



# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

JULY 29, 2018

## Discussion Guide

### HARDWIRED TO CONNECT

#### 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 EVER FEEL ALONE? WHEN, IF EVER, DO YOU FEEL MOST ALONE? WHAT IS IT LIKE TO FEEL ALONE?

#### 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, THE REALITIES OF BEING CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE.
- READ GENESIS 1.1-2.3 ALOUD.
- AS YOU READ THIS BEAUTIFUL HYMN CELEBRATING GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITY, WHAT PATTERNS OR THEMES, IF ANY, POP OR STAND OUT? WHAT SIGNIFICANCE, IF ANY MIGHT THESE PATTERNS/THEMES HAVE IN GOD'S CREATIVE PURPOSES?

- READ GENESIS 1.26-27.
- DESCRIBE HOW GOD CREATED PEOPLE AND WHAT PURPOSES THIS MIGHT HOLD FOR PEOPLE.
- READ GENESIS 2.15-25 ALOUD.
- WHAT, IF ANYTHING, ABOUT GOD'S PURPOSES FOR PEOPLE FROM GENESIS 1 STAND OUT IN THESE VERSES?
- WHAT, IF ANYTHING, DO THESE VERSES SAY AS TO HOW PEOPLE ARE MEANT TO LIVE AND WHY?
- DO MOST PEOPLE EXPERIENCE LIFE IN THESE WAYS? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF LIVING IN THIS MANNER?
- DO YOU THINK PEOPLE BELIEVE HAVE AN ANSWER TO HOW THEY MIGHT EXPERIENCE LIFE IN A WAY THAT MORE CLOSELY MIRRORS GOD'S ORIGINAL INTENTIONS?
- IF A PATH TOWARD EXPERIENCING LIFE AS GOD INTENDED IT EXISTED, WOULD YOU TAKE IT? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- CONSIDER TAKING SOME TIME TO CONSIDER HOW YOU PERSONALLY EXPERIENCE LIFE. IS IT IN KEEPING WITH THE WAY GENESIS 1-2 DESCRIBE IT? WOULD YOU LIKE THIS TO BE THE CASE? DISCUSS YOUR ANSWERS AS A GROUP AND TAKE TIME TO PRAY FOR OPENNESS TO WHAT GOD MIGHT HAVE TO SAY IN THE COMING DAYS AS TO THE WAY HE INTENDS LIFE TO BE LIVED.

### CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND COMMENTARY

#### IMAGE OF GOD

IN THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF CREATION, HUMANITY STANDS APART FROM THE REST OF CREATION BECAUSE PEOPLE ALONE ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD (GENESIS 1.26-27; 5.1-3; 9.6). ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE, ALL OTHER CREATURES BEAR

THEIR OWN DISTINCTIVE, GOD-INTENDED DESIGN, BUT THEY ARE CREATED ACCORDING TO THIS DESIGN AND NOT IN GOD'S IMAGE (GENESIS 1.21, 24, 25). THIS DISTINCTION BETWEEN GOD'S CREATIVE INTENTIONS FOR PEOPLE AND ALL OTHER CREATURES INDICATES THE SUPREME ROLE HUMANITY FILLS IN GOD'S CREATIVE PURPOSES, BUT ONE MUST SEEK TO UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSES TO WHICH THIS ROLE POINTS HUMANITY TOWARD.

IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE WORD TRANSLATED "IMAGE" MIGHT ALSO BE TRANSLATED AS "IDOL." THIS POINT IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT ALLOWS SOME INSIGHT INTO GOD'S CREATIVE PURPOSES FOR HUMANITY. IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, IDOLS WERE UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE PHYSICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF DEITIES UPON EARTH. THESE IDOLS WERE BELIEVED TO CONTAIN THE SPIRIT OF A DEITY BUT WERE THEMSELVES DISTINCT FROM THE DEITY, A BEING MEANT TO PORTRAY THE CHARACTER, POWER, AND LIFE OF THE DEITY TO HUMANITY. IDOLS WERE UNDERSTOOD TO EXIST IN PSYCHOSOMATIC UNITY; THAT IS, THEY WERE COMPLETE IN AND OF THEMSELVES. THEY WERE THEOMORPHIC; THAT IS, THEY EXPRESSED THE DEITY BUT WERE NOT EXACT FACSIMILES. FINALLY, IDOLS EXISTED TO PORTRAY THE LIFE OF THE GOD, SO OTHERS MIGHT EXPERIENCE THE DEITY'S PRESENCE AND PERSON.

CONSIDERING THIS ANCIENT UNDERSTANDING OF IDOLS, THE COMMON PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE WORLD IN WHICH THIS TEXT WAS WRITTEN, WE GAIN SOME POTENTIAL UNDERSTANDING INTO GOD'S CREATIVE PURPOSES FOR PEOPLE. IF PEOPLE ARE GOD'S "IDOLS," THEN PEOPLE SHOULD EXIST IN PSYCHOSOMATIC UNITY; THAT IS, LIKE GOD, THEY SHOULD HAVE A DISTINCT PERSONHOOD WITH THE ABILITY TO REASON AND ACT ON THEIR OWN POWER. SECOND, PEOPLE SHOULD BE THEOMORPHIC, EXISTING TO EXPRESS LIKENESS OF GOD BUT NOT TO FUNCTION IN GOD'S PLACE AS GOD. FINALLY, PEOPLE SHOULD EXIST TO PORTRAY THE LIFE, CHARACTER, AND POWER OF GOD TO THE REST OF CREATION SO THAT ALL OF CREATION MIGHT KNOW WHO GOD IS. WHETHER THESE ARE CORRECT UNDERSTANDINGS REQUIRE SUPPORT FROM THE BIBLICAL TEXT.

THAT PEOPLE EXIST IN PSYCHOSOMATIC UNITY IS READILY FOUND IN THE CREATION ACCOUNT. ADAM IS GIVEN THE TASK OF NAMING THE ANIMALS; THAT IS, ADAM HAS THE ABILITY TO REASON, THINK, AND MAKE DECISIONS ON HIS OWN AS A UNIQUE PERSON (GENESIS 2.19-20). FURTHER, ADAM AND EVE ARE PORTRAYED AS BEINGS WHICH HAVE A DISTINCT IDENTITY SEPARATE FROM GOD, CAPABLE OF MAKING DECISIONS (EVEN BAD ONES!) ON THEIR OWN ACCORD (GENESIS 3.4-7). SECOND, ADAM AND EVE ARE THEOMORPHIC. THEY ARE MEANT TO REPRESENT GOD BUT NOT TO REPLACE HIM. GOD HIMSELF NOTES THAT HIS PURPOSE FOR CREATING PEOPLE IS TO MAKE SOMETHING WHICH BEARS HIS "LIKENESS," A TERM WHICH SPEAKS TO SIMILARITY BUT NOT DIRECT REPRODUCTION (GENESIS 1.26; 5.1-2). FINALLY, THE TEXT INDICATES PEOPLE ARE CREATED FOR THE PURPOSE OF EXTENDING THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF GOD TO THE REST OF CREATION. SCRIPTURE EXPLICITLY INDICATES THAT PEOPLE BEAR THE IMAGE OF GOD FOR THE EXPRESS PURPOSE

OF RULING (LIKE GOD) OVER CREATION AND IMPLICITLY POINTS TO A MODELING OF GOD'S LIFE IN THE EXPERIENCE OF A COMMUNITY OF PLURALITY EXISTING IN UNITY (GENESIS 1.26-27; 2.18, 23-25). WHILE HUMANITY HAS FALLEN FROM ITS ORIGINAL CREATED POSITION BY CHOOSING TO FUNCTION INDEPENDENT OF GOD (GENESIS 3.4-7), PEOPLE HAVE NOT LOST THE IMAGE OF GOD WHICH THEY WERE CREATED TO BEAR (GENESIS 5.1; 9.6). WHILE GOD INDICATED THE CARRYING OUT OF ONE'S CREATIVE INTENTIONS ARE MADE MORE DIFFICULT BY THE FALL (GENESIS 3.17-19), IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO DO SO. IN CHRIST, WE SEE WHAT FUNCTIONING AS A BEARER OF GOD'S IMAGE LOOKS LIKE (2 CORINTHIANS 4.4; COLOSSIANS 1.15), AND IN HIM THIS IMAGE-BEARING PURPOSE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF BEING REDEEMED, FOR IN HIM PEOPLE ONCE MORE MIGHT REPRESENT GOD IN THEIR RULING (1 PETER 2.9) AND IN THEIR SPEAKING AND ACTING (1 CORINTHIANS 12; 1 PETER 4.10). HOWEVER, THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S CREATIVE INTENTIONS FOR PEOPLE AS HIS IMAGE-BEARERS IS NOT FULLY RESTORED UNTIL PEOPLE STAND BEFORE CHRIST AND ARE FULLY TRANSFORMED INTO HIS LIKENESS AS WAS GOD'S ORIGINAL INTENTION (1 JOHN 3.1-3).

## THE TEXT

### GENESIS 1-3: *HARDWIRED TO CONNECT*

THE STORY OF GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITY IN GENESIS FORMS THE BASIS FOR UNDERSTANDING LIFE AS WELL AS POINTING TO THE CORE IDENTITY AND PURPOSE OF PEOPLE. THE BIBLICAL CREATION ACCOUNT FALLS INTO TWO PARTS: A HYMN CELEBRATING GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITY (GENESIS 1.1-2.3) AND A MORE DETAILED ACCOUNT EXPLAINING GOD'S PURPOSES FOR PEOPLE AND THE REASON WHY PEOPLE DO NOT NOW EXPERIENCE THE FULLNESS OF THESE PURPOSES (GENESIS 2.4-3.24). THE CELEBRATORY HYMN HAS STROPHES SET OFF BY A COMMON REFRAIN, "THERE WAS EVENING AND THERE WAS MORNING. . ." (GENESIS 1.5, 8, 13, 19, 23). IN ANCIENT HYMNS, IT WAS NOT UNCOMMON TO HAVE A CHORUS WHICH SANG AN ANTIPHONAL REFRAIN. SUCH A REFRAIN APPEARS THROUGHOUT THIS HYMN, "AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD" (GENESIS 1.4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). THE POINT OF THIS HYMN IS NOT TO DESCRIBE "HOW" GOD CREATED BUT IS DIRECTED TO CELEBRATING THE REALITY THAT GOD STANDS BEHIND ALL OF CREATION, AND THAT HIS CREATIVE ACTIVITY HAD PURPOSE, DIRECTION, AND ORDER. THE SECOND PART OF THE CREATIVE ACCOUNT IS MORE DETAILED, BUT LIKE THE HYMN, IT DOES NOT REALLY EXPLAIN THE "HOW" OF GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITY. RATHER, THIS ACCOUNT DEALS MORE WITH THE PURPOSES OF HUMANITY, SEEKING TO PROVIDE DIRECTION FOR LIFE AS IT IS MEANT TO BE LIVED, ACCOUNTING FOR WHY LIFE AS IT IS EXPERIENCED MISSES THIS MARK.

IN THE CELEBRATORY HYMN, GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITY REACHES ITS CLIMAX WHEN HE CHOOSES TO MAKE PEOPLE IN HIS IMAGE. THE WORD CHOSEN FOR "IMAGE" IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IS THE WORD "IDOL." THE CHOICE TO USE THIS WORD IS NOT ACCIDENTAL BUT RATHER THE AUTHOR HAS INTENTIONALLY CHOSEN IT TO COMMUNICATE

THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE TO A WORLD FAMILIAR WITH IDOLS. IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, IDOLS EXISTED AS THEOMORPHIC BEINGS, EXISTING IN PSYCHOSOMATIC UNITY FOR THE EXPRESS PURPOSE OF EXTENDING THE PRESENCE, POWER, AND CHARACTER OF THE REPRESENTED DEITY. SIMPLY PUT, IDOLS WERE MEANT TO LOOK LIKE A GOD BUT NOT BE A GOD (THEOMORPHIC), AND THEY WERE CAPABLE OF EXISTING AS THEIR OWN SEPARATE BEING APART FROM THE DEITY SO THE DEITY COULD EXTEND HIS PRESENCE, POWER, AND CHARACTER THROUGH THEM. THEREFORE, IN CREATING PEOPLE AS HIS "IDOLS," GOD HAS CHOSEN TO CREATE BEINGS WHICH EXIST APART FROM HIM, BEINGS CAPABLE OF REASONING AND DECISION MAKING. THESE BEINGS ARE MEANT TO RESEMBLE HIM BUT NOT REPLACE HIM. INSTEAD, THESE BEINGS ARE INTENDED TO EXTEND THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE, POWER, AND CHARACTER TO THE REST OF CREATION AS THEY FILL THE EARTH.

BECAUSE THESE ARE THE COMPONENT REALITIES OF EXISTING AS AN IDOL, IT IS NOT SURPRISING TO READ THAT GOD CREATED PEOPLE IN HIS IMAGE SO THAT THEY MIGHT RULE, EXTENDING THE REIGN OF GOD THROUGHOUT CREATION (GENESIS 1.26, 28). BY RULING, PEOPLE ARE FULFILLING THEIR ROLE OF EXTENDING THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF GOD. HOWEVER, THERE IS AN ALLUSION TO MORE THAN PEOPLE EXTENDING THE RULE OF GOD IN THIS BEAUTIFUL HYMN. THE AUTHOR NOTES THAT IN HIS CREATING OF PEOPLE, GOD MADE THEM AS MALE AND FEMALE. THIS ALLUSION CAN POINT TO A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT REALITIES, SUCH AS DIVERSITY OR PLURALITY WHICH BECOMES A UNITY, BUT ALL THESE REALITIES POINT BACK TO GOD'S CHARACTER OR IDENTITY.

THIS ALLUSION TO PEOPLE SERVING A ROLE OF REVEALING GOD'S CHARACTER OR IDENTITY IS EXPANDED IN THE SECOND CREATION ACCOUNT. THERE, GOD CREATES A GARDEN AND PLACES THE MAN WITHIN IT, BUT HE NOTES THAT THE MAN IS ALONE AND THIS IS NOT GOOD (GENESIS 2.18). THIS STATEMENT IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT ECHOES THE CHORUS FROM THE HYMN THUS TYING THE TWO TOGETHER. SOMETHING ABOUT THE MAN'S ALONENESS DOES NOT FIT WITH GOD'S CREATIVE PURPOSES FOR MAN IN HIS ROLE AS AN "IDOL" OF GOD. THE MAN NEEDS A SUITABLE HELPER, SOMETHING TO COME ALONGSIDE HIM TO BE WITH HIM, A DISTINCT BEING TO BE WITH BUT NOT BE THE SAME AS THE MAN. GOD CREATES THE ANIMALS BUT THEY ARE NOT SUITABLE HELPERS. THEY ARE NOT LIKE THE MAN. THEREFORE, GOD PUTS THE MAN TO SLEEP AND TAKES A PART OF HIM AND FASHIONS A WOMAN AND GIVES HER TO THE MAN AS THE SUITABLE HELPER HE NEEDS. ADAM SEES THE WOMAN AND RECOGNIZES WHAT GOD HAS DONE. HE HAS CREATED A BEING WHICH IS LIKE HIM BUT NOT THE SAME AS HIM. THE PURPOSE OF THIS BEING IS TO BE WITH THE MAN AND TO BECOME ONE WITH THE MAN THEREBY CREATING THE EXPERIENCE OF A PLURALITY OF PERSONS WHICH FORM A UNITY OF BEING. AS ONE WHO IS THEOMORPHIC (LIKE GOD) AND MEANT TO REPRESENT THE CHARACTER AND LIFE OF GOD, WE NOW SEE THROUGH THIS RELATIONSHIP THE NATURE OF GOD. GOD IS SEEKING

TO PORTRAY TO CREATION THAT HE EXISTS AS A PLURALITY OF PERSONS WHO LIVE IN A UNITY OF BEING. WE CALL THIS THE WAY OF BEING THE TRINITY. WHILE OTHER ASPECTS OF GOD'S CREATIVE INTENTIONS FOR PEOPLE MIGHT BE DRAWN FROM OTHER PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE, THE CREATIVE ACCOUNTS PLACE THE PURPOSES OF RULING AND EXISTING IN A RELATIONSHIP WHICH INCLUDES A PLURALITY OF PERSONS WHO EXIST IN A UNITY OF BEING AS THE FOREMOST. SIMPLY PUT, GOD SEEMS TO BE INTERESTED IN USING PEOPLE TO SHOW CREATION WHO HE IS (SOVEREIGN RULER) AND THE ESSENCE OF HIS LIFE. PEOPLE FULFILL THEIR CREATIVE PURPOSE WHEN THEY USE THEIR POWER TO RULE IN A WAY THAT POINTS TO GOD AND EXIST WITH ONE ANOTHER IN A WAY THAT DEMONSTRATES WHO GOD IS.

THE TRAGEDY OF LIFE IS THAT PEOPLE MISS BOTH OF THESE PURPOSES. PEOPLE WERE DECEIVED BY A SERPENT INTO BELIEVING THAT THEY DID NOT NEED TO BE THEOMORPHIC BEINGS (IDOLS WHO ARE LIKE GOD BUT NOT GOD). THEY COULD BE GODS, A REPRODUCTION OF HIS BEING NOT A LIKENESS OF HIS BEING (GENESIS 3.4-7). IN CHOOSING TO BE GODS, PEOPLE REJECTED THEIR ROLE AS THOSE CREATED TO REPRESENT GOD (THE PURPOSE OF AN IDOL). IN SO DOING, PEOPLE CREATED A CONTEXT WHERE LIVING OUT THEIR CREATIVE PURPOSE WAS MORE DIFFICULT (GENESIS 3.17-19). THE FRUIT OF THIS APPEARS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MAN AND THE WOMAN. IN THIS RELATIONSHIP, THE MAN AND THE WOMAN WOULD NOW USE THEIR POWER TO SEEK TO CONTROL ONE ANOTHER RATHER THAN SUBDUING CREATION (GENESIS 3.16). AS THEY SOUGHT TO DOMINATE ONE ANOTHER, THE INTENDED RELATIONSHIP OF A PLURALITY OF PERSONS EXISTING IN A UNITY OF BEING IS AT BEST MARRED, AND AT WORST LOST.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE NEW TESTAMENT FOCUSES ON THESE TWO CREATIVE PURPOSES FOR PEOPLE AND THEIR RESTORATION. PASSAGES LIKE 1 PETER 2.9 AND REVELATION 22.5 POINT TO THE RESTORATION OF THE RULING ROLE OF PEOPLE. THROUGHOUT THE MINISTRY OF JESUS, THE RESTORATION OF THE INTENDED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE IS ALLUDED TO (MARK 3.13-19, 33-35; MATTHEW 18.20; EPHESIANS 2.14-16). WHILE THE DISOBEDIENCE OF PEOPLE LED TO THE MARRING OF GOD'S IMAGE, IT IS NOT LOST (GENESIS 5.1; 9.6), AND THROUGH CHRIST IT CAN AND WILL BE RESTORED.

## **REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:**

WHAT FRIGHTENS US THE MOST? SPIDERS? HEIGHTS? CLOWNS? CLOSED SPACES? MANY THINGS IN LIFE FRIGHTENS US, BUT PERHAPS NOTHING FRIGHTENS US AS MUCH AS THE THOUGHT OF BEING ALONE. WE DON'T LIKE BEING ALONE. WE DON'T REALLY KNOW WHY, BUT FOR SOME REASON, JUST THE THOUGHT OF BEING ALONE SHAKES US TO THE CORE. WE ARE AFRAID NO ONE WILL LIKE US. WE ARE AFRAID OUR FRIENDS WILL LEAVE US. WE ARE AFRAID OUR LOVED ONES WILL DIE BEFORE US. WE ARE AFRAID OUR CHILDREN WON'T CARE FOR US. THESE ARE ALL JUST EXPRESSIONS OF A SINGLE FEAR, THE FEAR OF BEING ALONE. SO, WE MOVE THROUGH LIFE DOING OUR BEST NOT TO FEEL LONELY. WE

TURN ALL THE LIGHTS ON AND TURN UP THE TELEVISION WHEN NO ONE ELSE IS AROUND TO DROWN OUT THE FEELINGS OF LONELINESS. WE SCROLL THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA FEEDS "LIKING" POSTS AND CHECKING TO SEE IF OTHERS HAVE "LIKED" OUR POSTS, TRYING TO NOT FEEL ALONE. WE WILL HEAD OUT AND WALK THE MALL OR ATTEND A PUBLIC EVENT, JUST SO WE CAN AVOID THE CRUSHING FEELING OF LONELINESS, BUT NONE OF THIS IS WORKING. WE ARE A LONELY BUNCH. THE MOST LONELY OF US ALL ARE THOSE WE CALL GENERATION Z (18-24 YEAR-OLDS), SUPPOSEDLY THE MOST CONNECTED OF ALL OF US. WHAT MANY OF US KNOW BUT CAN'T QUITE PUT WORDS TO IS THE TRUTH THAT OUR LONELINESS IS KILLING US, SLOWLY. BEING LONELY SLOWLY AND SURELY STRANGLES THE LIFE OUT OF US, SHORTENING OUR LIVES AND FILLING THE YEARS WE DO LIVE WITH AN ASSORTMENT OF PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL AILMENTS. WHAT WE'RE DISCOVERING IS NO AMOUNT OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTION, PUBLIC EVENT ATTENDANCE, OR "CHATTING" BY TEXT MAKES US FEEL ANY LESS ALONE. THE ONLY THING THAT WORKS IS BEING FACE TO FACE WITH PEOPLE. ONLY WHEN WE LOOK PEOPLE IN THE EYE, AND THEY RETURN OUR GAZE DO WE FEEL WE ARE NO LONGER ALONE.

NONE OF THIS SHOULD SURPRISE US AS PEOPLE OF FAITH. WE CONFESS THAT WE WERE CREATED TO "BE WITH" ONE ANOTHER, TO LIVE IN RELATIONSHIPS WHERE DIFFERENT PEOPLE CONNECT IN SUCH DEEP INTIMACY THAT WE EXPERIENCE A ONENESS OF BEING EVEN AS WE RETAIN THE DISTINCTNESS OF OUR PERSONHOOD. WE ALSO KNOW THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE FALLS FAR SHORT OF THIS EXPERIENCE BECAUSE WE CHOSE TO GO OUR OWN WAY, LIVING ON OUR OWN TERMS WHICH HAVE TAKEN US FAR FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE GOD INTENDED FOR US. WE KNOW THIS. I KNOW THIS. WHAT AMAZES ME IS THAT IN KNOWING THIS, I DO NOTHING TO ADDRESS IT. I KNOW GOD CREATED ME TO BE WITH OTHERS. I CONFESS IT IS PART OF MY CREATED IDENTITY AS ONE WHO BEARS THE IMAGE OF GOD. I STATE I BELIEVE LIFE WAS MEANT TO BE LIVED WITH OTHERS AS A MEANS OF SHOWING AND EXPERIENCING THE BEAUTIFUL LIFE OF GOD, AND YET, I DO NOTHING TO STEP TOWARD THIS LIFE. I AM NOT IGNORANT OF THE ABNORMALITY OF LONELINESS AND YET I WILLFULLY LIVE IN THIS ABNORMALITY. I DRAW BACK. I HIDE. I RUN AWAY. I AM LONELY AND DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO STAY THAT WAY.

WHY IS THIS? CERTAINLY, IT MAKES NO SENSE THEOLOGICALLY OR PRACTICALLY, AND YET IT IS MY EXPERIENCE AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SO MANY OTHERS. I THINK THIS IS THE EXPERIENCE OF SO MANY OF US BECAUSE WE CAN'T SEEM TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO CONNECT. WE LONG TO CONNECT. WE ARE HARD-WIRED TO CONNECT. THIS IS WHY LIFE FEELS AND IS SO BROKEN WHEN WE ARE NOT CONNECTING WITH OTHERS. WE JUST DON'T SEE A WAY TO EXPERIENCE THIS LIFE. WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO DRAW NEAR TO OTHERS OR IN WHAT CONTEXT THAT CONNECTING MIGHT BE POSSIBLE. SO, WE STAY LONELY, AND IT IS KILLING US. BUT I AM WONDERING IF THERE REALLY IS NO WAY TO CONNECT, NO PLACE OR CONTEXT. AS I READ THE NEW TESTAMENT, OVER AND OVER AGAIN, I SEE REFERENCES TO CONNECTION, A CONNECTION BETWEEN PEOPLE

MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE WORK OF CHRIST IN AND WITH A PEOPLE CALLED THE CHURCH. SO, MAYBE, JUST MAYBE IT IS POSSIBLE TO NO LONGER BE LONELY BUT TO DISCOVER THAT POSSIBILITY I MUST TURN AND LEAN INTO THIS THING CALLED "CHURCH."

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WE ARE LONELY PEOPLE. THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE IN AMERICA TODAY REPORT FEELING LONELY, AND IT IS KILLING US. LITERALLY. THE QUESTION IS NOT WHETHER WE ARE LONELY BUT WHAT WE ARE TO DO ABOUT IT. OUR MODERN CULTURE HAS INVENTED SOCIAL MEDIA AS ONE ANSWER, BUT MANY STUDIES REPORT THAT SOCIAL MEDIA ONLY FURTHERS OUR ISOLATION AND HEIGHTENS OUR SENSE OF BEING ALONE. THE ONLY THING WHICH SEEMS TO MAKE US FEEL LESS LONELY IS BEING FACE-TO-FACE WITH ANOTHER, AND THAT IS THE PROBLEM. WE DON'T REALLY KNOW HOW TO DO THAT. WE CAN'T IDEALIZE A GOLDEN AGE WHEN THIS WAS EASY OR BETTER. THE TRUTH IS, BEING FACE-TO-FACE WITH PEOPLE HAS ALWAYS BEEN DIFFICULT. PEOPLE ARE DIFFICULT, AND YET IT IS THESE DIFFICULT PEOPLE WE NEED AND LONG FOR THE MOST. BUT WE PINE AWAY IN LONELINESS BECAUSE WE DON'T REALLY KNOW HOW TO CONNECT. DOES IT REALLY HAVE TO BE THIS WAY? CHRIST CAME TO REDEEM OUR LIVES. THIS DOESN'T JUST MEAN HE CAME TO TAKE US TO HEAVEN ONE DAY WHEN WE DIE. IT MEANS HE CAME TO LEAD US TO THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE AS IT WAS ALWAYS MEANT TO BE LIVED, AND THIS INCLUDES ADDRESSING OUR LONELINESS. THROUGHOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT, WE SEE THAT A PATH HAS BEEN MADE TO EXPERIENCE PEOPLE IN A WAY WHICH ADDRESSES OUR LONELINESS, AND THAT PATH IS FOUND AMONG A PEOPLE WE CALL THE CHURCH. MAYBE CHURCH SCARES YOU. MAYBE CHURCH PEOPLE SCARE YOU. THEY SCARE ME TOO, AND I AM A PASTOR! BUT BEFORE WE RUN SCREAMING FOR THE HILLS, WHAT IF WE PAUSED AND CONSIDERED THAT MAYBE, JUST MAYBE THERE WAS SOMETHING IN THE CHURCH WHICH MIGHT ADDRESS OUR LONELINESS. IF THAT WAS SO, WOULD IT NOT BE WORTH LEANING INTO THAT SOMETHING? THIS WEEK, I ENCOURAGE YOU TO TAKE SOME TIME TO CONSIDER YOUR OWN FEELINGS OF LONELINESS. THIS MAY TAKE MORE THAN A CURSORY EXAMINATION. TAKE SOME TIME TO LOOK INSIDE AND ASK QUESTIONS LIKE, DO I FEEL ALONE? WHEN DO I FEEL ALONE? WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO BE ALONE? WHAT DO I DO WHEN I FEEL ALONE? DO THESE THINGS REALLY ADDRESS MY LONELINESS? AS YOU PONDER THESE QUESTIONS, CONSIDER JOTTING DOWN SOME OF YOUR ANSWERS SO THAT YOU MIGHT FURTHER CONSIDER THEM THROUGHOUT THE WEEK. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER HOLDING SOME OF THEM BEFORE GOD, ASKING HIM TO SPEAK AND LEAD AS YOU LEAN INTO YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE OF LONELINESS.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP