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

The word "*restoration*", as used often in the biblical narrative, has the connotation of receiving back more than had been lost to the extent that the final state realized was actually greater than the original condition.

"Look up Webster's definition of 'restoration'. How does it differ from the biblical understanding?"

"What were your thoughts on the "Hope Formula" that John offered during his reflections?"
Faith→ Risk→ Change→ Hope

Perhaps you could take time, as a group, to dialogue about each component and some of the obstacles to moving forward in the process.

"Are you convinced that there are certain aspects of your life which are so broken as to be beyond God's ability to restore?"

"What other resource/strategy do you need to exhaust before you are ready to trust God?"

"Would you be willing to risk coming out of hiding if it meant that you could be healed?"

Teaching Notes...

Restoration: We are a people who share in God's work of healing, renewing, and restoring the world so that it increasingly becomes a better reflection of the wholeness ("shalom") for which it was created.

"Justice" and "Generosity"

At its best, Christianity compels us toward authentic and humble encounters with God and each other. At its worst, it simply compounds our issues by contributing to our shame and forcing us either into isolation or more creative means of hiding.

We know we are called to “community”, but most often, isolation seems to be our default response. We want to live sacrificially as long as you don’t ask me for *“that”* (whatever *“that”* is). We want to love others unconditionally, but they just seem to make it sooooo difficult! We long for transcendence (life that extends beyond the limits of ordinary experience), but we just seem to get stuck.

(3) primary themes in the biblical narrative:

1) a righteous God

2) a world gone wrong

3) the hope of a creation set right

A righteous God...

“Shout with joy to the LORD, all the earth! Worship the LORD with gladness. Acknowledge that the LORD is God! He made us, and we are his.” Psalm 100

“He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth,... he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. From one man he created all the nations...” Acts 17

The Jews emerged amongst many other cultures in history with a unique message: their God was the one, true Creator-God. He was the *“prime mover”* who designed his creation to function in certain ways, especially in terms of how we were to relate to him and to one another. His purposes for us are always with a view toward our flourishing---having the fullest experience of life.

A world gone wrong...

“As the Scriptures say, ‘No one is righteous— not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away’... For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” Romans 3

Human history is the account of the failures of freedom.

God’s intention, from the very beginning, was to rule the world through his image-bearing and responsive humanity. When we fail in our role, all of creation suffers the consequences.

The hope of a creation set right ...

God has promised that he will restore all of creation so that it will one day become all that it is presently “*groaning*” to be (Romans 8).

It is the rightful conclusion to a “restoration” Story. Even when the word is not used specifically, *the gospel* shows up on every page of the Story.

The gospel is the sound of Adam and Eve crouching in the bushes, scrambling for something without (3) leaves, and the love-sick voice of God calling, “*Where are you?*” (Genesis 3).

The gospel is the young son who demands his inheritance, gives his dad the finger and makes his way out into “freedom” where he blows it all on liquor and porn and his leeching posse. With no place left to turn but to the father he had treated with contempt, he returns, reeking of pig manure and failure and gets the surprise of his life: the “*welcome home, son*” banner, flapping in the wind and his dad in his bathrobe and Seahawk’s slippers running toward him with no intent of deceleration (Luke 15).

Most often, God will not violate the governing principles he has established: he chooses to work “in”, “with” and “through” creation to restore creation.

I find that God faces this ‘**quandary**’: if he does act, we consider him **controlling** and **manipulative**. All this talk of freedom is just a smokescreen for God’s need to micro-manage everything.

If he doesn’t intervene, we assume he’s **weak** and **indifferent**. It’s just as we suspected; things really are spiraling out of control and God has little other recourse except to sit back and watch the devastation.

Within the unfolding drama, God had to find a way to deal honestly with our brokenness while allowing us to maintain our dignity and inherent worth. His response? Grace and truth.

“*So, the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love (grace) and faithfulness (truth)*”. John 1:14

If we dismiss this reality, we are left with either “moralism” or “relativism”. Both are threats to the gospel. Both are attempts to be right and live rightly, without God.

With moralism, we simply end up with a therapeutic approach that is determined to ‘*behave our way*’ into wholeness. Such an approach is admirable but neglects the futility of attempting the right conduct from the wrong heart (Colossians 2:20-23, “*Don’t taste. Don’t touch*”).

Relativism (Judges 21, “... *in their own eyes*”), on the other hand, leaves us floundering in ambiguity--- subject to one another’s self-indulgent preferences and with nothing to guide us except our own moral compass (which is desperately in need of calibration).

Justice and generosity are not polar opposites, but necessary components of love.

“The Lord loves righteousness and justice...” Psalm 33:5

Righteousness and justice are a single, complex idea expressed in (2) words.

“righteousness”- fully what it should be, therefore, able to serve as a standard by which something else can be measured.

“justice”- to put things right; to intervene in a situation that is not as it should be and remedy it.

Righteousness is about right relationships: with God, with others. Love forms us into communities of people where we see each other, notice each other, care for each other. The inescapable outcome of that kind of loving-interdependence is “justice”.

The bible fails to offer us a schematic for restoration, but the process and authority (inner and outer) which encourages us to participate and trust the process.

John C's journey into transformation

“I will give you back your health (restore you to health, NIV) and heal your wounds,” says the LORD.” Jeremiah 30:17

Unlike the dictionary definition of **“restoration”** (where we are restoring something to its former condition), the biblical idea actually incorporates all that went wrong, redeems it, and utilizes it as a means of fostering our healing.

“You will remember your sins and cover your mouth in silent shame when I forgive you of all that you have done. I, the sovereign Lord, have spoken.” Ezekiel 16:63

God's justice is always revealed as restorative and not punitive. God has this way of punishing us by loving us in extravagant ways which leave us defenseless and speechless.

Jeremiah 31:3-4 [Jeremiah 4:20, *“... faithless wife who leaves her husband...”*] *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel”.*

Imagine God's desired purposes for their lives would accomplish such a transformative work in them that once being described as having **“committed adultery”** or having **“prostituted themselves”**, he would now identify them as his **“virgin Israel”**.

There is no sense that God has simply ‘overlooked’ our infidelity and chosen to live with us as ‘damaged goods’ (the way they would have been seen). There is the sense that love is so redeeming and so restorative that we would, in God's sight, be returned to purity.

“What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we’re called children of God! That’s who we really are. And that’s only the beginning. Who knows how we’ll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we’ll see him—and in seeing him, become like him.” 1 John 3 (The Message)

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”

“... this is the way; walk in it.” Isaiah 30:21

[Deuteronomy 29:29; John 20:30-31; Psalm 119:15-16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21]

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”

“Honor the LORD for the glory of his name. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.” Psalm 29:2

[Genesis 3:8; Exodus 19:3; Isaiah 6:1-8; Jeremiah 29:13-14; Matthew 28:17; Mark 5:6]

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”

“From then on, 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]

Integration: We are a people who are committed to seeing, honoring, and welcoming the “stranger” in ways which encourage healthy inter-dependence and compel others to participate in transformative community.

“Reconciliation” and “Hospitality”

“If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new!

So, we have been sent to speak for Christ...” 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

[Exodus 22:21; Romans 12:9-13; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 1:20-22; 1 Timothy 3:2; Hebrews 13:1-2]

Restoration: We are a people who share in God’s work of healing, renewing, and restoring the world so that it increasingly becomes a better reflection of the wholeness (“shalom”) for which it was created.

“Justice” and “Generosity”

“... generously offer food to the hungry and meet the needs of the person in trouble; then your light will rise in the darkness, and your gloom become like noon.” Isaiah 58:10

[Deuteronomy 15:7-8; Psalm 33:5; 112:5; Isaiah 40:29; 61:8; Micah 6:8; Luke 6:35-36; 2 Corinthians 9:11]

Engagement: We are a people who are authentically loving God and compassionately loving our ‘near ones’ in ways which validate our claims of faith in Jesus and compel others to find life in and through him.

“Invitation” and “Reach”

“God did this so that people would seek him. Then perhaps they would reach out for him and find him.

They would find him even though he is not far from any of us.” Acts 17:27

[John 3:16-18; Acts 10:39-43; 28:28-31; Romans 1:16-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Peter 2:12]