



Easter is

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

APRIL 1, 2018

Discussion Guide

EASTER IS NEW BEGINNINGS

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 IN DO-OVERS? 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, TALK ABOUT THE DIFFERENT TERMS FOR LOVE USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND HOW JOHN USES THESE TERMS IN THE PRESENT TEXT.
- READ JOHN 21.1-19 ALOUD. SEEK TO IMAGINE YOURSELF AS PETER OR ONE OF THE OTHER DISCIPLES. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.

- IN WHAT WAYS DOES JESUS TAKE PETER (AND THE OTHER DISCIPLES) BACK TO THE BEGINNING? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY EXAMPLES AS POSSIBLE.
- WHAT MIGHT BE JESUS INTENTION AS HE PROVIDES THESE TO HIS DISCIPLES? WHY MIGHT THIS BE IMPORTANT FOR PETER?
- DO YOU THINK PEOPLE TODAY BELIEVE IT IS REALLY POSSIBLE TO HAVE A FRESH START? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN EXPERIENCE WHERE YOU NEEDED A FRESH START? DID YOU FEEL THIS WAS TRULY POSSIBLE?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DOES THIS TEXT SPEAK TO OUR LIVES AND THOSE AREAS WHERE WE NEED TO BEGIN AGAIN?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO WELCOME JESUS INTO OUR PAST EXPERIENCES SO THAT WE MIGHT MOVE INTO A NEW FUTURE? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO WALK WITH ONE ANOTHER IN THIS PRACTICE?
- CONSIDER CONCLUDING IN PRAYER. YOU MIGHT SEEK TO USE THIS TIME TO INVITE GOD INTO YOUR PAST SO THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE A NEW FUTURE.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

DIVINE LOVE OR FRIENDSHIP LOVE

IN JOHN 21, THE APOSTLE DETAILS A RESTORATIVE/REDEMPTIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN JESUS AND PETER IN WHICH JESUS CALLS OUT AND THEN DEALS WITH PETER'S THREE-FOLD DENIAL SO THAT HE CAN TAKE UP THE ROLE OF SHEPHERDING GOD'S PEOPLE IN IMITATION OF JESUS (JOHN 21.15-19). HOWEVER, THE INTENDED MEANING OF THIS PASSAGE IS OFTEN MISSED BECAUSE MUCH IS MADE OF THE CHANGING VERBS FOR LOVE FOUND IN THE TEXT.

IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, THERE ARE 4 WORDS WHICH CAN BE TRANSLATED "LOVE": STERGO, EROS, PHILEO,

AND AGAPAO. EROS IS EROTIC OR SEXUAL LOVE, AND STERGO IS MOST OFTEN USED TO REFER TO THE LOVING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN A FAMILY, SUCH AS THE LOVE BETWEEN A PARENT AND CHILD. HOWEVER, MANY PASTORS (AND SOME COMMENTATORS/SCHOLARS) HAVE ARGUED THAT AGAPAO IS THE WORD CHOSEN BY THE AUTHORS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TO REFER TO DIVINE/SACRIFICIAL LOVE OF GOD OR THE LOVE OF GOD'S FAITHFUL PEOPLE FOR GOD AND ONE ANOTHER, WHILE PHILEO IS THE WORD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WHICH REFERS TO A LOWER OR LESSER FORM OF LOVE, THE LOVE BETWEEN FRIENDS.

IN JOHN 21, JOHN VACILLATES BETWEEN AGAPAO AND PHILEO IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER:

JESUS' QUESTION	PETER'S RESPON
"DO YOU LOVE [AGAPAS] ME?"	"YES, LORD, YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE [PHILO] YOU."
"DO YOU LOVE [AGAPAS] ME?"	"YES, LORD, YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE [PHILO] YOU."
"DO YOU LOVE [PHILEIS] ME?"	"LORD, YOU KNOW ALL THINGS. YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE [PHILO] YOU."

BUILDING ON THE IDEA THAT AGAPAO AND ITS VARIOUS FORMS REFER TO A DIVINE, SACRIFICIAL LOVE, WHILE PHILEO REFERS TO FRATERNAL LOVE, THESE PASTORS AND COMMENTATORS ARGUE THAT THE POINT OF THE PASSAGE INVOLVES JESUS' QUESTIONING OF THE QUALITY OF PETER'S LOVE. DOES PETER LOVE HIM WITH A LOVE OF FAITH OR JUST AS A FRIEND? HOWEVER, THIS KIND OF THINKING CANNOT STAND AS IT DOES NOT HOLD UP UNDER THE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL OR FROM THE WIDER LITERARY WORLD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

SIMPLY PUT, A DISTINCTION CANNOT BE MADE BETWEEN AGAPAO AND PHILEO; THAT IS, THESE TWO WORDS DO NOT REFER TO TWO DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOVE BUT MAY BE AND ARE USED INTERCHANGEABLY, THE KEY TO THEIR MEANING BEING THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY ARE FOUND. THIS REALITY IS SEEN IN JOHN'S OWN GOSPEL BECAUSE JOHN USES AGAPAO AND PHILEO INTERCHANGEABLY. HE USES BOTH WORDS TO REFER TO GOD'S LOVE OF PEOPLE (JOHN 3.16; 16.27). HE UTILIZES BOTH WORDS TO IDENTIFY THE FATHER'S LOVE FOR JESUS (JOHN 3.35; 5.20). JOHN USES BOTH WORDS TO CALL OUT JESUS' LOVE FOR PEOPLE (JOHN 11.5, 36). HE USES BOTH WORDS TO SPEAK OF LOVE FOR ONE'S FELLOW PERSON (JOHN 13.34; 15.19). HE USES BOTH WORDS TO URGE LOVE FOR JESUS (JOHN 8.42; 16.27). CLEARLY, JOHN DOES NOT PREFER ONE VERB OVER THE OTHER. RATHER, THE GOSPEL ITSELF SEEMS TO IDENTIFY JOHN'S PREDILECTION FOR VARYING HIS WORDS AS A STYLISTIC RATHER THAN THEOLOGICAL DEVICE. AS A CASE IN POINT, IN THIS SAME

SCENE FROM JOHN 21 ALSO VARIES THE VERB FOR SHEPHERDING. SIMPLY PUT, AS AN AUTHOR, JOHN DIDN'T LIKE TO USE THE SAME WORD REPEATEDLY IN SUCCESSION.

WHEN ONE LOOKS WITH A WIDER LENS, AT THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ARGUE FOR TWO KINDS OF LOVE BEING REPRESENTED BY AGAPAO AND PHILEO. THE SEPTUAGINT (LXX), THE GREEK TRANSLATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, USES BOTH VERBS INTERCHANGEABLY. FOR INSTANCE, DESCRIPTIONS OF JACOB'S PREFERENTIAL LOVE FOR JOSEPH USE BOTH VERBS (GENESIS 37.3, 4) AS DO THE DESCRIPTIONS OF AMNON'S RAPE AND DECLARATIONS OF LOVE FOR TAMAR (2 SAMUEL 13).

THE REAL QUESTION IS HOW DID INTERPRETERS AND PASTORS BEGIN TO CLAIM A DISTINCTION BETWEEN AGAPAO AND PHILEO? SOME OF THE IMPETUS MAY BE INTERPRETERS' DESIRE TO CONFORM THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TO THEIR OWN DESIRES AND THEOLOGICAL PREDISPOSITIONS. LIKEWISE, THIS DISTINCTION ALMOST CERTAINLY ARISES FROM THE PRIMARY POSITION GIVEN TO PAUL BY INTERPRETERS. THESE INTERPRETERS USE PAUL'S WRITINGS RATHER THAN THE GOSPELS AS THE INTERPRETIVE LENS FOR THE ENTIRE NEW TESTAMENT. BECAUSE PAUL ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY USES AGAPAO TO REFER TO THE SACRIFICIAL LOVE OF GOD FOR PEOPLE, THESE INTERPRETERS THEN EXTRAPOLATE THAT AGAPAO MUST BE LINKED TO THIS KIND OF LOVE. HOWEVER, A STRONG LINGUISTIC CASE CAN BE MADE THAT AUTHORS WERE BEGINNING TO PREFER AGAPAO OVER ALL OTHER WORDS FOR LOVE FROM THE FOURTH CENTURY B.C. ONWARD, AND PAUL HIMSELF IS NOT MONOLITHIC IN HIS USE OF AGAPAO. HE USES PHILEO TO REFER TO THE LOVE ONE IS TO HAVE FOR GOD (1 CORINTHIANS 16.22) AND TO THE LOVE GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO HAVE FOR ONE ANOTHER (TITUS 3.15). LIKEWISE, OUTSIDE THE LETTERS OF PAUL, JESUS USES PHILEO TO REFER TO HIS LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE (REVELATION 3.19). IT IS THEREFORE BEST TO NOT USE ARGUMENTS ABOUT THE NATURE OF LOVE BASED UPON THE NEW TESTAMENT WORD IN THE TEXT. RATHER, IT IS BEST TO ALLOW THE LARGER CONTEXT TO GIVE MEANING AND DEPTH TO THE USE OF THE TERM RATHER THAN A PREDETERMINED OUTSIDE STANDARD.

THE TEXT

JOHN 21.1-19: RESURRECTION LIFE PROVIDES NEW BEGINNINGS

THE FINAL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THE RESURRECTED JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES WHICH JOHN RECORDS OCCURS ON THE SHORES OF THE SEA OF GALILEE. SOME UNDETERMINED AMOUNT OF TIME HAS PASSED AND THE DISCIPLES HAVE RETURNED TO GALILEE, MOST LIKELY IN OBEDIENCE TO JESUS' COMMAND (MATTHEW 28.16). HOWEVER, THEY ARE NOT YET FULLY ENGAGED IN TAKING UP JESUS' KINGDOM MINISTRY WHICH PROBABLY INDICATES THE DISCIPLES ARE IN PROCESS. THEY ARE NO LONGER IN A STATE OF DISBELIEF BUT HAVE MOVED TO FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE. HOWEVER, THEY ARE NOT YET CAPABLE OF CARRYING OUT THE FULL EXTENT OF JESUS' COMMANDS.

SOMETHING IS HINDERING THEM, SOMETHING WHICH JESUS WILL DEAL WITH IN THIS FINAL RECORDED ENCOUNTER.

AS THE DISCIPLES ARE IN PROCESS, PETER SUGGESTS AN OUTING IN WHICH THEY GO FISHING. THIS SHOULD NOT BE VIEWED AS APOSTASY, A RETURN TO AN OLD WAY OF LIFE BUT RATHER AS THESE MEN REACHING OUT TO A FAMILIAR TOUCHSTONE AS THEY UNDERGO THE TRANSFORMATION OF THEIR FAITH JOURNEYS. THE DISCIPLES FISH ALL NIGHT, BUT THEY DO NOT CATCH ANYTHING. EARLY IN THE MORNING, A MAN FROM SHORE QUESTIONS THEIR SUCCESS AND ENCOURAGES THEM TO THROW THEIR NET ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE BOAT, AT WHICH POINT THEY CATCH SO MANY FISH THEY CANNOT PULL UP THE NET. WITH THIS EXPERIENCE, JOHN (THE BELOVED DISCIPLE) REALIZES THAT THE MAN ON THE SHORE IS NONE OTHER THAN JESUS. HIS RECOGNITION COMES NOT FROM THE VOICE OR THE APPEARANCE. JESUS IS TOO FAR AWAY (OVER 100 YARDS) TO RECOGNIZE HIS FEATURES CLEARLY. RATHER, JOHN REALIZES THE MAN IS JESUS BECAUSE HE AND HIS FELLOW DISCIPLES HAVE HAD THIS EXPERIENCE BEFORE. WHEN JESUS FIRST CALLED PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN, IT WAS IN THE CONTEXT OF A FAILED FISHING EXPERIENCE WITH A SUBSEQUENT MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISH (LUKE 5.1-7).

UNABLE TO WAIT, PETER SWIMS TO SHORE WHILE HIS COMPANIONS HAUL THE LARGE CATCH TO SHORE. ON SHORE, THEY DISCOVER JESUS HAS A FIRE READY AND IS PREPARING BREAKFAST WHICH HE ENCOURAGES THEM TO EAT. AFTER THE MEAL, JESUS TURNS TO ADDRESS PETER. HE BEGINS BY ASKING PETER IF HE LOVES JESUS MORE THAN THE OTHER DISCIPLES. THIS QUESTION ECHOES A CONVERSATION ABOUT LOVE AND PETER'S LOVE FOR JESUS WHICH TOOK PLACE DURING THE LAST SUPPER WITH JESUS. IN THIS CONVERSATION, PETER DECLARED THAT HE WAS SO PASSIONATELY DEVOTED TO JESUS THAT HE WOULD DIE FOR HIM, TO WHICH JESUS REPLIED THAT IN TRUTH PETER WOULD DENY HIM THREE TIMES (MARK 14.27-31; JOHN 13.34-38). WHILE THE WORD "LOVE" DOES NOT APPEAR IN THIS INITIAL CONVERSATION, THE CONCEPT IS CLEARLY PRESENT. PETER'S LOVE FOR JESUS IS EVIDENT BOTH IN HIS PASSION AND DECLARATION OF DEVOTION. JESUS SIMPLY RETURNS TO THIS CONVERSATION IN THE PRESENT.

HEARING JESUS' QUESTION, PETER REPLIES AFFIRMATIVELY. HE TRULY LOVES JESUS AND JESUS SHOULD KNOW THIS. TO THIS AFFIRMATION, JESUS REPLIES BY ENCOURAGING PETER TO FEED HIS LAMBS. THIS EXHORTATION IS NOT UNLIKE JESUS' COMMISSIONING OF HIS DISCIPLES IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER (JOHN 20.21-23). AS JESUS PREPARES FOR HIS ASCENSION, HE HANDS OFF HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY TO HIS FOLLOWERS. HERE, HE HANDS OFF THE SHEPHERDING CARE OF HIS KINGDOM PEOPLE TO PETER WHO MOST LIKELY STANDS FOR THE DISCIPLES AS A WHOLE IN THE CONTEXT.

SURPRISINGLY, JESUS ASKS PETER A SECOND TIME IF HE LOVES HIM. IMPLIED IS THE IDEA OF LOVING MORE BECAUSE OF THE CONTEXT. ONCE MORE, PETER REPLIES AFFIRMATIVELY, INDICATING JESUS ALREADY KNOWS THIS. TO THIS, JESUS ONCE MORE EXHORTS PETER TO SHEPHERD JESUS' PEOPLE. JESUS THEN TURNS TO PETER AND ASKS ABOUT HIS LOVE A THIRD TIME. IT IS WITH THIS THIRD QUESTION THAT PETER'S CONSCIOUS IS PRICKED AND HE IS HURT. JOHN IS CLEAR TO EMPHASIZE THAT IT IS THE REPETITION AND NOT THE CHANGE IN LANGUAGE WHICH HURTS PETER. WHAT IS HURTFUL BECOMES APPARENT WHEN ONE REMEMBERS THAT THIS EXCHANGE IS A CONTINUATION OF THE CONVERSATION BEGUN AT THE LAST SUPPER. THERE PETER DECLARED HIS PASSIONATE DEVOTION TO JESUS, AND JESUS INDICATED PETER WOULD DENY HIM THREE TIMES. BY ASKING ABOUT PETER'S LOVE THREE TIMES, JESUS SUBTLY CALLS OUT PETER'S THREE-FOLD DENIAL (JOHN 18.15-27). PETER IS FILLED WITH SHAME BECAUSE HE REALIZES THAT HIS ACTIONS UNDERCUT HIS DECLARATION OF PASSIONATE DEVOTION. UNABLE TO EXPLAIN OR JUSTIFY HIS ACTIONS, PETER ASKS JESUS TO LOOK BEYOND HIS ACTIONS TO HIS HEART. JESUS KNOWS ALL AND SO HE SHOULD BE ABLE TO LOOK PAST THE DENIALS TO SEE THAT PETER'S LOVE IS TRUE. IN REPLY, JESUS, ONCE MORE, EXHORTS PETER TO TAKE UP JESUS' SHEPHERDING MINISTRY.

JESUS THEN MOVES ON TO INDICATE THE TRAJECTORY OF PETER'S LIFE. PETER HAD OFFERED TO DIE FOR JESUS AND THIS WOULD ONE DAY BE THE CASE. HOWEVER, IN THE MEANTIME, PETER WAS TO FOLLOW. THIS SINGLE, FINAL EXHORTATION BRINGS THE TEXT FULL CIRCLE TO JESUS' FIRST CALLING OF PETER, A CALLING WHICH TOOK PLACE WITH THE FIRST MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISH. ON THAT DAY, AFTER PETER AND HIS COMPANIONS HAD PULLED THEIR BOATS ASHORE, JESUS HAD ENCOURAGED PETER TO FOLLOW (MARK 1.16-20). WITH THE PRESENT MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISH AND THIS CALL TO FOLLOW, JESUS HAS TAKEN PETER BACK TO THE VERY BEGINNING. AS HE HAS DONE THIS BOTH VERBALLY AND EXPERIENTIALLY, HE HAS CALLED OUT PETER'S FAILING BUT DEALT WITH IT REDEMPTIVELY. JESUS STILL HANDS OFF HIS MINISTRY TO PETER, HIS IMPERFECT FOLLOWER. WITH EACH QUESTION OF LOVE, ONE FOR EACH DENIAL, JESUS ALLOWS PETER TO EXPERIENCE FORGIVENESS AND RESTORATION. JESUS GIVES PETER THE OPPORTUNITY TO REVERSE HIS WRONG AND EXPERIENCE JESUS' FORGIVENESS AND RESTORATION. HAVING FULLY RESTORED PETER, JESUS THEN GIVES HIM THE OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN ONCE MORE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING. PETER'S DENIALS DID NOT FOREVER MARK HIM, BUT JESUS HAS RESTORED HIM AND MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO CONTINUE FORWARD ONCE MORE, FAITHFULLY LIVING AS JESUS' DISCIPLE.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

I HAVE DONE SOME PRETTY AWFUL THINGS IN LIFE. I SUPPOSE WE ALL HAVE. EACH OF US HAS FAILED AND FALLEN IN COUNTLESS WAYS. IT IS PART OF BEING HUMAN IN THIS FALLEN WORLD. THE FUNNY THING ABOUT ALL THE WAYS WE HAVE BLOWN IT AND BLOWN UP IS THAT THEY STAY WITH YOU. LITTLE VOICES, ECHOES OF WHAT YOU HAVE DONE WHISPER SUBTLE REMINDERS OF WHAT WAS, WHAT WE DID. I HEAR THEM. YOU PROBABLY DO TOO. EVEN THIS MORNING, I HAVE BEEN PLAGUED BY ONE OF THESE VOICES, A VOICE WHICH IS RELENTLESSLY CALLING OUT THINGS WHICH MAKES ME FEEL LIKE A FAILURE. I AM NOT SURE I AM IN THIS INSTANCE, BUT THIS VOICE SAYS I AM. AS I LISTEN TO THIS VOICE IT MAKES A DEEP IMPRESSION UPON ME. THIS VOICE LEADS ME TO BELIEVE NOT JUST THAT I FAILED BUT THAT I AM A FAILURE AND I WILL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE. THIS VOICE TELLS ME THAT ALL THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR ME IS MORE FAILURE. MY PAST WILL BE MY FUTURE. I AM FOREVER MARKED, MY DESTINY DETERMINED BECAUSE OF MY PAST.

MAYBE YOU HAVE HAD SIMILAR EXPERIENCES. TO SAY THEY ARE HEAVY AND DEMORALIZING MIGHT BE SOMETHING OF AN UNDERSTATEMENT. AS I TYPE THESE WORDS, OTHER VOICES ARE JOINING TO FORM A CHORUS, A CHORUS WHICH SAYS I SHOULD JUST STOP NOW AND FIGURE OUT HOW TO SELL INSURANCE. I WILL NEVER AMOUNT TO ANYTHING OR ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING IN MY PRESENT ROLE. AT POINTS, I AM TEMPTED TO SHUT OFF THE COMPUTER AND HEED THEIR CALL. HOWEVER, I AM YET TO YIELD. I DO NOT YIELD BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN MYSELF (SELF-CONFIDENCE) OR BECAUSE I THINK THEY LIE (DENIAL). I AM YET TO YIELD BECAUSE I KNOW THAT IN SPITE OF MY PAST, MY FUTURE REMAINS WIDE OPEN. THIS IS THE REALITY THE RESURRECTION HAS MADE POSSIBLE FOR ME AND FOR YOU. YES, WE FAIL. WE BLOW IT AND BLOW UP. HOWEVER, OUR PAST DOES NOT DETERMINE OUR FUTURE. RESURRECTION LIFE IS A LIFE OF NEW BEGINNINGS. RESURRECTION LIFE IS A LIFE WHERE GOD COMES TO US AND CALLS OUT OUR FAILINGS, NOT TO SHAME US BUT TO RESTORE US. IT HURTS TO ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT HAS HAPPENED, BUT WHEN WE ALLOW GOD TO TOUCH THESE EXPERIENCES, HE GENTLY RESTORES THEM. HE OFFERS FORGIVENESS AND LOVE IN PLACE OF OUR BROKENNESS AND SHAME. WITH FORGIVENESS AND LOVE IN HAND, WE FIND OURSELVES FACING A NEW BEGINNING. YES, WE BLEW IT, BUT WE CAN START AGAIN. YES, WE BLEW UP, BUT WE CAN START OVER IN A WAY THAT IS NOT DEFINED BY OUR PAST. SO, I AM YET TO YIELD. MAYBE I DID BLOW IT. ON MY WORST DAYS I THINK THIS IS TRUE, BUT EVEN IF I DID, THE FUTURE IS NOT BLEAK. MAYBE THE VOICE I HEAR IS NOT ACCUSATORY BUT GOD'S OWN VOICE INVITING ME TO ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT WAS SO HE MAY OFFER HIS LOVE AND FORGIVENESS SO THAT I MIGHT BEGIN ONCE MORE.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

EVERY ONE OF US HAS BLOWN IT. WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING WE ARE NOT PROUD OF, SOMETHING WE DON'T WANT ANYONE TO KNOW,

SOMETHING THAT WON'T BE FOUND ON ANY OF OUR RESUMÉS. WE DON'T WANT ANYONE TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED, WHAT WE DID BECAUSE IF THEY DID THEY MIGHT NOT JUST FEEL DIFFERENTLY ABOUT US. THEY MIGHT FIND US DISQUALIFIED IN SOME WAY FROM FRIENDSHIP, OUR JOB, MAYBE LIFE ITSELF. THE TROUBLE IS, EVEN IF NO ONE ELSE KNOWS, WE KNOW. KNOWING IS TERRIBLE BECAUSE OUR KNOWLEDGE MAKES US FEEL DISQUALIFIED. WE LIVE WITH DOUBT AND REGRET, A DEEP SENSE OF SHAME THAT WE ARE FOREVER MARKED BY WHAT WE HAVE DONE, OUR PRESENT AND FUTURE SOMEHOW SHAPED BY OUR PAST. IN SOME WAYS THIS IS TRUE BECAUSE WE BELIEVE IT IS TRUE AND THUS LIVE OUT THIS REALITY, BUT IF WE ARE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST AND LIVE THIS WAY, WE HAVE BELIEVED A LIE.

AS A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST, WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN RESURRECTION LIFE, A LIFE WHICH IS AVAILABLE TO US NOW, NOT JUST ONE DAY WHEN WE DIE. THIS LIFE FREES US FROM THE FAILINGS OF OUR PAST BY GRANTING US NEW BEGINNINGS. AT THE HEART OF RESURRECTION LIFE IS THE FLOWERING OF SOMETHING NEW. THE OLD HAS GONE AND THE NEW HAS BURST FORTH. SO TOO, OUR PRESENT LIVES MIGHT MIRROR THIS REALITY. WE MAY HAVE FALLEN, BLOWN UP OR BLOWN IT IN SOME WAY, BUT THIS CAN PASS AWAY AND WE CAN START ANEW. THIS IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE GOD FREES US FROM OUR PAST FAILINGS WITH HIS LOVE AND FORGIVENESS. HE MEETS US WHERE WE HAVE FAILED AND OFFERS US HIS LOVE AND RESTORATION. WHEN WE ACCEPT THESE FROM HIM, WE FIND OURSELVES FACING A FRESH START, A NEW JOURNEY WHICH NEED NOT BE SHAPED BY OUR PAST FAILINGS.

IF YOU FIND THAT THERE ARE ISSUES OR EXPERIENCES FROM YOUR PAST WEIGHING DOWN YOUR PRESENT AND FUTURE, IT REALLY IS POSSIBLE TO MOVE FORWARD. THIS IS THE REALITY OF HAVING RESURRECTION LIFE. THIS REALITY CAN FIND ITS WAY INTO OUR LIVES ONLY WHEN WE BEGIN TO ALLOW GOD TO TOUCH WHAT WAS. THIS IS OFTEN A PAINFUL EXPERIENCE, BECAUSE WE WOULD RATHER NOT REMEMBER. WHEN GOD TOUCHES WHAT WAS, HE OFTEN PULLS IT ALL OUT INTO THE LIGHT SO THAT WE SEE IT FOR WHAT IT REALLY IS AND WAS. HOWEVER, GOD'S INTENTION IS NOT TO SHAME BUT TO HEAL. ALL THAT WAS MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED SO THAT IT ALL MIGHT BE DEALT WITH BY GOD. OFTEN A FIRST STEP WITH THIS INVOLVES SOMETHING LIKE CONFESSION. CONFESSION CAN BE MADE DIRECTLY TO GOD BUT IT CAN ALSO INVOLVE A FELLOW CHILD OF GOD. MANY PEOPLE FIND THE LATER MORE HELPFUL BECAUSE THE PERSON OF GOD BECOMES THE WELCOMING FACE AND PRESENCE OF GOD AS WHAT WAS IS BROUGHT FORTH. A SAFE PLACE TO TAKE THIS STEP CAN BE FOUND IN MINISTRIES LIKE ReGen OR WITH MEMBERS OF OUR STAFF, DEACONS, OR ELDERS.



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