

“Flourish”: Creating a Culture of Transformation
A Culture of Vision
4.8.18



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

Woodinville Alliance Church... a community where every person discovers who they really are in Christ, experiences his goodness, and shares this life-changing encounter with their world so that others might value and choose Jesus for themselves.

(4) demonstrations (*gospel-realities*) we experience:

IDENTITY—ENCOUNTER—TESTIMONY—NEW LIFE

Identity| we only discover who we are when we know who God is. If we are not settled and secured in this identity, we will spend the rest of our lives subject to other names, other labels, each meant to devalue us and desensitize us to God’s love.

Encounter| we were created to encounter God; to experience his goodness and good intentions toward us. Ours is not to attempt to generate such experiences, but to expect them and to ensure that we are alert and responsive.

Testimony| authentically transformed lives always seek to share what they have experienced of God with others.

It is our experiences of God which form the life we live and create the stories that we tell.

New Life| being “*born again*” (*anew*; John 3) depicts an *entrance into* and *orientation toward* another way of living which allows us to have the fullest experience of humanness. It is the life of God in you, animating and motivating these new desires and new affections which reflect your participation in the Kingdom.

“How would you define the idea ‘values’? What do you think shapes the way(s) a person develops a sense of their own values? Why are everyone’s values different?”

Review the sample list below and circle the (10) things you think you value:

- | | | | |
|------------|------------|---------|-----------------------|
| Peace | Integrity | Wealth | Joy |
| Happiness | Love | Success | Recognition |
| Friendship | Family | Truth | Authenticity |
| Wisdom | Power | Status | Influence |
| Belonging | Creativity | Health | Spiritual Development |
| Justice | Stability | Respect | Leisure |
- Other:

Now, reduce the list down to (5).

“What is it that seems that you value? How do you know? How are you seeing your lifestyle support your stated values?”

“I do _____ (what) because I value _____ (why).”

“For my people have done two evil (disorderly) things. They have abandoned me--- the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!”

Jeremiah 2:13

“What do you think Jeremiah meant by this imagery? What does it suggest to you about humanity’s desires?”

“To which wells do we keep returning in order to address our longings? The well of money and comfort? The well of sex and relationships? The well of power and influence?”

“Based on the life and teachings of Jesus, what would you say that are some of the things that God values? How did Jesus embody such values?”

“What are you currently pursuing? Has it proven to be effective in satisfying your deep-heart longing or simply entertained/distracted you?”

Teaching Notes...

The Bible presents us with (2) contrasting approaches to life: wisdom and folly.

“*Fear of the Lord*”, according to Proverbs 9:10, being the launching point of such knowledge (relationship). The wise person is depicted as the one who rightly recognizes God (glorifies him) as central and seeks to order their life accordingly.

Folly (foolishness) is the life that originates from the wrong premise: “...*there is no God*” (Psalm 14:1). The fool sees themselves as their own ‘point-of-reference’ which causes them to make reach conclusions and form determinations that from their own limited perspective and independent of God.

Jesus was always helping us understand the connection between our heart, our values, our choices, and the quality of life it produces.

Jesus’ teachings were always linked to the life they produced and the life they produced was recognized as “blessed” and “truth” ---perfectly correlating with reality.

“*Hear these words of mine*”, Jesus says, “*and put them into practice...*” (Matthew 7). He uses a popular literary offering known as the “two-ways motif” [“*small gate/wide gate*”; “*narrow road/broad road*”] He sets his “ways” alongside that of the prevailing cultural and requires that we choose; that we “**discern**”.

Paul identifies our challenge in Romans 1 when he says that humanity, when faced with the notion of either accommodating God’s vision for us, or charting our own course, we chose the latter. He says that we refused to “*glorify God*” (recognize and gratefully respond) which naturally results in the creation of an alternate reality... “*a lie*”. We become “delusional”.

“... *their thinking became futile (worthless) and their foolish hearts were darkened*” (1:21).

Literally, it means that even as they attempted to “*deliberate about what is true*”, they could no longer discern because their hearts were “*deprived of light*”.

There is always a direct link between that in which we glory and the rightly-ordered life.

“**glory**”- ‘weight, significance, recognition’

“**righteous**”- ‘right, ethical in character, just’

So, we have a glory issue: we assign value to the wrong things. We’re mistaken about what’s real and what is actually significant, which results in a righteousness issue: our

lives aren't right because we've ordered them around things which actually aren't weighty enough.

So, when we consider our values, as a church, we seek to ensure that they are being informed and formed by the biblical narrative and that they help to compel responses which better reflect God's desires and allow us to faithfully represent him in his good world.

Values reflect a person's beliefs about what is good or bad, fair or unjust, valuable or dispensable. Admittedly, they are developed by a number of influences and experiences, and our interpretation of those experiences.

They serve as **guide-posts** for our lives and help determine who we are becoming.

We will always find what we seek because we will always seek what we truly desire. Examine your desires.

The Bible is consistently connecting our values to our "loves". At times, it says, "Love this..." (Luke 10:27) and, at times, it says, "Don't love this..." (1 John 2:15). "Eat from this tree. Don't eat from that one" (Genesis 2-3).

God sets us within the context of beauty and delight and says, in effect, there is no need to deprive ourselves of anything good, as long as we allow God to define "good" and establish the boundaries of our freedoms. But, it is precisely our 'desire to be like God' that assumes the responsibility for defining goodness.

"How do we know if a desire is good or bad?" Often, it is only as we discover that to which are attaching our desires.

Our pursuits are not always an accurate representation of our longings.

We all have things for which are longing (desires). We all have things which we are pursuing. The key is to ensure that the pursuits are compatible with the longings.

Consider, for example, the nameless 'woman at the well', from John 4. Coming to the well in the heat of the day, in order to avoid all of the gossipy-chatter and disapproving glances. She had five failed marriages and remained essentially 'uncommitted' to her present partner. She hadn't fully abandoned her conviction that the next relationship would satisfy the deeper needs of her heart.

“Why not just offer her a couple of marriage-therapy sessions in order to help make her marriage all that she dreamed for it to be?” Because the marital relationship was not her issue. In fact, it was simply contributing to the dilemma.

She was pursuing marriage, but what she really longed for was deeper than the idea of marriage. She desired for someone to delight in her. Someone with whom she might belong; with whom she might feel secure.

When it comes to our longings (desires), we typically don’t go deep enough. We stop short of our “thirsts”.

“... it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak.”
C.S. Lewis

All of your desires are actually bigger than your pursuits.

We were created eternal beings, but we too easily settle for temporary pleasures. God, in his own intriguing way, has knit something of himself into us--- *“subliminal messages”* from God that are embedded in the deepest part of who we are. *“Eternity in our hearts”* (Ecclesiastes 3:11), as Solomon identifies it, means that all our life-pursuits, independent of God, will ultimately prove futile.

Transformation is the process by which God re-directs our hearts and affections so that they are now pursuing the right things.

Somehow, it’s these desires for significance and belonging and security and goodness which make us aware of God and our humanity. The objective is not to eliminate our desires, but to ensure that they are directed at the right things.

Christianity is at its best when it is able to connect the deeper longings of our heart to our desire for God.

We are not simply the sum of all our cravings. We are *not* our baser instincts. It’s why we long for love. It’s why we seek meaning and meaningful connection. It’s why Jesus says, *“If anyone is thirsty, come to me and drink...”* (John 7:37).