

“This Is Life”: Our Natural Habitat

Text:1 John 1:5-10

9-30-18



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

“Often, in our lives, we find ourselves feeling the need to provide a helpful challenge to someone we love. How have you found it helpful to use a caring posture, such as John utilizes in his letter?”

“What do you think it means to ‘walk in the light’? What do you think it means to ‘walk in darkness’?”

“How do you understand the practice of confession? How have you found it difficult? How has it proven beneficial in your relationship both with God and others?”

2 Corinthians 13:5-9

“Examine (for the purpose of ascertaining proof) yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test (scrutinize: see whether a thing is genuine) yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?”

“Where are signs of life? Where is there growing confidence as you are realizing increasing alignment between God’s desires and your determinations?”

“Where is there dissonance? Where is there a struggle between your profession and your lifestyle? How might being reminded of God’s faithfulness provide the courage to address the conflict?”

“Where is there an invitation for a ‘doing’ the right... the good... that you know?”

“Remember, it is a sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.” James 4:17

Teaching Notes...

In order for this series of reflections to become ‘transformative’, you have to be willing to consider the possibility that your current approach to life might actually be limiting your possibilities, and you must be unwilling to settle for anything less than life with an eternal quality to it.

Deep within all of us are desires for living humanly (flourishing; becoming who we were created to be) which eventually either get connected to our Creator-God or attached to any number of seemingly attractive options which leave us discontent and disoriented. The way we’re supposed to feel when we are disconnected from God.

John contrasts a heart-beating, lung-breathing, cell-dividing kind of existence and “life”.

“life”... (Gr. zoe) the absolute fullness of life, real and genuine, belonging uniquely to God that he shares with us.

The Bible introduces us to John as a young man, perhaps in his twenties. He was a fisherman working in the family business on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus called John and his brother James to join the first disciples. *“Immediately,”* Scripture records, *“they left the boat and their father and followed him”* (Matthew 4:22).

The Scriptures portray John as a rather impetuous and impulsive personality. Along with his brother, James, they formed the WWE tag-team, *“Sons of Thunder”* (Mark 3:17).

Arguably, no one knew Jesus as well as John. He was privy to many of the really cool God-moments in Jesus’ life (healing, impactful teachings, confrontations with the religious elite, garden prayer), but what centered him was his self-identification as *“the one Jesus loved”* [John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20].

John will return to the (3) themes, with some regularity, in order to capture the essence of “life”:

Who/what you love.

Who/what you trust (believe)

How you live.

John is giving fatherly oversight to a group of house-churches which are likely meeting near the ancient city of Ephesus (modern day Turkey). These followers were realizing a great deal of tension and disagreement about Jesus’ claims to Messiahship and whether he was really God or just “appeared to be” God.

There were any number of deceptive teachings swirling around the community. There was talk about “*secret knowledge*” that you had to access which was only available to a privileged few. There was the insistence that what is material (tangible, physical) is “evil” and what is immaterial (spiritual) is “good”.

This not only challenged the idea of the incarnation but suggested that there was no real connection between our faith and our actions. Faith is spiritual and unrelated to what we do “in/with our body”.

What John is attempting to say is that if you choose wrongly about who you decide Jesus to be, you run the risk of losing who you are.

John is utterly and radically convinced of and transformed by the love of Jesus and will not be content with any representation of him that diminishes him in any way. He is so disturbed by their deceptive misrepresentations that he used decidedly harsh language to describe them: “antichrists,” “liar,” “trying to deceive,” “children of the devil,” “false prophets”.

“God is light”.

There’s nothing particularly surprising about that statement. It would be a way that many of the world’s religions would have described a deity. What is noteworthy is that the character of God being offered is to be reflected in the lives of his followers. It reinforces the summary of God’s intent for relationship with us: *“I will be your God and you will be my people.”* (Exodus 6:7) *If this is the kind of God I am, this is the kind of people you should be.”*

I find it interesting that in our beginnings (Genesis), God first intentionally addresses the darkness and the void and the chaos before we are introduced into creation because it’s not the environment in which we were meant to live and flourish.

Darkness is a condition in which we choose to live which forms our responses independent of God’s revealed nature and character. It is characterized by self-deception and denial.

To “*walk in the light*” means that we are ready to respond as if God’s word(s) are true, so that we might experience “reality” from God’s perspective.

John is saying that Jesus is the way that God comes to us. Jesus is the way that we come to God.

John and other NT writers boldly make the declaration that, “*in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body*” (Colossians 2:9). Without the ability to unpack all of the mystery captured in such a statement, I think it fair to say: **First**, Jesus was the image of true humanity. He was everything we were meant to be. Paul calls him the “*last Adam*” (1 Corinthians 15:45). Perfectly spiritual and perfectly physical. He was the first human, since Adam, to be fully alive.

Second, we could say that Jesus has come to *conform us to his image* and bring us into his life. “*God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn (first in a long line) among many brothers and sisters.*” Romans 8:29

Third, we would say that Jesus is the only one perfectly suited (anointed) for the role of Messiah because he responds, not from the posture of a disgusted and distanced deity, but as “*God with us*”... “*God for us*” [Hebrews 2:14-17].

The issue is not our humanness but living in-humaneily.

As humans, we are all the object of God’s inexplicable goodness and we all experience the wide-ranging consequences of our failure to live into that love.

They show up in (2) equally detrimental postures: ***we don’t have sin*** (Our propensity is not toward self; all we need is enough time, resources and distance from the God-myth and we’ll get this thing turned around) and ***we have not sinned*** (unable to identify the ways in which our lives are producing behavior/consequences that are out-of-sync with what God desires).

In order for us to realize the depth of its impact, sin must be understood as a ‘relational term’, not a ‘legislative term’.

Sin, as simply a laundry-list of “*God-infractions*” trivializes it and fails to capture the enormity of the human dilemma. It’s not just the breaking of a law, but a breach of relationship.

Sin is the “*falling short*” (Romans 3:23); the ***who we are*** in light of ***who we were created to be***. “Sins” are simply all the symptoms of that condition. Your life is demonstrating the existence of an underlying issue.

It’s always hard for us to hear that God expects something of us without that morphing into some warped and unhealthy emphasis on our good deeds alone.

It has been difficult for us to find some equilibrium between a faith that is “***too demanding***” (relies on rigid rule-keeping) and a faith that “***demands nothing***” of us. One is harsh and grace-less, the other hollow and deceptive.

John is not calling for some **neurotic introspection** which leaves us always feeling as if we can never be sure, but for a serious reflection on our professions of faith and its effects on the way that we conduct ourselves.

John says that your “confidence” is directly proportionate to the compatibility of your faith-claims and your demonstration of faith (lifestyle). It will determine our sense or experience of either “***dissonance***” (clashing of things that are inharmonious) or “***confidence***”.

Jesus would never offer us a way of life which allowed us to “keep the rules” but “ignore our hearts”.

Righteousness prevents us from successfully developing this ‘hybrid’ faith which disconnects belief and behavior; which allows us to make professions which are totally disconnected from the actual way that we conduct our lives. Otherwise, faith is just “superstition”.

To the Jews, “**righteousness**” meant: 1) God’s covenant faithfulness in the context of our infidelity, 2) adherence to his ways as our anticipated response to the revelation of God’s goodness.

“**hear it and do what it says**”: (10x) in Matthew 7:13-27, the word ‘do’ or ‘practice’ appears (3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 21:32).

Righteousness has never been merely a compliance issue, but a love issue. It is about faithfulness to a relationship.

There is a relational quality of the word **commandment** (*‘entole’*, in Hebrew, *‘a precept related to relationship’*). It always connects the hearer with the giver.