

Stepping Out

FBC's Fall Focus: Reconcile

October 25, 2009

Fall Focus Update

As we enter into week five of our Fall Focus we discover together God's heart for the nations – for all ethnic groups and cultures in his great diverse world. Of course diversity sometimes is difficult for us. We don't understand why some cultures do things so differently from the way we do. The easiest thing for many of us is to stay within one's own cultural setting. That is our comfort zone. Yet as Pastor Glen often reminds us, God is not as interested in our comfort as he is our character. And part of our character involves the way we treat those who are different from us. One thing that will help is to listen to the stories of those from other cultures. What is it like to be a minority in the U.S.? Here is Orlando Crespo's story:

When I was seven years old, my family became the first Puerto Ricans to move into a white neighborhood. We endured taunting from the family directly across the street, as well as racial insults based on our Latino heritage. It was all too easy to learn the lesson that being Puerto Rican was dirty and unacceptable. Bigotry and racism left an indelible mark on my soul.

But as I studied the Scriptures, I observed God working through the ethnicities and cultures of prominent figures like Moses (a tri-cultural person, Hebrew-Egyptian-Midianite!), Mordecai and Esther (Persian Israelites), and Paul (a Jewish Roman citizen). For each of them, their ethnic identity was central to God's plan for the deliverance of his people. If any of them had chosen to simply assimilate to the dominant culture, they would have missed God's deepest purposes for them. I began to believe that God could have a purpose for my ethnic identity – that my Latino identity was not an accident or a mistake, but a gift.

This story was taken from an article entitled "Our Transnational Anthem." To read the entire article you can find it on the web at www.christianitytoday.com. The fastest way to find it is to Google the title of the article.

Monday – He First Loved Us

"Talk not of wasted affection; affection never was wasted." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

1. Please read 1 John 4:19-21. Where does love originate? Think about the simplicity and profundity (depth) of verse 19. What does this verse tell you about your ability to love God and others?
2. How does our treatment of others reflect the quality of our relationship with God?
3. What might John have thought when he originally heard Jesus speak of this in John 13:34-35?

Digging Deeper: Read John 15:1-17 and consider practical ways that your treatment of others can reflect God's love for you.

Tuesday – We Ought to Love

"Love is the difficult realization that something other than oneself is real." Iris Murdoch, 20th c. English author

1. Please read 1 John 4:7-18. How did God act upon his love? What does an absence of love mean (v. 8)?
2. In John 15:13, what does Jesus identify as test of genuine love? How did God demonstrate his love for us according to 1 John 4:10 (pay special attention to the action verb in this verse)?
3. Now look at 1 John 4:11-12. What should God's love prompt in us (v. 11)? For what purpose (v. 12)?

Making it Personal: What barriers exist that prevent others from seeing the nature of your relationship with God by the way you treat them? Ask God to help you with those barriers.

Wednesday – All One in Christ

"Whatever disunites man from God, also disunites man from man." Edmund Burke, 19th c. Irish statesman

1. Please read Galatians 3:28-29. What difference is there in God's eyes between the Christians who sit with you on Sunday morning and those who gather together in a church on the opposite side of the planet?

Text Insight: Paul used the word "Greek" to refer to everyone who is not Jewish.

2. Compare Galatians 3:29 with Genesis 12:1-4 and describe the breadth of God's promise to the world.
3. At the age of 75, Abram learned that God sometimes calls us out of our comfort zone to do his will. How does his experience help you evaluate your situation? Is there a way God is calling you out of your comfort zone to build bridges of love with another?

Making it Personal: Pray that God will guide you in his ways, and that he will strengthen you to follow him.

Thursday – Nation, Tribe, People, Language

"It takes all sorts to make a world." English proverb

1. Please read Revelation 7:9-17. Who are the people described in verses 9-10 and 13-17? Where do you fit in that description? Is there a people group there, whom you need to show more grace to?
2. Read Psalm 68:31-35. Cush was considered the ends of the earth and Egypt had historically oppressed Israel whenever it got the chance. What is God telling us about the New Heaven and New Earth in the life to come? What does this reveal about God's heart for the "whole" world?

Prayer Focus: Pray for God's people to reach out to everyone (not just those we are familiar or more comfortable with). In this way we will build God's Kingdom.

Friday – The Nations Will Walk In

"Nation: A people who share common customs, origins, history, and frequently language; a nationality." American Heritage Dictionary (4th ed., 2009)

1. Please read Revelation 21:22-27. Describe the scene in your own words.
2. How does this description of the nations differ from how nations behave and interact presently? What will make the difference?
3. Earlier in Revelation 21, at verse 3-6, Jesus announces the living conditions for the nations. What part of this is most reassuring to you? Why?

Making it Personal: Are there people it is hard for you to relate to because they are different from you in some way, whether their culture or skin color, age or lifestyle? Pray that God will reconcile you to them.

For the Weekend: Read Isaiah 55:1-13. How are the nations involved in this passage? How does God offer to provide for them? What does this tell you about the present reality of people around the world who may be very different from you?