

“Thrive”: Forging a Vital Faith
From Brokenness to Wholeness
3.17.19
Selected texts



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

“In what areas of your life do your good intentions keep getting trumped by your desires?”

“What truth (reality) in your life have you been regularly ignoring in hopes that the tension would simply go away? How do you suppose the numbness in your soul might be preventing you from feeling the ‘good pain’?”

“Can you recall a specific situation in your life that you would attribute some measure of healing or wholeness directly to the Spirit’s empowerment? What was the effect on the situation or relationship?”

“Is there an area of your life in which you been willing to substitute a self-imposed strategy for divine intervention?”

“If you keep telling yourself you could make some changes if you really wanted to, why don’t you want to?”

Teaching Notes...

We began these considerations several weeks ago with consideration of this proposition:

Deep within us all are desires for living humanly (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 Christian faith has never been a static location (a decision; a doctrinal stance), but a spiritual journey (“leave”, “go”, “enter”, “possess”) which helps locate us and invites us toward a more compelling vision human flourishing.

This journey is to have our desires 're-directed' so that they are now pursuing the right things.

None of the “**From---To**” movements are the result of a singular, decisive action. Our wholeness--- our transformation--- is the result of a lifetime of intentionally living into and living out of these movements.

Self-Reliance to God-Reliance: the journey is initiated as what you are trusting for life fails you and you become willing to adopt a different paradigm and set of practices for your life (until then, you will have no legitimate reason for abandoning your own way).

Isolation to Belonging: your God-conferred status as the “beloved” must be the non-negotiable source of your identity, or you will never be confident enough to belong with others without fear of being inspected or dismissed.

Fear to Trust: all our insecurities are the result of trusting the wrong things. In order to eliminate fear, I must give myself to knowing (experiencing) God’s love which deepens our ability to trust.

Duty to Delight: the only people who love God’s laws are the ones who realize they can never be saved by them. Their obedience is not simply an attempt at ‘pleasing God’ but birthed out of the ‘pleasure of God’.

Insignificance to Purpose: the present--- the now--- is the only available context for God to work with and through you. Make the most of the collaborative opportunity.

Brokenness to Wholeness: as broken people on our way to restoration, we can link ourselves to the needs of our near-ones and serve them in ways which lend to their shalom.

“We carry inside us a vision of wholeness that we sense is our true home and it beckons us.”

Frederick Buechner

As believers, we are never in the process of moving from “sinner” to “saint”. We are simply living into more robust expressions of who we already are (2 Corinthians 3:18).

“... when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own, giving you the Holy Spirit...” Ephesians 1

We can’t see who we really are (1 John 3) but we are perpetually compelled to jettison anything that competes with our image-bearing identity; anything that encourages us to behave in ways that are inauthentic and disingenuous--- not as dearly loved children. “Shalom”, in the scriptures, means universal flourishing, wholeness, functionality, nothing broken, nothing missing: everything the way it is supposed to be.

Wholeness (perfection) is not an ideal to be achieved, but a vision for life into which we might live.

“... not that I have already achieved all these things or that I have already reached perfection (completeness). But, I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me”. Philippians 4

In fact, we are coming to realize that our holiness is first (and always) God’s holiness and that’s why we are secure enough, in him, to attempt transformation.

“Be holy as I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:16).

How you hear that depends upon your relational posture to God.

If you believe it is a call to rigid moralism, you will hear it with frustration and fatigue.

If you believe it is an invitation into healing union with Jesus, you will hear it as the opportunity into a more wholesome and less fragmented way of life.

“I no longer seek any perfection from my own efforts, but only the perfection that comes from faith and is from God...” Philippians 3:9,15

Paul rightly defines wholeness as a ‘relationship’ to be developed and not a goal to be achieved.

“How can we move forward without the ‘shalom-schematic’?”

I would suggest that although transformation is never ‘formulaic’, that there are a number of postures and practices which Jesus embodied and have been utilized by his followers for centuries in order to experience the life “well-lived”.

Know that God intends to fulfill the desires he has placed in you... if that’s what you desire, as well.

“For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.” Philippians 2:13

We aren’t sure how God accomplishes his ‘saving’ work in us, but we do eventually come to the realization that it will not be done “for” us and it will not be done “without” us.

At the outset of the journey, we can’t say that we really “know” God, except that we have had some encounter with him that got our attention and incited our imagination. We aren’t really honest about all our brokenness. We most often come to God with our **‘presenting’ issues**, which surprisingly often, are not the real issues at all

(we say we want God to help us create more space in our lives for him and our families, but the real issues are often self-importance and greed).

Know that you can only ‘fend off’ your dysfunctionality for so long, by your own efforts.

Whatever sinful “holes” we are attempting to plug, simply forces it to spring up somewhere else. Apart from the power of the Spirit in you, your willpower will prove no match for your brokenness and you will eventually get fatigued and give way to your under-developed passions.

“Don’t try this at home”, but make plenty of space for solitude.

At some point, you must let God love you through someone else. Without it, love remains theoretical and restoration is something I attempt in order to belong, not I live a life because I am accepted and acceptable.

The issue with “shalom” (wholeness) is that it is an ‘integrating’ movement: it is bringing all of the pieces/aspects of our lives into healthy alignment, which means that I can never allow myself to be content with an intimacy with Jesus that is distancing me from you.

But, much of the really, deep-heart work that God does in us takes place in solitude. In such an environment, our responses are less prone to the presumptions of others and a better reflection of our true, heart posture.

Keep showing up (with God and trusted others) with intentionality and whatever level of authenticity that you are able to offer and expect more: more grace from God a more gracious response from us (James 4:6)

Choose to respond out of your renewed identity and re-oriented heart. Even if at first it feels awkward, know that it will produce fruitful outcomes.

Often what we want is “deliverance” without the nagging necessity of discipline, but even deliverance does not eliminate our continued need for grace and discernment (“go and sin no more”).

Adopt definitive practices which help to loosen your grip on all that you hold to (hold onto), but which are obstructing your progress.

These practices allow us to better cooperate with our new identity and renewed passions.