Challenge 21 of 40

Reflection by Tiago Arrais - Berrien Springs, USA

He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their hearts, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end... for God has so worked that men should fear Him. Ecclesiastes 3:11, 14

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

If I were to ask you, 'What word best defines you at this moment in your life?,' what would you say? This same question was directed to me a couple of years ago and after thinking for a few seconds I responded, 'Overwhelmed.' Studies, family, responsibilities, and pressure led to this response. Even today I feel this is the word that best describes me. I'm overwhelmed.

Interestingly though, from a young age all of us are taught that if we try hard enough, we can trespass any barrier, win any race, overcome any problem. Movies show it, songs promote it, and books preach it. The Gospel of Personal Effort! If you work hard enough, you will make it. We are educated to reject any limitation or limit. The idea of accepting the limitation is inconceivable. Yet when I look back at my past experiences in this life I was given, I notice how many times I tried, worked hard, gave my best...and nothing happened!
I did not win, reach, or overcome. And frustration generally appeared hand-in-hand with this experience of trying hard and not making it. Overwhelmed and frustrated! It seems to be a cocktail of despair.

Speaking with a friend last week about limits and the concept of “eternity in the heart of humanity” in Ecclesiastes 3, we were confronted with the radical concept of human experience and the limitations that seemed to underscore everything we’d already discussed. According to Ecclesiastes, our limitations as human beings were Divinely intended! And only when we embrace our limitations, only when we embrace the fact that we are not infinite, do we end up learning to connect with the infinite One! When we embrace our finitude, we are prepared to understand His infinitude.

This is a radical idea! To embrace our finitude! He has placed eternity in the heart of humanity so that we may yearn for greater things as created beings. But because we are created beings, and because we cannot “find out the the work which God has done,” in embracing our limitations, we have the unique opportunity of learning to fear Him. When we are overwhelmed, tired, and facing our limitations we must realize that this is the best opportunity to understand that we are only finite creation, He is the infinite Creator.

In Matthew 11:28 we find this same concept echoed. Kierkegaard wrote an entire book on this and other passages called Practice in Christianity. One of my favorite sections in his book is a section that comments on Jesus’ invitation to “come to me” which reads as follows:

The Helper is the help...Commonly a physician must divide himself among his many patients, who, however many they are, are very far from being all. He prescribes the medicine, tells what is to be done, how it is to be used—and then departs...to another patient. Hence in this case the helper and the help are not one and the same thing.

Yet when we look to Jesus in this passage, he invites and attends to all! Nobody invites all! But Jesus does. Yet who is this all? What characterizes this group? The text responds: all who are weary and heavy laden. All who recognize themselves to be the weary, the heavy laden, the tired, and the overwhelmed are to come—and receive rest. Those who are not weary, are not heavy laden, are not invited to come.

In Ecclesiastes 3, we, the overwhelmed, are invited to find and embrace our limitations in order to experience and fear the Eternal One who knows no limitations. In Matthew 11, we, the weary and heavy laden, are invited to come and rest in Jesus, the Helper and the help.

Limitations lead us to God and His Son Jesus.

Yet the question is, are we willing to recognize our limitations? Are we willing to recognize ourselves as the weary and heavy laden in order to find rest in Jesus? In a society that places the strong and confident in a higher ranking, this is a complex invitation. Only when we recognize and embrace our limitations, when we understand ourselves to be the weary and heavy laden, are we able to find and fear the Eternal One in the rest that Jesus offers.
Recalibrate

1) What are your limitations? What would it look like to embrace these limitations in trust and fear of God?

2) Jesus is the Helper and the help. How can we as individuals, and as a church community, live out this same “form of life” in our own existence?
One project Family,

We have some folks from smaller churches, or from locations further from San Diego, who can only afford part of the expenses to attend the gathering in February, yet who would still like to join us. If possible, we'd like to support these willing participants by raising $6,000 in scholarships to help those who would like to attend.

If you are willing/able to donate resources, travel tickets, or even airline miles to help, please email Japhet De Oliveira. Whatever you can give is appreciated.