

SEPTEMBER 26/27, 2020
LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
DISTANCE LEARNING | BUT IF NOT
DANIEL 3:1-30
FALL QUARTER WEEK 3 of 12

EFCC's definition of a disciple: Someone who is learning to live in the way of Jesus with the heart of Jesus.

EFCC's discipleship values: Pursuit, Obedience, Journey, Wholeness, Togetherness, Mission.

EFCC's discipleship model: being WITH (upward focus), becoming LIKE (inward focus), doing As (outward focus).

EFCC's discipleship methodology: focus on what we need to learn, what we need to practice and who we need to be in relationship with.

As I look at the message the value that I see to be most prevalent is **wholeness**. Wholeness is about living an abundant life. Wholeness is about our commitment to abide in the identity God has given us in Christ. Wholeness is about offering all of ourselves to Him so that we might become fully integrated people — experiencing His wholeness in every area of our lives.

But there are always tests and challenges to living in and living out wholeness. For Shadmego, they made a decision to abide in their identity as worshipers and followers of Yahweh. They had been shaped and formed their whole lives by the Ten Commandments and by these words, “4 ‘You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God... (Exodus 20:4-5)’ ”

This is their identity. This is who they were. One thing King Nebuchadnezzar is trying to do in this account is force them to live contrary to that. In order to remain true to themselves, and to God, and to their identity, deep faith will be required.

As we live in America in 2020, it may be the case that a deeper faith will be required as we are called on to trust God as we make decisions to abide in the identity He has given us. Risks may need to be taken as we refuse to compromise who we are in the core of our being. The culture, the government, and who knows who else will continually attempt (under the willing and sometimes unknowing command of Satan) to pull us away from wholeness, from an integrated life of faith where all of life is spiritual.

The part of the model we want to emphasize is being LIKE. For Shadmego, this test both reveals their identity and strengthens it. It shows who they are like (followers of Yahweh) and strengthens their commitment to being His followers. (Can you imagine ever doubting God's power and love and presence after experiencing the delivery they do? I can't.) Being LIKE also focuses us on the fact that this faith is Spirit given and Spirit empowered. We cannot stand up to the temptations of identity theft without leaning completely on the Holy Spirit. Nor can we grow into a deeper and fuller identity and wholeness in Christ apart from His working in us.

If you were to talk to Kathy Moratto, or Sharon Chapman, or Greg Schmid, or so many others involved with Biblical Counseling and our Truths that Transform Class, they will tell you that your understanding of “who you are in Christ/your identity in Christ” is the second most important thing you’ll ever think about (the first being, “What you think about God is the most important thing about you” - Tozer). Since our identity in Christ is so important, is it any wonder that the world, the flesh, and the devil are constantly taking shots at it?

Tempting us to idolatry is a core temptation we will experience. Shadmego’s story reminds us of that. The antidote to that temptation is faith in God. So let’s talk about faith. But before we do, here’s a fun question.

Engaging with Each Other

1. You can have an unlimited supply of one thing for the rest of your life, what is it?

The answers I am looking for are not: God, grace, the Holy Spirit, mercy, etc. Those are givens! And you can’t answer, “Money!”

I’m looking for something else. Since all of life is spiritual, not every answer has to be spiritual to be spiritual. How’d God make you? What do you value? What, if you had an unlimited supply of it, would make life more enjoyable for the rest of your days?

My answer is going to be tickets to Angels’ games. If I could have season tickets for the rest of my life, I would love that! That would be awesome. Of course I would have two tickets - one for me and one for Darica. I’m not sure how happy she’d be about going to 81 baseball games a year, but hey, she doesn’t have to go to every one!

What’s yours?

Engaging with the Scriptures

2. Share with your group your thoughts about this statement that Pastor Ryan made: “Faith is a posture of surrender, not a position of control.”

Now we launch into the *learning* part of our time together (to be followed by *practices* and *community*). What do we need to think about, to learn, or be reminded of, as we consider the role faith plays in helping us align ourselves with God as He grows us in wholeness?

Here are some discussion starter questions, if needed:

- Did you grow up thinking faith was about surrender, or about control? What are some thoughts on how that impacts your faith journey today?
- How does this statement about faith relate to our pursuit of wholeness and identity in Christ? (Answers to this question are below, and I think this question lends itself to a great discussion.)

Here are some thoughts from Ryan’s notes:

- They didn’t know the outcome, but they lived obediently - because faith isn’t a way to control or predict outcomes. (I would add, when it comes to wholeness and identity, that living by faith is the way to be faithful to who we are in Christ and to God’s ability to take care of us as we live lives of fidelity to Him. It’s good to learn/be reminded that faith is a posture of surrender to God’s ability to work things out for us, and for Him, as

we live in and live out our identity and wholeness. In this account, faith is not about trying to control the outcomes, it's about them trying to remain true to who they are and trusting God with the outcomes. What's true for them is also true for us.)

- "Faith is not a way to get something from God, it's a way to walk with God - that leads to our wholeness, healing, and abundant life. Instead of God being the way we acquire the treasure we really desire; He is the treasure we really desire." (For me the challenge is to remember to value wholeness, healing and abundant life over getting something from God. For some, this is a different way to understand faith. For all, it can be challenging.)

(Remember, though, that all of this doesn't mean we don't ask for things from God. Nor does it mean we don't trust God for the things we need. We get to do all of those things. We have chapter and verse on that. But faith is first and foremost a way to walk with God. It's a relational and not a transactional faith. Otherwise we are practicing a religion.)

- Interesting quote from Rich Mullins. "Surrender don't come naturally to me. I'd rather fight you for something I don't really want than to take what you give that I need."

So I think there is more than enough to talk about now.

3. Pastor Ryan brought to light three things that the lives of "Shadmego" call us to. What are they, and how is each particularly relevant for you right now?

Here we are going to learn or be reminded about how to live when our faith is tested in the fires of an opposition that is trying to strip us of our identity in and before God. What does God have for you and those in your group?

- Reject idolatry and worship wholeheartedly.

Here are some thoughts from Ryan's notes:

- "An idol is any created thing we look to in order to give us the meaning, hope and happiness that only God Himself can give, it will eventually fail to deliver and break our hearts." Tim Keller

(Also Tim Keller, "An idol is anything you will sin to obtain or keep.")

- Here are some questions you might ask to diagnose your heart of worship:
 - What most worries you and what's the solution you dream about?
 - Where do you turn when you're worried?
 - Where do you run when you're bored?
 - What do you spend money on?
 - What do you want to talk about most?
 - What are your strongest and deepest hopes?
- We must actively and regularly pursue God in worship. If you keep your worship before God hot, that will weed out the desire to turn anything else into an idol.

How is the call to reject idolatry and worship wholeheartedly relevant for you as you fight the battle that rages against your identity and wholeness in Christ? How is it relevant in any other areas of life right now? (But I would argue that I can draw a very clear and straight line directly from any life struggle right to a person's perception of

their identity in Christ, and then talk about how that struggle is coming from that misperception. I know this to be true because I can do it in my own life.)

- Embrace God’s presence in life’s pain.
Here are some thoughts from Ryan’s notes:
 - I seem to sense His pleasure when things are going well; but I know His presence when things are difficult.
 - Can I call you to do three things when you’re in a furnace:
 - Express your heart honestly.
 - Expect God’s presence.
 - Remember God’s past faithfulness.

Sometimes God’s plan to refine our identity and create even greater wholeness results in pain and confusion. How does His presence help? How does one “expect God’s presence” anyway?

- Remember temporal defeat will eventually give way to eternal destiny.
 - Suffering is never the end of the story. Fire is never the end. Death is never the end. The end is resurrection and life eternal.
 - 1 Peter 1.6-9

Sometimes things don’t go the way we’d hoped as God moves toward greater wholeness. How does the hope of eternal destiny (John 11.25, 26) help us rebound from the defeats?

Engaging the Scriptures with Life

4. What is one way a “But if not” life looks like for you this week?

This is the “practices” and community section of the night. This is the chance to apply. To talk about how you will “obey all that I have commanded you.” We’ve been taught what to do by Shadmego, God and Ryan. Now we can talk about how to do it. A practice or two. Nothing overwhelming. Something attainable.

I don’t know where I’m going to land just yet.