTH STEP FOR CONGREGATIONS WHO WERE THOROUGHLY PAGAN IN THEIR BACKGROUND THEREBY IGNORANT OF THE MORAL/ETHICAL DEMANDS OF A GOD-ORIENTED LIFE.

PAUL BEGINS HIS LETTER WITH A THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER WHICH HIGHLIGHTS GOD'S WORK OF REDEMPTION THROUGH THE PERSON OF JESUS. HE BEGINS TO DELVE INTO THE NATURE OF THIS REDEMPTIVE WORK OF GOD IN CHAPTER 2. HERE PAUL NOTES THAT PRIOR TO THE WORK OF GOD IN CHRIST, THE EPHESIAN BELIEVERS WERE DEAD IN THEIR TRANSGRESSIONS AND SINS. PAUL USES THE TERM "DEATH" IN A METAPHORICAL SENSE, PROBABLY IN REFERENCE TO LIFE ITSELF.

SIMPLY PUT, THE EPHESIANS WERE LIVING DEAD PEOPLE. THEY WERE PHYSICALLY ALIVE BUT THEY WERE DEAD TO REAL LIFE. THIS WAS THEIR STATE IN LIFE BECAUSE THEY WERE LEADING A LIFE MARKED BY TRANSGRESSION AND SIN; THAT IS, THEY WERE LIVING CONTRARY TO THE WAY GOD HAD DESIGNED THEM TO LIVE. THEY WERE LIVING BY THE STANDARDS OF THE WORLD AROUND THEM WHICH PAUL STATES COME FROM SATAN HIMSELF. WHEN ONE STEPS BACK, HE CAN SEE THAT PAUL DESCRIBES A SYSTEM WHICH IS BOOBY-TRAPPED TO CREATE FAILURE WHEN ATTEMPTING TO LIVE A REAL LIFE. THE FRAMEWORK PEOPLE ARE GIVEN FOR LIFE COMES FROM ONE WHO IS AGAINST THEM (SATAN) AND THEIR OWN PERSONAL BENT IS AWAY FROM THE THINGS OF GOD. IT IS THEREFORE IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE EPHESIANS TO EXPERIENCE ANYTHING OTHER THAN LIFE OTHER THAN IT IS MEANT TO BE.

PAUL DOES NOT SEPARATE HIMSELF, AS A JEW, FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF THE EPHESIANS. HE AND HIS MISSION TEAM WERE IN THE SAME SITUATION. THEY TOO SOUGHT TO LIVE ON THEIR OWN TERMS, AND SO LIKE THE REST OF HUMANITY, PAUL AND HIS MISSION TEAM—DOES HE HERE ALLUDE TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE AS A WHOLE?—DESERVED WRATH. THE CONCEPT OF WRATH WAS WELL UNDERSTOOD IN PAGAN CIRCLES. THE PAGAN GODS WERE WRATHFUL GODS, PUNISHING PEOPLE IF THEY WERE NOT APPEASED. HOWEVER, PAUL APPROACHED WRATH FROM A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE. THEREFORE, HE PROBABLY HAD IN MIND WRATH AS DESCRIBED IN ROMANS 1.18-30. IN THE JEWISH PERSPECTIVE, WRATH INVOLVED GOD TAKING A HANDS-OFF APPROACH TO DISOBEDIENT PEOPLE, ALLOWING THEM TO GO THEIR OWN WAY WHICH ULTIMATELY LED TO THEIR DESTRUCTION.

PAUL'S SUMMARY OF HUMANITY, TO THIS POINT, IS BLEAK. ON THEIR OWN, PEOPLE PURSUE THEIR OWN WAY IN LIFE, WAYS WHICH IN FACT ARE GROUNDED IN LUSTFUL PASSIONS AND SATANIC INFLUENCE. BY LIVING THIS WAY, PEOPLE NOT ONLY LIVE A LESS-THAN-ALIVE LIFE, BUT THEY HURTLE TO THEIR DEMISE IN BOTH THE PRESENT AND FUTURE. PAUL PORTRAYS HUMANITY AS HOPELESSLY CAUGHT IN THE GRIPS OF A WAY OF LIFE WHICH IS DESTRUCTIVE AND LESS THAN WHAT LIFE COULD BE. HOWEVER, PAUL EXPRESSES THAT HOPE FOR REAL LIFE IS FOUND IN GOD'S CHOICE TO DELIVER PEOPLE FROM THIS WAY OF LIFE.

PAUL'S DISCUSSION HINGES ON THE CONJUNCTION "BUT." WHILE PEOPLE EXPERIENCE A LIVING-DEATH AND HURTLE TO THEIR ULTIMATE DEMISE, GOD HAS GREAT LOVE AND COMPASSION FOR PEOPLE. HE THEREFORE MADE PEOPLE ALIVE THROUGH THE PERSON OF CHRIST EVEN THOUGH PEOPLE WERE LIVING IN A WAY THAT LED TO THEIR DEMISE. PAUL ENVISIONS PEOPLE EXPERIENCING LIFE BUT ONLY THROUGH THE EXTERNAL INTERVENTION OF GOD, SOMETHING PAUL REFERS TO AS GRACE, THE EXERCISING OF GOD'S EFFECTIVE POWER. THIS EXERCISING OF GOD'S POWER (GRACE) GAVE PEOPLE THE LIFE THEY COULD NOT DISCOVER ON THEIR OWN. IN THE LETTER OF EPHESIANS, THIS ABILITY TO GIVE LIFE TO THAT WHICH IS DEAD IS EVIDENCED IN JESUS' OWN RESURRECTION (EPHESIANS 1.19-21).

PAUL ARGUES THAT THE REALITY THAT GOD REALLY CAN AND DOES BRING LIFE TO DEAD PEOPLE—REAL LIFE TO PEOPLE WHO ARE

OTHERWISE UNABLE TO EXPERIENCE IT—CAN BE SEEN IN THE LIVES OF BELIEVERS. GOD HAS EVEN NOW RAISED UP (GIVEN LIFE) TO THOSE WHO FOLLOW JESUS AND HAS NOW GIVEN THEM ACCESS TO HIMSELF THROUGH WHAT JESUS HAS DONE. HE HAS LEFT BELIEVERS ON EARTH, RATHER THAN SIMPLY TAKING THEM INTO HIS HEAVENLY PRESENCE SO THAT THEY MIGHT SERVE AS EXAMPLES OF WHAT GOD CAN DO THROUGH HIS INCOMPARABLE GRACE (EFFECTIVE POWER) MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH JESUS.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

IS CHRISTIANITY STILL RELEVANT? A WAY OF LIFE IS RELEVANT IF IT HAS SOMETHING OF VALUE TO OFFER, A FRAMEWORK WHICH LEADS TO THE FULFILLMENT OF THE DESIRES WHICH MAKE US HUMAN. CAN CHRISTIANITY OFFER THAT? CAN IT PROVIDE A WORKABLE FRAMEWORK FOR LIFE? WHAT ABOUT A FRAMEWORK FOR ONE OF THE MOST PRESSING ISSUES IN LIFE, THE ISSUE OF BROKENNESS? IT IS HARD TO MISS THAT OUR WORLD IS BROKEN. THERE IS NOT A SYSTEM, A PERSON, A PLACE THAT IS NOT IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT. EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE CAN BE BETTER, AND WE KNOW IT SHOULD ALL BE BETTER. AS OUT OF SORTS AS EVERYTHING AROUND ME IS, WHAT I WANT MOST IS A BETTER ME. THAT SOUNDS VERY “POP-PSYCHOLOGY,” BUT THERE IS TRUTH TO IT. I AM BROKEN. I HAVE WAYS OF BEING AND THINKING THAT ARE NOT GOOD FOR ME OR OTHERS. HOW DO I FIX THOSE? HOW DO I FIX ME?

THIS HAS BEEN ONE OF THE PRIMARY QUESTIONS WHICH I HAVE SOUGHT TO ANSWER, PARTICULARLY OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS. IT ALL STARTED WHEN I EXPERIENCED A PERIOD OF CLINICAL BURNOUT AND MY COUNSELOR SAID, “YOU HAVE TO CHANGE OR IN 6 MONTHS I WILL BE ATTENDING YOUR FUNERAL.” NOTHING LIKE STATING IT AS IT IS, BUT HOW WAS I TO GO ABOUT CHANGING? I HAVE TRIED TRYING HARDER. I HAVE TRIED WORKING OUT A BETTER STRATEGY AND PLAN. I HAVE TRIED COMMUNITY. I HAVE TRIED THERAPY. I HAVE TRIED SELF-HELP BOOKS. I HAVE TRIED MANY THINGS, AND I HAVE FOUND IN EACH OF THEM A MEASURE OF HELP, BUT I HAVE NOT FOUND HEALING. I HAVE NOT FOUND A WAY TO FIX ME. SO, I KEEP TRYING, LOOKING FOR THAT MAGIC BULLET WAY THAT WILL ONCE AND FOR ALL RIGHT ALL THAT IS WRONG IN ME.

I AM COMING TO THE POINT WHERE I RECOGNIZE THAT THINGS LIKE THERAPY AND COMMUNITY ARE GOOD AND NECESSARY IN THEIR OWN RIGHT. IT IS HELPFUL TO HAVE A FRIEND OR SYSTEM THAT HELPS ME BY SORTING THROUGH LIFE TO IDENTIFY THE ISSUE. IT IS HELPFUL TO HAVE PEOPLE WHO CHEER ME ON TO WORK THROUGH THESE ISSUES. HOWEVER, THE RECTIFYING OF THESE ISSUES IS BEYOND ME. IF IT WERE NOT, I WOULD HAVE FOUND A WAY BY NOW. I HAVEN'T. I AM COMING TO REALIZE THAT I NEED HELP, GOD'S HELP IF I AM TO FIX ME. MAYBE THAT IS TOO WEAK OF A WAY TO WORD IT. I NEED GOD TO FIX ME. MIND YOU, THIS DOESN'T MEAN I JUST LAY AROUND FOR GOD TO ZAP ME WITH HIS MIGHTY ZAPPER. I HAVE WORK TO DO BUT THE WORK I HAVE TO DO IS MORE IN LINE WITH MAKING MYSELF AVAILABLE TO GOD THAN IT IS TO HELP GOD OUT OR DO HIS WORK. I AM ALSO COMING TO

UNDERSTAND THAT GOD TYPICALLY DOESN'T ZAP PEOPLE. HE IS IN THE BUSINESS OF RUNNING HEALING MARATHONS NOT SPRINTS. HOWEVER, HE DOES WORK, WHEN I MAKE ROOM FOR HIM. JUST OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS I HAVE MADE INCREDIBLE STRIDES TO HEALING, BUT IT HAS ALL BEEN BECAUSE I HAVE BEEN SEEKING TO OPEN MYSELF MORE AND MORE TO GOD. I AM LEARNING THAT TO FIX ME, I HAVE TO LET HIM FIX ME.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

IS CHRISTIANITY RELEVANT? IF IT CAN OFFER A FRAMEWORK FOR LIFE THAT WORKS, THEN MOST CERTAINLY IS IT RELEVANT. CAN CHRISTIANITY DO THAT? CAN IT ANSWER THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS OF LIFE IN A WAY THAT LEADS TO A WORKABLE LIFE? CAN IT ANSWER QUESTIONS LIKE HOW WE ARE TO DEAL WITH BROKENNESS, NOT JUST IN THE WORLD BUT IN OUR LIVES? THE REALITY IS WE ARE BROKEN PEOPLE. WE LONG TO BE MORE FULLY HUMAN. MAYBE I SHOULD SAY, WE LONG TO BE MORE. WE KNOW MORE IS OUT THERE. WE JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS OR HOW TO GET THERE. WE TRY MANY DIFFERENT WAYS, THE MOST POPULAR MODERN APPROACH BEING THE THERAPEUTIC APPROACH. WE HAVE THE IDEA THAT IF WE ARE JUST MOTIVATED ENOUGH AND ARMED WITH THE RIGHT TOOLS AND INFORMATION WE CAN CHANGE. WE KEEP TRYING IT, AND IT KEEPS NOT WORKING. SHALL WE SAY, NOTHING CHANGES? SO HOW DO WE CHANGE? IS IT EVEN POSSIBLE? CHANGE IS POSSIBLE IF WE RECOGNIZE THAT WE CAN'T DO IT. OUR LIVES ARE BOOBY TRAPPED FOR FAILURE ON THE CHANGE FRONT. HOWEVER, GOD HAS THE POWER AND UNDERSTANDING TO DISARM THE BOOBY TRAPS AND LEAD US TO THE EXPERIENCE OF REAL, HEALING CHANGE, IF WE WILL LET HIM. HEREIN LIES THE ISSUE. WILL WE LET HIM? EXPERIENCING THE CHANGING WORK OF GOD INVOLVES A WORK ON OUR PART, A WORK WHICH IS ABOUT MAKING ROOM FOR HIM TO DO HIS WORK. IT INVOLVES DOING HARD WORK OF IDENTIFYING AREAS WHERE WE NEED GOD'S HEALING TOUCH AND THEN LAYING DOWN ON THE SPIRITUAL OPERATION TABLE FOR HIM TO DO WHAT ONLY HE CAN DO. THIS LOOKS DIFFERENT IN EVERY PERSON AND WITH EVERY SITUATION, BUT THE PRINCIPLE IS THE SAME. THIS WEEK, I ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONSIDER AN AREA OF YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU NEED TO EXPERIENCE HEALING CHANGE. WHAT IS IT ABOUT THAT AREA THAT GOD NEEDS TO ADDRESS? DON'T STOP ON THE SURFACE. TRY TO DIG DEEPER. WHAT LIES BENEATH WHAT YOU SEE ON THE SURFACE? ASK GOD TO GIVE YOU EYES TO SEE WHAT HE SEES: MOTIVATIONS, REASONS, FEARS, ATTITUDES, AND THE LIKE. WHEN YOU HAVE SEEN WHAT YOU CAN NOW SEE, OFFER THIS TO HIM. ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT LIES BENEATH AND ASK HIM HOW YOU MIGHT OPEN THIS AREA OF YOUR LIFE TO HIM. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER TALKING TO A SPIRITUAL FRIEND OR ONE OF THE LEADERS AT UNION CENTER ABOUT WHAT OPENING YOUR LIFE MIGHT LOOK LIKE. PURSUE THIS OPENING AND ALLOW GOD TO DO THE REST.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP