

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

**DESIRE values...** [the biblical Reception & Replication pattern is evidenced in the parallelism following each value statement]

**Discovery:** We are a people who are being informed and formed by the biblical narrative and who are developing both a strong sense of identity (*who we are*), and a deep sense of purpose (*why we are*) within the Story of a loving and faithful God.

***“Revelation” and “Incarnation”***

**Encounter:** We are a people who intentionally make ourselves “*present to*” and “*present for*” God in order that we might know him and respond in obedience to his loving initiatives.

***“Glory” and “Worship”***

**Surrender:** We are a people who are learning to trust in God’s goodness and his good intentions for us and who are courageously and voluntarily living into his will for us.

***“Truth” and “Repentance”***

*“Do you most often associate surrender with something voluntary or something coerced? Why does surrender often sound like resignation or giving up?”*

*“How would you describe the difference between ‘humiliation’ and ‘humility’? From which have you learned the most?”*

*“Is your determination to maintain control of your life resulting in greater levels of peace/confidence or fear?”*

*“What is it that you believe to be true of God that prevents you from trusting him? Would you be open to re-considering your position?”*

*“In what areas of your life are you finding it difficult to surrender? Are you able to trust without a ‘contingency plan’?”*

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### **Teaching Notes...**

*“... Jesus began to tell people, ‘Turn to God and change the way you think and act, because the Kingdom of heaven is near.’” Matthew 4:17*

[Isaiah 30:15; Jeremiah 31:19; Matthew 3:8; Mark 1:15; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:8-10]

Jesus comes not only **announcing** the arrival of the Kingdom (*God’s will, God’s desires done God’s way, producing God’s anticipated outcomes--- “restoration”*), but **inviting** us to participate.

His intent was to offer a vision of God and his way of life that was so robust and so persuasive that we would become convinced that there are no limits to his good intentions toward us and his determination to carry them out. In response, we would choose him. We would willingly re-order our lives so as to nourish the new creation and experience the “shalom” (functionality; relatability) for which we were created. They would discover, in Jesus, “*... the way, the truth, and the life...*” John 14:6

As you reflect on the personal encounters that Jesus had, you recognize that some people were painfully aware of their brokenness and needed little convincing that life hasn’t turned out well. Some unashamedly cried out for help; some asked for covert meetings; some felt they had no place else to go (John 6:68 and Luke 18).

Some were painfully oblivious... over-inflated, over-confident, certain that God couldn’t help but notice (“*To some who were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else...*” Luke 18: Pharisee and tax collector)

Some were unable to put their finger on their condition, so when Jesus equated it with ‘**hunger**’ or ‘**thirst**’... that seemed to resonate.

### **Be cautioned about any other motivation for transformation than love (God’s kindness: Romans 2). Be suspicious of any talk of transformation that doesn’t require confession and repentance.**

**confession**- the gift that God gives us due to our inability to receive grace. It’s a way to be honest without all the “self-loathing”. It is the safe confines in which we can learn to live life “*out in the open*”, not without sin, just without pretense. We don’t have to fake it, anymore.

**repentance**- is the gift that God gives us which not only allows us to admit our brokenness but provides the courage to live differently--- to choose a less self-destructive path for our lives.

- Without the possibility of restoration, confession merely rehearses all that's wrong with us, intensifies our guilt and reinforces our hopelessness. Repentance allows us to create distance between our brokenness and who we are becoming. "*I'm not that person anymore!*"

**Life always requires a response from us and surrender is the response that initiates the life-long journey of transformation--- growing into who you are in God.**

Surrender, by definition, is "*voluntarily cooperating with the will of another*". It's not indecisiveness (in fact, it's the most determined choice you can make). It's not passivity. It's not about succumbing to life or resignation, but it is about taking responsibility for who you are becoming.

**The absolute key to submission is the conviction that God would never put my heart at risk. He would never take advantage of my willingness to trust.**

Surrender is the "yes" that initiates the journey. It is not the "yes" of absolute clarity or the "yes" of unwavering confidence, but the "yes" of humility. It is the "yes" that combats our resistance.

Surrender is rarely appealing because life has chipped away at our capacity to trust. We've been violated. Trust has been abused. The guarded life is our only other option.

**Until you come to terms with a benevolent God, you will never feel safe in his world.**

Historically, humans didn't expect love from God. He didn't seem very approachable or even likeable. Interestingly, every time he shows up to humanity, he begins by saying, "*Don't be afraid!*" [1 John 3:1-3; 1 John 4:18; Psalm 112:8]

Some assume that God is not really for us nor against us, he's just disinterested. **Indifferent.** He's kind of like the (14)-year old Life Guard who knows you're in the pool, but who's probably distracted and not going to notice your appeals for help.

Some have a functional vision of a God who is **hostile**. He's operating on a short fuse and in order to temper him, he must be appeased: find out what he wants and give it to him and we'll all be happy.

With incredible patience and passion, God pursues us in such a way as to eliminate any reason that we might have for resisting his advances--- for doubting his good intentions toward us.

**We can always only be accepted for who we are.**  
**We always only ever risk change once we are accepted.**

Only when I am convinced that my doubts won't exclude me from faith, that despite my best efforts (and failed attempts), I still belong, that God's love is stronger than my ability to keep the rules, that it is the character of the Lover (God) that transforms the beloved (us), will I feel secure enough to face God, to face myself, and to face you in hopes of something less demanding--- but something that demands more of me: Love.

**You never have to fear committing yourself to someone who has so consistently and so profoundly evidenced their willingness to seek your ultimate best.**

*"All of the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful..." Psalm 25:10*

**Romans 8:31-39 (MSG)**

*"So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture: They kill us in cold blood because they hate you. We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one. None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing - nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable - absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us."*

It's as if Jesus is saying, *"If you really knew me, you would be less hesitant to trust my love."*

**"Who is against you?"**

*"...you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins... and they will call him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" Matthew 1*

**"Who will point an accusing finger at us?"**

*"... for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus." Romans 3:26 [Romans 4:5]*

Jesus doesn't simply overlook all that's gone wrong (to do so would be heartless and unjust). He doesn't set aside his righteousness (rightness; as nature and standard). He absorbs within himself all that's wrong so that he might offer his very life to us.

**“Who will condemn us?”**

*“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.” Romans 5:6*

Jesus was the only one perfectly suited to know us: he knows what it's like to be human and what it's like to be God.

**“Who shall separate us?”**

*“All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.”*

1 John 4:15-16