



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

DECEMBER 16, 2018

Discussion Guide

HEARING LEADS TO JOY

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 AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING SAYING: STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES, BUT WORDS WILL NEVER HURT ME? 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.)

- WORDS HAVE POWER, THE POWER TO CREATE OR DESTROY. TAKE SOME TIME AND TALK ABOUT THE VARIOUS VOICES WHICH FILL YOUR WORLD, AND THE POWER THEY HAVE IN YOUR LIFE.
- TAKE SOME TIME TO DISCUSS THE BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH.

- WHAT KINDS OF MESSAGES (WORDS) WOULD HAVE FILLED THE EARS OF THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH DURING THE TIME OF ZEPHANIAH? SEE 2 KINGS 21-23 FOR HELP.
- WHAT KIND OF EFFECT MIGHT THESE MESSAGES HAVE UPON THE PEOPLE?
- READ ZEPHANIAH 3.9-20, HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD. PAUSE AND READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.
- WHAT MESSAGES ARE CONTAINED IN THESE VERSES? IN WHAT WAYS ARE THEY LIKE OR UNLIKE THE MESSAGES WHICH THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH WOULD HAVE BEEN HEARING?
- WHAT EFFECT, IF ANY, MIGHT THESE WORDS HAVE UPON THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH?
- CONSIDER THE MESSAGES WHICH FILL YOUR LIFE AND THE EFFECTS THEY HAVE. ARE THESE SIMILAR OR DISSIMILAR TO THOSE MESSAGES WHICH THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH HEARD?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DO THE WORDS OF ZEPHANIAH SPEAK TO WHAT WE HEAR TODAY? WHAT EFFECT MIGHT THEY HAVE UPON THEM?
- WHAT KIND OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORDS OF GOD WOULD OPEN OUR LIVES IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY MIGHT AFFECT OUR LIVES? WHAT MIGHT THIS ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?
- DISCUSS WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE TO OPEN YOUR GROUP TO GOD'S WORDS IN THIS MANNER.
- YOU MIGHT CONSIDER CLOSING BY READING THE WORDS OF ZEPHANIAH 3.14-20 AS WORDS OF SENDING.

CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND COMMENTARY

THE PROPHECIES OF ZEPHANIAH

THE BOOKS OF PROPHECY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT CAN BE INTIMIDATING. THEY ARE FILLED WITH A MIXTURE OF HARSH REBUKES, SONGS OF LAMENT, STERN PROMISES OF JUDGMENT, GENTLE PLEAS FOR REPENTANCE, AND WONDERFUL PROMISES OF RESTORATION. MANY TIMES, THESE WORKS MOVE IN AND OUT OF THESE ELEMENTS WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE A SOMEWHAT HAPHAZARD MANNER. HOWEVER, THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS CAN PROVIDE A RICH AND MEANINGFUL SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND DIRECTION TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD IF THEY ARE READ PROPERLY.

READING THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS REMAINS A FUTILE ENDEAVOR INASMUCH AS WE READ THEM AS ISOLATED WORKS. HOWEVER, THE PROPHETS WERE REAL PEOPLE WHO SPOKE DURING REAL PERIODS OF TIME ABOUT REAL ISSUES. WHEN WE SEEK TO DISCOVER THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THESE PROPHETS SPOKE THEIR WORDS COME ALIVE AS THEIR CONTEXT PROVIDES ORDER AND STRUCTURE FOR UNDERSTANDING THEIR WORDS. THIS IS BECAUSE, CONTRARY TO POPULAR UNDERSTANDING, OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY WAS MORE ABOUT FORTHTELLING (SPEAKING TO PRESENT ISSUES) RATHER THAN FORETELLING (SPEAKING ABOUT THE FUTURE). WHILE MOST OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS SPOKE ABOUT THE FUTURE WORK OF GOD, THE BULK OF THEIR WORDS ADDRESSED THEIR PRESENT SITUATION AND SOUGHT TO LINK THEIR PRESENT TO GOD'S FUTURE.

ZEPHANIAH WAS A PROPHET DURING THE REIGN OF JOSIAH (640-609 B.C.), ONE OF THE LAST KINGS OF JUDAH. IT APPEARS HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE ROYAL FAMILY (ZEPHANIAH 1.1), THOUGH WE HAVE NO RECORD OF HIM OUTSIDE HIS PROPHECIES. THE REIGN OF JOSIAH WAS MARKED BY MUCH RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL REFORM CATALYZED BY THE DISCOVERY OF THE LONG LOST BOOK OF LAW, MOST LIKELY THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY (2 KINGS 22.3). MANASSEH, JOSIAH'S GRANDFATHER AND SON OF KING HEZEKIAH, HAD REIGNED FOR 55 YEARS AND DONE MUCH TO CORRUPT THE NATION OF JUDAH. HE BUILT PAGAN SHRINES THROUGHOUT THE LAND FOR THE CANAANITE AND ASSYRIAN GODS, INCLUDING IN THE TEMPLE. HE SACRIFICED HIS SON TO THE GOD MOLEK, AND PRACTICED DIVINATION AND SORcery (2 KINGS 21.6). FURTHER, HE KILLED MANY INNOCENT PEOPLE IN AN EFFORT TO SOLIDIFY HIS REIGN (2 KINGS 22.16). IN RESPONSE TO MANASSEH'S REIGN, GOD PROMISED TO COME AND DESTROY THE NATION OF JUDAH AS PUNISHMENT FOR THESE SINS (2 KINGS 21.11-15).

AFTER MANASSEH'S DEATH, HIS SON AMON REIGNED FOR TWO YEARS, BUT WAS ASSASSINATED BY SOME OF HIS OFFICIALS (2 KINGS 22.23). IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT JOSIAH, THE SON OF AMON, WAS MADE KING AS AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD BOY (2 KINGS 22.1). JOSIAH SOUGHT TO DO WHAT WAS RIGHT IN GOD'S SIGHT. WHEN HE WAS EIGHTEEN, HE BEGAN A PROJECT TO RENOVATE THE TEMPLE.

DURING THIS PROJECT, THE BOOK OF LAW WAS FOUND, MOST LIKELY THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY (2 KINGS 23.8). WHEN JOSIAH READ THE BOOK, HE REALIZED HOW FAR JUDAH HAD STRAYED FROM GOD'S INTENTIONS. THEREFORE, HE BEGAN A NATIONWIDE PROJECT TO RID THE LAND OF IDOLATRY AND TO RENEW THE COVENANT BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE (2 KINGS 22.11-23.27). HOWEVER, IN SPITE OF HIS EFFORTS, WHICH GOD PRAISED, THE COMING PUNISHMENT OF JUDAH COULD NOT BE AVOIDED (2 KINGS 22.18-20; 23.26-27). WITHIN 3 MONTHS OF JOSIAH'S DEATH, JUDAH BECAME A VASSAL STATE OF EGYPT (2 KINGS 23.31-35), AND IN 586 B.C. THE CITY OF JERUSALEM WAS DESTROYED BY KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR OF BABYLON.

ZEPHANIAH'S PROPHETIC MINISTRY WITHIN THE REIGN OF JOSIAH IS DIFFICULT TO DATE AS THE PROPHET NEVER PROVIDES A HISTORICAL MARKER TO HELP THE READER UNDERSTAND HIS IMMEDIATE CONTEXT. HOWEVER, A STRONG ARGUMENT CAN BE MADE FOR ZEPHANIAH'S MINISTRY BEING LOCATED DURING AND AFTER JOSIAH'S REFORMS. MUCH OF THE LANGUAGE IN THE BOOK HAS PARALLELS TO THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY LENDING WEIGHT TO ZEPHANIAH KNOWING OF THE BOOK AND ITS CONTENT. FURTHER, ZEPHANIAH SEEMS TO POINT TO THE EXISTENCE OF PRIESTS WHO KNOW THE LAW AND YET CHOOSE TO DISOBEY IT (ZEPHANIAH 3.4).

THE CENTRAL THEME FOR ZEPHANIAH IS THE DAY OF THE LORD, THE COMING DAY OF THE JUDGMENT OF GOD. ACCORDING TO ZEPHANIAH, THE DAY OF THE LORD WOULD BE AN UNPARALLELED EXPERIENCE, ONE WHICH WOULD ALMOST SWEEP AWAY THE ENTIRETY OF ALL LIFE (ZEPHANIAH 1.2-3). IT WAS TO BE A DAY ON WHICH JUDGMENT WOULD BE DEALT OUT STARTING WITH GOD'S PEOPLE (ZEPHANIAH 1.4-13; 3.1-2) AND EXTENDING TO OTHERS. ZEPHANIAH LISTS THOSE TO BE JUDGED AS THE PHILISTINES, MOABITES, AMONITES, CUSHITES, AND THE ASSYRIANS (ZEPHANIAH 2.4-15). WHILE THIS LIST ENCAPSULATES THE TRADITIONAL ENEMIES OF JUDAH, THEY REPRESENT THE FOUR POINTS OF THE COMPASS IMPLYING THAT GOD'S JUDGMENT WOULD START WITH HIS PEOPLE AND EXTEND IN ALL DIRECTIONS. ZEPHANIAH INDICATES GOD LONGS FOR HIS PEOPLE TO REPENT (ZEPHANIAH 2.1-3). HOWEVER, THE TRAJECTORY OF HIS PROPHECIES INDICATE THAT GOD UNDERSTANDS THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH WERE NOT LIKELY TO DO SO. HOWEVER, ZEPHANIAH MAKES IT CLEAR THAT GOD'S COMING JUDGMENT WAS A PURIFYING RATHER THAN PUNISHING EVENT. GOD DID NOT DESIRE TO PUNISH BUT TO CLEANSE HIS PEOPLE. HE WOULD LEAVE A REMNANT WHICH HE WOULD ONE DAY RESTORE AND SHOWER WITH HIS PRESENCE, HONOR, AND JOY (ZEPHANIAH 3.9-20).

WHEN PLACED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE LATTER PART OF JOSIAH'S REIGN, ZEPHANIAH'S PROPHECY COMES ALIVE WITH MEANING AND PURPOSE. AS A MEMBER OF THE ROYAL FAMILY, ZEPHANIAH HAD A FRONT ROW SEAT TO THE DAMAGE MANASSEH'S LEADERSHIP BROUGHT TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH. HE KNEW THE TRAJECTORY IT CREATED FOR GOD'S PEOPLE, ONE OF COMING JUDGMENT. HOWEVER, HE ALSO SAW

JOSIAH'S ATTEMPT TO REFORM AND REDIRECT GOD'S PEOPLE. WHILE A LAUDABLE EFFORT, THE EFFORTS OF JOSIAH WERE NOT ENOUGH TO TURN THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH FROM THEIR WICKEDNESS. THE EFFORTS OF MAN ARE NEVER ENOUGH TO BRING ABOUT A DEEP AND LASTING CHANGE. GOD DESIRED PEOPLE'S REPENTANCE, BUT THE DIRECTION OF PEOPLE AWAY FROM GOD WAS SO SET THAT ONLY GOD'S INTERVENTION COULD STOP IT, AND GOD WAS GOING TO INTERVENE. HIS INTERVENTION WAS NOT TO BE PUNITIVE BUT CORRECTIVE. GOD HAD GOOD PLANS FOR HIS PEOPLE, BUT THEY MUST FIRST UNDERGO A CLEANSING EXPERIENCE SO THAT THEY MIGHT LIVE WITH GOD AND EXPERIENCE THE DELIGHT OF HIS PRESENCE. ZEPHANIAH'S PROPHECY POINTS TO THE DOWNWARD TRAJECTORY OF MANKIND WHICH PAUL NOTES IN ROMANS 1 AND POINTS TO THE NECESSITY OF GOD'S INTERVENING ACTION TO STEM THIS MOVEMENT. THE DAY OF THE LORD IS NECESSARY AS NO HUMAN EFFORTS WILL EVER FULLY TURN PEOPLE BACK TO GOD. HOWEVER, ZEPHANIAH'S PROPHECY POINTS TO THE GOOD AND REDEMPTIVE CHARACTER OF GOD. THE DAY OF THE LORD, WHILE SEVERE, WAS MEANT FOR GOOD AND THE FUTURE JOY OF HIS PEOPLE. ZEPHANIAH'S EXPERIENCE HAS PARALLELS TO THE MODERN WORLD AND ITS TRAJECTORY, INCLUDING HUMAN EFFORTS AT REFORM, WHILE HIS WORDS ABOUT THE DAY OF THE LORD REMIND US OF THE NECESSITY AND GOODNESS OF GOD'S FUTURE INTERVENTION BROUGHT ABOUT THROUGH THE RETURN OF CHRIST.

THE TEXT

ZEPHANIAH 3.14-20: *A Joyous Future*

ZEPHANIAH'S PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD ARE FILLED WITH STARK REMINDERS OF THE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES OF A LIFE BENT AWAY FROM GOD AND HOW ONLY GOD CAN DEAL WITH SUCH BENTNESS. HOWEVER, ZEPHANIAH IS QUICK TO NOTE HOW THE TOPIC OF THE COMING JUDGMENT OF GOD IS NOT ONE OF DOOM AND GLOOM BUT ONE OF JOY. GOD'S COMING JUDGMENT WAS NOT MEANT TO CRUSH PEOPLE BUT TO PURIFY THEM (ZEPHANIAH 3.9), ENABLING THEM TO TURN TO GOD ONCE MORE, SOMETHING THEY COULD NOT DO ON THEIR OWN (ZEPHANIAH 3.10). GOD'S COMING JUDGMENT WAS INTENDED TO SET ASIDE A PEOPLE WHO WERE THE TRUE PEOPLE OF GOD, A REMNANT WHO WOULD EXPERIENCE A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (ZEPHANIAH 3.12).

BECAUSE GOD'S COMING JUDGMENT WAS INTENDED TO PURIFY RATHER THAN DESTROY, ZEPHANIAH ENDS HIS PROPHECY WITH A HYMN OF JOY (ZEPHANIAH 3.15-20). HE INTRODUCES THIS HYMN WITH AN INVITATION TO THOSE WHO HEARD HIM TO JOIN IN THE SONG, TO SHIFT THEIR PERSPECTIVE FROM GLOOM TO JOY (ZEPHANIAH 3.14). THIS IS AN INTERESTING EXHORTATION CONSIDERING THE PRESENT CONTEXT. JOSIAH'S REFORMS HAD FAILED. EVEN THE PRIESTS HAD TURNED AWAY, AND GOD HAD NOT CHANGED HIS MIND CONCERNING THE COMING DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM (ZEPHANIAH 3.4; 2 KINGS 22.18-20; 23.26-27). THESE WERE DARK

TIMES FILLED WITH BAD NEWS. SOME OF THIS BAD NEWS WAS COMING FROM ZEPHANIAH! HOWEVER, THE PROPHET CALLS ON THE PEOPLE TO REJOICE AND JOIN HIM IN A HYMN OF JOY. HIS REASONING IS FOUND IN THE HYMN ITSELF.

THE DAY OF THE LORD WAS COMING, BUT IT WAS NOT THE CATAclysmic END. THE DAY OF THE LORD WAS TO BE THE DOORWAY TO A WONDERFUL REBIRTH. IN THE FUTURE, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT WAS A DAY WHERE GOD AND HIS PEOPLE LIVED TOGETHER ONCE MORE. IN THIS SETTING, PEOPLE HAD NO REASON TO FEAR ADDITIONAL HARM (ZEPHANIAH 3.15). IN FACT, THE PARALYSIS OF FEAR WOULD DISSIPATE AS THE WARRIOR GOD SAVED HIS PEOPLE, EXPRESSING HIS GREAT DELIGHT IN THEM WITH SONG (ZEPHANIAH 3.16-17). THE DAY OF THE LORD WOULD PURIFY THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN A WAY JOSIAH DESIRED BUT WAS UNABLE, AND WOULD RESCUE THE PEOPLE FROM SORROW AND SUFFERING IN A WAY NO OTHER KING COULD (ZEPHANIAH 3.18-19). THE DAY OF THE LORD WOULD OPEN A PATH FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD TO COME HOME SO THEY MIGHT EXPERIENCE HONOR AND BLESSING ONCE MORE (ZEPHANIAH 3.20).

ZEPHANIAH AFFIRMS THE SEVERITY AND SURETY OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD, BUT HE REFRAMES THE EXPERIENCE FOR HIS PEOPLE. WHILE THE PRESENT WAS FILLED WITH DARKNESS AND BAD NEWS, THE FUTURE WAS GOOD. THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD WOULD DO WHAT NO PERSON, NOT EVEN THE GREAT JOSIAH WHO LOVED AND FOLLOWED GOD AS NO OTHER KING EVER HAD (2 KINGS 23.25). THE MESSAGE OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD WAS IN FACT A MESSAGE WHICH SHOULD INSPIRE JOY. GOD WAS COMING, AND HE WAS GOING TO RIGHT WHAT PEOPLE COULD NOT. THE MESSAGE OF THE DAY OF THE LORD WAS NOT ONE OF DOOM AND GLOOM BUT ONE OF HOPE AND JOY.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

WHY SHOULD I LISTEN TO GOD? SURE, I NEED TO LISTEN TO GOD BECAUSE HE HAS A WILL FOR MY LIFE, BUT LISTENING TO GOD IS ABOUT MORE THAN ASKING WHAT I SHOULD DO NEXT. GOD IS MORE THAN A GPS. LISTENING TO GOD IS ABOUT BEING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, MAKING ROOM FOR HIM IN WAYS WHICH GO BEYOND DIRECTIONS. SO, WHY SHOULD I LISTEN? WHY SHOULD I LISTEN TO HIS VOICE THROUGH OTHERS? WHY SHOULD I TAKE TIME TO LISTEN TO WHAT HE SAYS THROUGH SCRIPTURE? WHY SHOULD I TAKE TIME TO LISTEN AT ALL?

I AM COMING TO UNDERSTAND THAT I MUST LISTEN NOT BECAUSE OF WHAT GOD SAYS BUT BECAUSE OF WHAT GOD'S VOICE DOES. GOD'S VOICE TRANSFORMS ME. ACTUALLY, VOICES IN GENERAL TRANSFORM ME. THE VOICES WHICH FILL MY LIFE HAVE INCREDIBLE POWER, POWER TO TRANSFORM OR DEFORM ME, SHAPE ME FOR GOOD OR ILL. I SUPPOSE THE POWER OF THE VOICE SHOULD NOT SURPRISE ME. THE VOICE HAS THE POWER TO CREATE INHERENT WITHIN IT (GENESIS 1)!

EVERY DAY, I HEAR SO MANY VOICES, MANY OF THEM NEGATIVE. NEGATIVE VOICES HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT UPON ME. THEY FILL ME WITH SADNESS AND SORROW, BUT THEY ALSO LEAD ME TO DESPAIR

AND HOPELESSNESS. THEY LEAD ME TO A PLACE WHERE I WANT TO LIE DOWN AND GIVE UP. THIS IS THE POWER AND EFFECT THE VOICES IN OUR PRESENT WORLD HAVE UPON ME. I AM FINDING THAT THE EVER-DARKENING STORIES OF POLITICS, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND HUMAN SUFFERING FILL ME WITH A HEAVINESS AND FEAR WHICH IS HARD TO DESCRIBE. BUT THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING. THESE STORIES ARE NOW BEING FOLLOWED BY OTHERS WHICH SPEAK OF EFFORTS TO BRING CHANGE AND REFORM, EFFORTS WHICH SHOW PROMISE. . .AND THEN FAIL. IT MAKES ME WANT TO CRY. AS IF THESE WERE NOT ENOUGH, I AM HEARING A GROWING NUMBER OF VOICES OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE DE-CONVERTED, LEFT THE FAITH. THEIR VOICES TELL STORIES OF PAIN, SUFFERING, AND ABUSE. THEIR VOICES REMIND ME OF HOW DEEPLY FLAWED AND BROKEN THE CHURCH IS, STILL TODAY. AND I DO WEEP. THESE AND SO MANY VOICES FILL MY EARS, AND WHAT I NOTICE IS THEY SHAPE ME. THEY DARKEN MY MOOD. THEY MAKE ME SHORT. THEY BRING ABOUT A CYNICISM WHICH SPILLS OUT IN WAYS I AM JUST BEGINNING TO NOTICE.

IF THESE WERE THE ONLY VOICES I HEARD, I WOULD NOT BE LONG FOR THIS WORLD. I TRULY THINK I WOULD GIVE UP OR JUST BECOME A PERSON WHO COMPLETELY WITHDREW WERE THESE THE ONLY VOICES IN MY LIFE, BUT THEY ARE NOT. I HAVE ANOTHER VOICE IN MY LIFE, THE VOICE OF GOD. AS I LISTEN TO HIS VOICE, HIS VOICE UNDOES WHAT THE FORMER VOICES DO TO ME. HIS VOICE BRINGS LIFE. HIS VOICE GIVES ME HOPE. HIS VOICE GIVES ME STRENGTH TO PUT ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER. I HEAR VOICES CALL OUT THE ABUSE AND BROKENNESS OF THE CHURCH, AND I WANT TO GIVE UP ON THE CHURCH. HIS VOICE REMINDS ME THAT GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE STRAYED, BUT HE WILL BRING THEM BACK, AND I HAVE HOPE ONCE MORE FOR THE CHURCH. I HEAR VOICES SPEAK OF THE EVER-DEEPENING PROBLEMS WITH OUR ENVIRONMENT AND THE REPEATED FAILURES TO ADDRESS THEM, AND I GROW EXASPERATED WITH THE LACK OF FORESIGHT WHICH WILL AFFECT MY CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN. GOD'S VOICE SPEAKS AND TELLS ME OF A DAY WHEN ALL WILL BE MADE RIGHT, AND I AM SAD BUT CAN STEP OUTSIDE WITHOUT A SENSE OF EXASPERATION. I HEAR VOICES TELL ME OF POLITICAL INTRIGUE THE LIKES OF WHICH I CAN HARDLY IMAGINE, AND I GET ANGRY, REALLY ANGRY. HIS VOICE TELLS ME THAT HE KNOWS, AND HE WILL CORRECT THE ABUSES. I AM ABLE TO RELAX AND RELEASE MY ANGER AND DESIRE FOR VENGEANCE. I HEAR MANY VOICES, BUT IT IS ONLY THE VOICE OF GOD WHICH BRINGS LIFE AND LEADS ME TO LIFE. SO, I TAKE TIME TO LISTEN.

QUESTION IS NOT WHETHER THEY HAVE THIS POWER TO CREATE BUT WHAT THEY CREATE WHEN THEY ARE SPOKEN. WHEN WE LISTEN, THE WORDS WE HEAR CREATE REALITIES WITHIN US AND CREATE (SHAPE) US. THEY CAN SHAPE US POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY. IN SPIRITUAL TERMS, THEY CAN FORM OR DEFORM US.

IN A WORLD FILLED WITH WORDS, WE ARE CONSTANTLY BEING SHAPED. TRUTH BE TOLD, MOST OF THE WORDS WHICH FILL OUR WORLD DEFORM US. THEY SPEAK OF TRAUMA, DECEIT, ABUSE, LOSS, SUFFERING, AND THE FAILURE TO STEM THE TIDE. THESE WORDS ENTER OUR EARS AND SHAPE OUR HEARTS. THEY DARKEN OUR MOOD. THEY ROB US OF HOPE. THEY BRING ABOUT A SPIRIT OF HOSTILITY AND VENGEANCE, AND ALL OF THIS IS JUST BY THE SECOND CUP OF COFFEE IN THE MORNING. HOWEVER, WHEN WE LISTEN TO GOD, HIS WORDS DO SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT. HIS WORDS BRING HOPE, JOY, AND LIFE. HIS WORDS UNDO WHAT THE WORDS OF THIS WORLD DO IN US. THEREFORE, WE LISTEN, AND AS WE LISTEN BE ARE MADE AND REMADE IN WAYS WHICH MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO MOVE FORWARD AND CLOSER TO GOD.

DURING THIS SEASON OF ADVENT, WE LISTEN TO WORDS WHICH SPEAK OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD. THESE WORDS REMIND US HOW MUCH WE NEED GOD TO INTERVENE IN OUR WORLD, AND HOW GOOD IT WILL BE WHEN HE DOES. THESE WORDS, WHEN WE LISTEN TO THEM, DEEPLY LISTEN, CAN GIVE US A HOPE AND JOY WHICH WE CAN FIND IN NO OTHER WAY. THIS WEEK, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF ZEPHANIAH WHICH SPEAK OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD. YOU COULD READ THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH, BUT BE SURE TO READ 2 KINGS 21-23 SO YOU HAVE THE CONTEXT FOR UNDERSTANDING THE VARIOUS PROPHECIES. WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO ZEPHANIAH 3.14-20. READ THESE VERSES CLOSELY AND OFTEN THIS WEEK. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER READING THEM BEFORE AND AFTER YOU WATCH THE EVENING NEWS. YOU MIGHT READ THEM BEFORE AND AFTER YOU SURF THROUGH THE VARIOUS NEWS CHANNELS ON YOUR PHONE. YOU MIGHT READ THEM AS A FAMILY AFTER YOU TALK ABOUT THE STRUGGLES OF THE DAY. SEEK TO HEAR THEM AGAIN AND AGAIN. AS YOU HEAR THEM, PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT, IF ANYTHING, THEY DO INSIDE YOU. DO THEY CHANGE YOUR MOOD, ADDRESS QUESTIONS OR LONGINGS, OR THE LIKE? YOU MIGHT CONSIDER JOURNALING YOUR EXPERIENCE OR DISCUSSING IT WITH A SOUL FRIEND.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHY SHOULD WE LISTEN TO GOD BEYOND TURNING TO HIM FOR GUIDANCE IN LIFE? IN PART, WE LISTEN TO GOD BECAUSE GOD WANTS TO BE MORE THAN OUR GPS. HE MADE US FOR FRIENDSHIP, AND FRIENDS SPEAK AND LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER. WE LISTEN BECAUSE LISTENING IS PART OF BEING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. WHEN WE LISTEN TO GOD, HIS WORDS CHANGE US. ACTUALLY, ALL WORDS CHANGE US. WORDS HAVE THE POWER TO CREATE (GENESIS 1)! THE



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