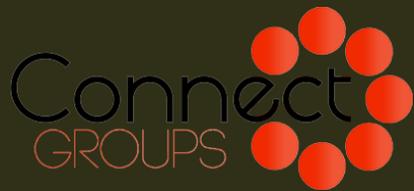


Finding Hope
for your
prodigal
experience

PARTICIPANT
GUIDE



AWAKENING.HONESTY.ACTION

AHHA



Welcome to your Connect Group: AHA Series!

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Session 1: The Father's House

Opening Question:

What is your reaction when you find something that you had previously lost?

This 6-week study is based on a famous story told by Jesus that has come to be known as “the parable of the prodigal son.” In the parable, the younger of two sons asked for his inheritance even though the custom was for him to receive his inheritance only after his father was dead. Despite the unbecoming nature of the request, his father gave him his share, and he promptly turned the assets into cash, journeyed to a distant land, squandered the money in reckless living, and ended up broke.

And that is when his AHA began.

AHA is an acronym for Awakening, Honesty, and Action, three essential elements for lasting life change. We all have prodigals in our lives – maybe it’s a child, maybe a sibling, maybe it’s actually us. This study will challenge us to become honest with ourselves and see the prodigals in our lives. Are you ready for your AHA moment?

Opening Prayer:

Father God, we thank you for bringing us together in this community to learn how to come home and stay close to You. Help us to purge the things that keep us from abiding in You. With You there is forgiveness. You are mighty and we praise You, in Jesus name. Amen.

Read Luke 15: 11-32

And [Jesus] said, “There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’”

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"



1. What made the younger son decide to return home? How did the father respond to his return home?

2. What causes us to harbor resentment when mercy is shown to someone else?

3. What does this parable reveal to you about the Lord's love?

Jesus told of another parable about two sons. In this story the father told both sons to go to work in the vineyard. The first son refused to go but later actually went. The other son agreed to go but never went. Jesus asked his listeners, “Which son did what the father wanted?” The answer, of course, is the first son, even though he initially balked. (Matthew 21:28-31)

Are you in need of an AHA moment? An Awakening that calls for Honesty and Action that leads to life change? Are you open to it?

4. Indicate where your answer falls on this spectrum:

|_____|

Not Really

Yes, definitely

Though you might be saying “no” right now, the Father doesn’t give up on you. He waits. Your no may yet turn into a yes. So, wherever you are on the no-yes spectrum, keep an open mind to see where you are, decide what to do about where you are, and act on what you decide. A true AHA involves searching self-reflection followed by concrete action. In both 1 Corinthians 11:28 and 2 Corinthians 13:5, believers are urged to “examine” themselves and then act on what they find.

Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

1 Cor. 11:28

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

2 Cor. 13:5

- 5. In the video, the phrase “leave the father” was used. What do you think it means to leave the father? Is leaving the father the same as leaving your church, leaving your family, or even leaving your marriage?**

Paul preached throughout the Roman Empire, sent by Jesus to tell the Gentiles the Good News of salvation. Preaching to the Gentiles was not acceptable to the Jews however, and Paul was imprisoned. Later he was sent before the Roman king, Agrippa, to defend his case.

Read Acts 26:1-23

So Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:

“I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. “My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?”

“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. “In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.

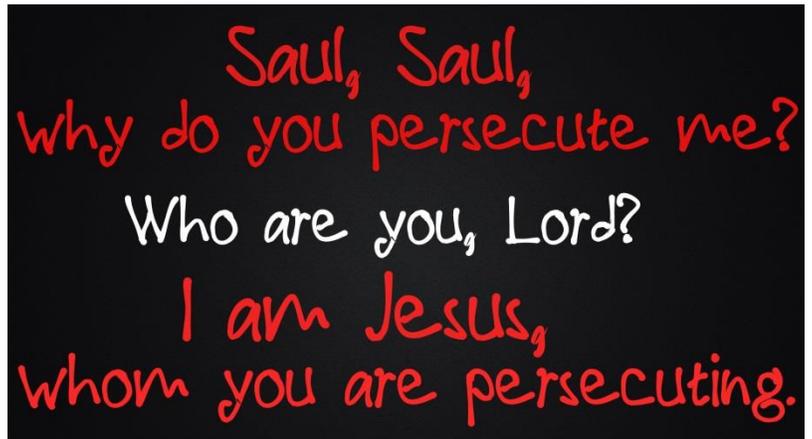
At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

"Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

6. What was Paul's Awakening?

7. What was Paul being Honest about?



Saul, Saul,
why do you persecute me?
Who are you, Lord?
I am Jesus,
whom you are persecuting.

8. What were Paul's subsequent Actions?

9. How do you explain the fact that Paul's AHA moment was a permanent life transformation for him? Have you ever experienced this type of life transformation?

The Distant Country

Opening Question:

Have you ever traveled to a far-away country? Where was it and why did you go?

Story recap from last week:

In last session’s video we saw an accountant say, “Now that we both have signature power, we could set up a dummy company, submit false invoices, and reap the profits. We met a club owner who says, “You could make \$500 on a bad night and afford your dream of medical school.” We witnessed a woman whose internal tempter leads her to say, “I’m tired of being somebody’s daughter, wife, mother. I want a life. I want to be free.”

WATCH VIDEO

- 1. Kyle said when a person first arrives in the far away country, it feels like freedom and a new life. Have you found that observation to be accurate? Why or why not?**

- 2. What would you say the “Far-Away Country” represents in Jesus’ parable of The Prodigal Son?**

3. The image of an alarm sounding was a repeated theme. What is your tendency when your wake-up alarm clock sounds? Do you tend to wake up right away? Hit snooze a couple of times? Get up even before it goes off?

4. Does the way you respond to your wake-up alarm correspond to the way you respond to other alarms in your life, such as those discussed in the teaching?

5. In the episode, when each character's alarm sounded loudly, what was the effect on you? What did you think when ...
 - a. Anjela was accosted at the club?
 - b. Claire was stood up by Brad?
 - c. Tim was arrested?

6. Do you have anyone in your life who you are hoping and praying will hear the alarm and wake up?



Read Mark 4:9, 13-20

And [Jesus] said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

7. What happens to those who accept the truth about Christ and accept it?

8. How can you make sure that the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the other desires of the world will not choke the life out of your Christian walk?



9. Where do you see yourself on this spectrum? I tend to ...

|_____|

**Blame myself
when things go wrong**

**Blame others
when things go wrong**

Experience a lot of guilt

Experience no guilt

Be hard on myself

Be easy on myself

When it comes to perceiving alarms, a person who marked the left side of the spectrum may...

- Hear far too many alarms
- Take personally alarms actually meant for others
- Heed the false alarms of an overactive conscience

For this person, a flat tire becomes a warning not to skip morning devotions again. The flu becomes a sign of unconfessed sin. A job loss indicates God wants to teach a lesson about perseverance. Almost everything is an alarm.

A person on the right side of the spectrum, an unhappy wife simply means she is spoiled and needs to grow up. An arrest for drunken driving means the cops are out to get you. A job loss indicates the boss is an idiot. Nearly nothing is an alarm.

10. What, if any, alarms are sounding in each area?

a. Family: _____

b. Health: _____

c. Finances: _____

d. Work: _____

e. Spiritual Life: _____

f. Other: _____

Awakening to the alarms in your life is your first step to an AHA moment. Some alarms have serious consequences, others are God's way of continuing to shape you into the image of Jesus Christ, a.k.a. the potter's clay or the refining of silver (see Lamentations 4:2 and Psalm 66:10).

We can be honest with ourselves about the facts of our alarm by telling the truth as best we see it. Or, we can be dishonest about the facts by ignoring, denying, or minimizing the truth.

We can approach the matter with an attitude of compassion ... a spirit of gentleness, understanding, and grace. Or we can approach the matter with a spirit of condemnation ... a sense of harshness, contempt, and judgement.

11. Why is it often painful to be brutally honest with ourselves?

12. How can we face the truth – and cope with it – so that we can approach life with greater honesty? What are the benefits of doing so?



“Sin always takes you farther than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs you more than you ever thought you would pay. The distant country is always revealed to be a pig pen.”

■ **Kyle Idleman**

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

From question #10 above, which area do you feel farthest away from God’s will for your life?

Look at where you are on the spectrum in question #9. If you were to be completely honest with yourself – without harsh judgement or frivolous over confidence – jot down your thoughts as you think about this area of your life. What is *really* happening here?

Write down your personal prayer to God.

A Sudden Awakening

Opening Question:

Do you remember a time when you've been suddenly jolted awake from a sound sleep? Was it a phone call in the middle of the night? A child crying in the night? A thief entering your home?

Story recap from last week:

In the last episode, Anjela starts her job in an exotic dance club, Tim creates two bogus companies in his accounting job, and Claire is happy in her luxurious home. They are all reaping the rewards of an extravagant life. Then things turn south. Anjela needs illegal drugs to keep up, Tim buys off his coworker to keep her from telling the boss, and Claire abandons her marriage.

WATCH VIDEO

1. **Two categories of Awakening were described:**
 - a. **Painful recognition, in which an individual comes face to face with the destruction he/she has caused**
 - b. **Startling realization, in which a person's eyes are opened to an insight that changes how he sees him/herself, life, or God**

What do you think of this distinction? Does it fit your life experiences?

2. **It was said that Awakening can be quickly derailed by denial. Three forms of denial were discussed:**
 - a. **Simple denial, in which one simply ignores the problem**
 - b. **Minimization, in which one plays down the problem**
 - c. **Projection, in which one projects the problem and the blame onto someone else**

Do you find any one of these forms of denial more common in you than another?

3. **Each of the three main characters recalled a warm, loving time in his or her past. Claire remembered Amber "catching" a fish; Tim recalled a spaghetti dinner with Emily; Anjela relived falling off her bike and Papi bandaging the scrape and singing to her. What was it like for you watching those scenes?**

Ephesians 5:14

Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

2 Chronicles 36:15

The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.

4. **As you get older, do you find yourself responding to alarms more quickly or more slowly?**

5. **How does life asleep differ from life awake?**

“King David was a ‘man after God’s own heart’. Yet he chose to ignore the alarms in his life. We might consider that the consequences he experienced after he slept with the married Bathsheba resulted in the worst possible scenario. In his darkened state he went on to commit murder. Then the son he conceived with Bathsheba died shortly after birth. Later, when his son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar, David found himself without the moral courage to confront this dreadful sexual misconduct.

David’s inaction led to another son, Absalom, taking matters into his own hands by murdering Amnon. Over time Absalom lost all respect for David and initiated a coup. In the ensuing civil war, Absalom was killed.

The consequences of David ignoring the alarms in his life snowballed to scope hardly imaginable.”

- Kyle Idleman

6. Do you consider yourself to be a “man/woman after God’s own heart”?

7. How did God show His glory through King David? Can God show his glory through your weakness?



Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

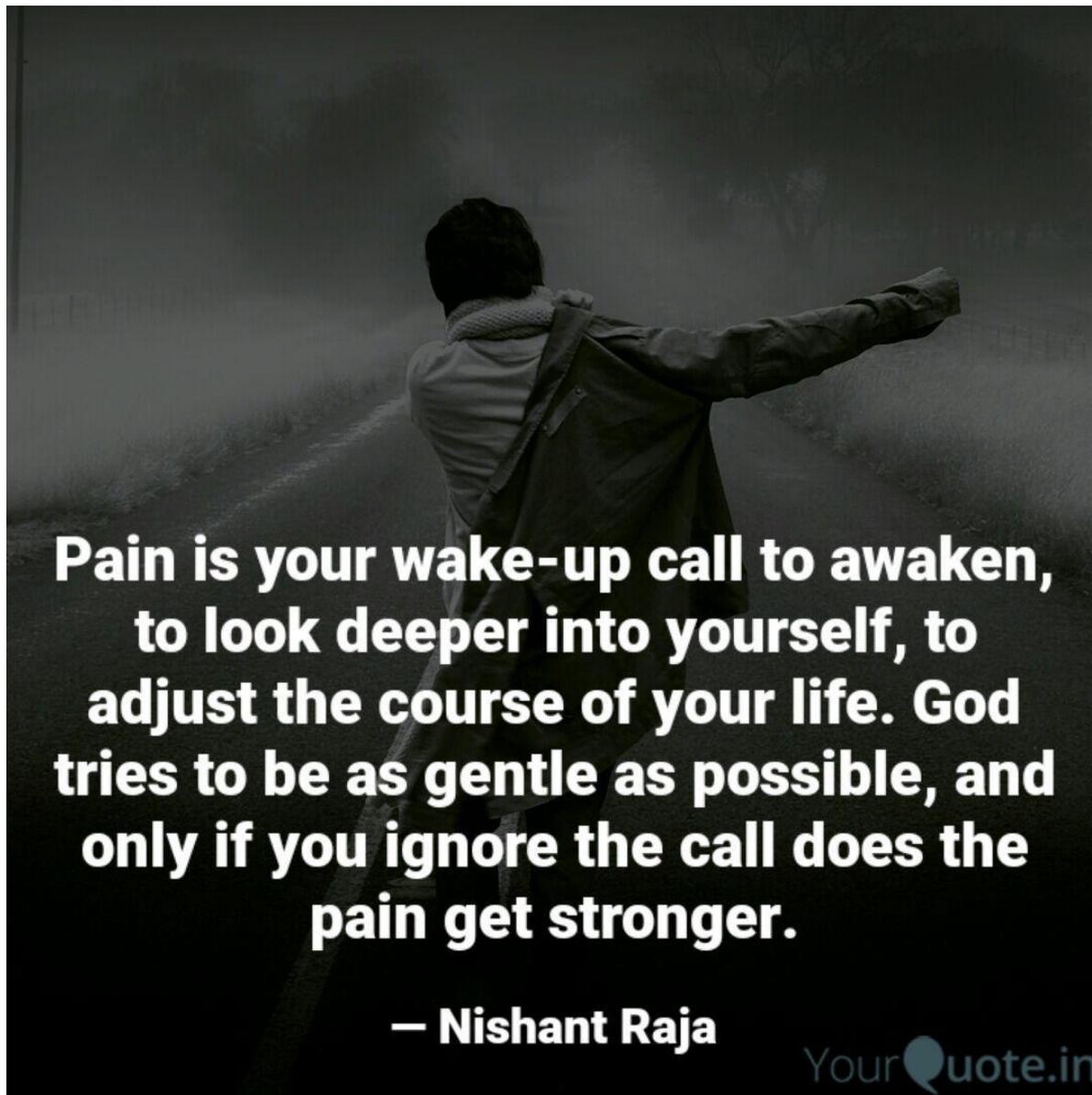
[Paul says] “Are they servants of Christ? I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from the Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

8. What were some of the consequences Paul experienced?

9. What event took place that we could call Paul’s “AHA” moment?

10. Why did Paul suffer after he came to his senses and woke up to his alarm of following Jesus after persecuting him for so many years? Were the consequences worth the benefit? Why?

11. It’s often a difficult passage to respond and take positive action when you finally answer your wake up call. What can you do right now to overcome the obstacles you are sure to encounter?



Pain is your wake-up call to awaken, to look deeper into yourself, to adjust the course of your life. God tries to be as gentle as possible, and only if you ignore the call does the pain get stronger.

— Nishant Raja

YourQuote.in

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Take some time to imagine what might happen if you ignore the alarm you've been considering in question #10 from session 2. Write out what might be the worst-case scenario, the best-case scenario, and the most likely scenario if you continue to ignore the alarm.

What is your personal prayer?

Brutal Honesty

Opening Question:

What season of the year is your favorite and why? Describe the weather patterns you experience at that time of year.

Story recap from last week:

In this episode of AHA, we find Tim Philips arrested for embezzlement, tax evasion, and fraud. Anjela, now addicted to drugs in her quest to make money for medical school, spins out of control at her job in the dance club. Claire realizes her marriage is over yet prepares a romantic dinner, but he never arrives. Each one is reflecting on a better time when they had close relationships with the ones they loved. Rock bottom moments ... how did they get here?

WATCH VIDEO

1. Kyle emphasized that sooner or later things go bad in the far country. How does this differ from bad things that happen even when we stay close to the Father?
2. When Claire was at the pier and confessed to her friend that she had been selfish and wrong, her friend defended Claire's past actions as natural and healthy. Even though her friend was compassionate, she was not completely honest. Did this help or hurt Claire in the long run? How could Claire's friend have been honest, loving, and compassionate?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-11

For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

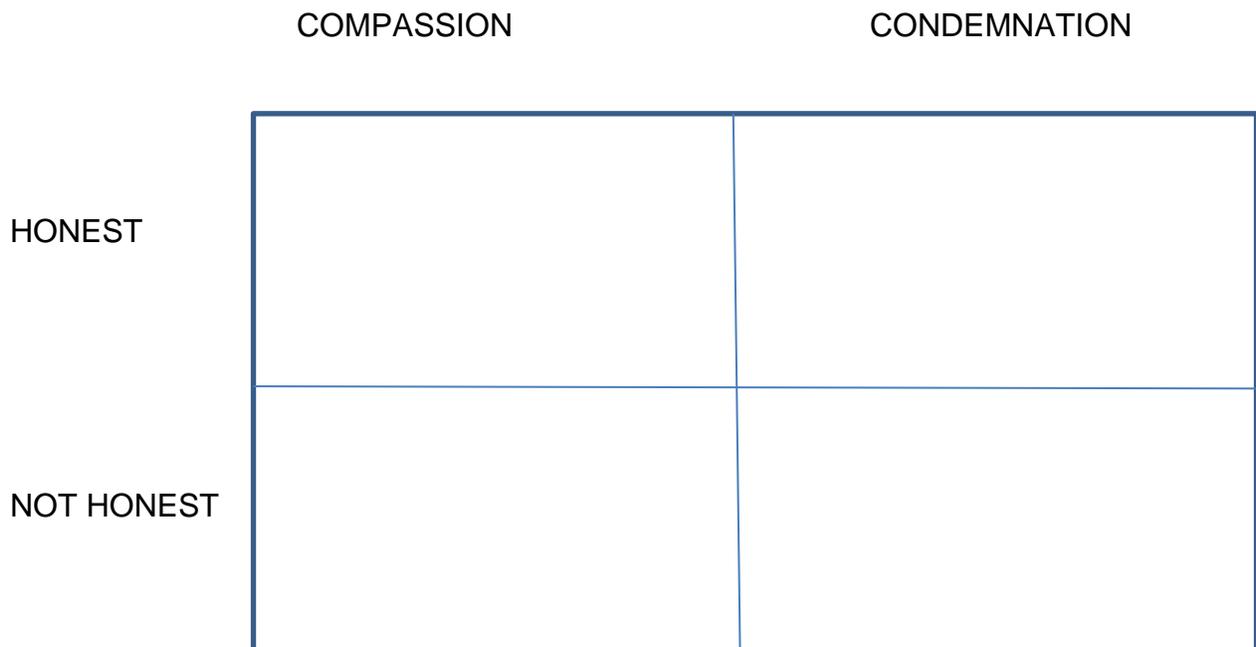


3. Based on this passage, how would you describe the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow?
4. Why did Paul change his feelings about sending this tearful letter?
5. How should we respond when someone points out a wrong in our lives?

This diagram portrays four basic ways we can react when we notice something wrong in someone else or when we wake up to something wrong in our own lives.

The left side of the grid represents the two basic approaches we can take to the facts of the situation: We can be HONEST about the facts by telling the truth as best we see it. Or, we can be DISHONEST about the facts by ignoring, denying, or minimizing the truth.

The top of the diagram represent the two basic attitudes of the spirit with which we can approach the sin or wrong: We can approach the matter with an attitude of COMPASSION – a spirit of gentleness, understanding, and grace. Or, we can approach the matter with a spirit of CONDEMNATION – a sense of harshness, contempt, and judgement.



6. Which zone do you find yourself in as you react to each of the main characters: Tim, Claire, and Anjela?

Read 1 John 1:8-10

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

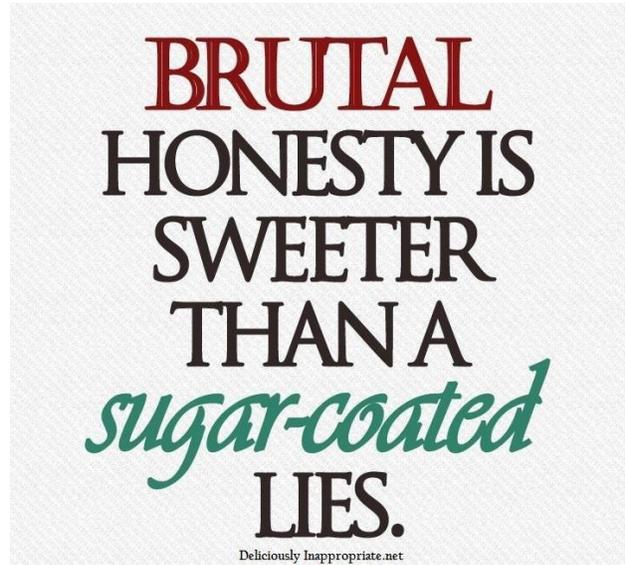
- 7. What are some ways we deceive ourselves? What hope do we have for confessing our sins?**

- 8. How important is it to admit our wrongs? How often should we do this? Does it become easier or harder to admit your sins as you get older?**

"Honesty" without compassion and understanding is not really honesty, but subtle hostility.

- Rose N. Franzblau

9. What do you think about this quote?



Read Psalm 103:13-14

Just as a father has compassion on his children,

So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

For He Himself knows our frame;

He is mindful that we are but dust.

10. How do these verses describe both God's honesty and his compassion with us?

11. Since God created us in His image, is it possible for us to see ourselves in the same way? How?

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

In session 2, question #10, you jotted down some alarms you might be hearing in your life. Some of those alarms are loud, some are softer. Choose one to reflect on here.

Write down why you believe that alarm is sounding.

Based on your reflection of yourself above, which quadrant are you responding in?

	COMPASSION	CONDEMNATION
HONEST		
NOT HONEST		

Go back and re-write your reflections in an honest and compassionate way.

Immediate Action

Opening Question:

When was the last time you sprung to action when someone needed you? Who was it and why did you act?

Story recap from last week:

In the last episode, our characters are each facing their demons. Claire is facing her selfish nature. As she and Walter go through divorce proceedings, she recognizes her sin and admits she threw away her marriage and now she wants it back. Is it too late? Tim is visited by his wife, Emily, in jail. She asks, why did he take a risk like that with their lives? He storms out, blaming her that she was never satisfied and she drove him to it. Is Tim being honest? Anjela looks at herself squarely in the mirror and says, “I’m not supposed to be here, but I am. And it’s all my fault. Brutal honesty.

WATCH VIDEO

1. It was suggested that the action needed during an AHA is not complicated; it’s simple. Do you agree? What are your thoughts?

2. Why is it easier to see others hit “rock-bottom”?

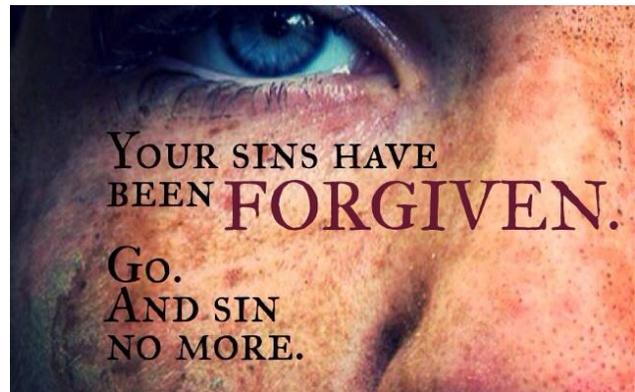
Read John 1:17 and 8:2-11

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Early in the morning he [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

- 3. What did God give us through Moses? Through Jesus? What is the difference between law and truth?**

- 4. How should we treat people who have sinned? How can you challenge a friend or family member caught in sin to sin no more, without being judgmental or self-righteous?**



- 5. What would motivate you to go and sin no more?**

The ones that need it the most are the least likely to be woken up. We have a hard time seeing it for ourselves. Even when we are awake and honest, it's really hard to take action ... to "go, and sin no more". We feel good about ourselves spiritually when we have an awakening moment and are honest about it. But without action, we're merely lying awake in bed. We need to do something about it ... to take immediate action. Supernatural life change through the Holy Spirit is immediate. He says: "Today is the day. Now is the time."

6. Why is it easier to procrastinate? Do you agree that change is not easy, but it's not complicated?

7. Why is the first step – repentance and an apology – only a *first* step? Do you get frustrated when your apology is not immediately accepted? Should it be?

The phrase, "so he got up" was emphasized in today's video. Some people are action-oriented by nature while others tend to be more reflective. Some action-oriented people tend to act before thinking things through. Some reflective people tend to think and think and delay action.

Luke 22

45-46 He got up from prayer, went back to the disciples and found them asleep, drugged by grief. He said, "*What business do you have sleeping? Get up. Pray so you won't give in to temptation.*"



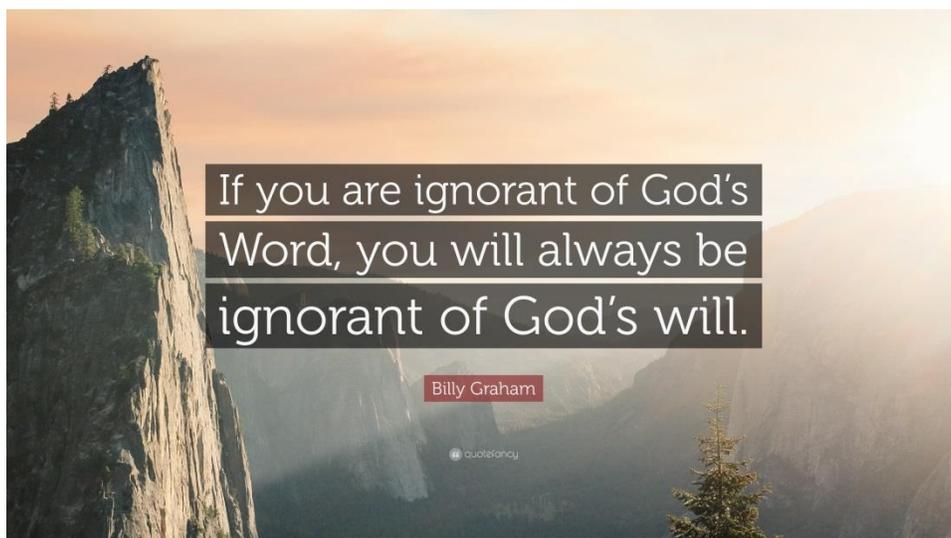
8. What is your disposition when it comes to action verses reflection?

9. Kyle Idleman spoke of two signs that someone is avoiding a called-for action. 1) underlying fatigue and 2) undirected anger. When have you found these to be a sign that a person is avoiding action?

10. How can pride get in the way of taking action, even if you are being honest about your situation?

11. How can shame get in the way of taking action?

12. Look back on session 2, question #10. What action is needed to be in line with God's will in this area?



FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Answer one of the following two questions:

When have you been so tired, you were unable to take action?

When have you had such a short fuse that you lost your temper at someone who didn't deserve it?

What AHA might be underneath this?



Coming Home

Opening Question:

“There’s no place like home.” “Home is where the heart is.”

“Home is where your story begins.”

What emotions do you experience when you think of “Home”?



Story recap from last week:

In the last episode, Anjela cleans up and leaves the dance hall through the back alley. Her boss catches her and throws her against the wall, saying, “I know what you are. You’re trash. You take your clothes off for money. Your father won’t take you back.” She goes to the bus terminal and buys a ticket home. Claire realizes her mistake and rushes home to Walter, begging him to take her back. “We are not your family anymore”, he replies. Tim, in jail facing 5-10 years, seems unaware of his fault in his situation.

WATCH VIDEO

1. **Why was the Father's response to Anjela when she walked in the restaurant so counter-culture to what she expected?**
2. **Why doesn't Carman celebrate Anjela returning home? Is there hope for a restored relationship?**

Read Luke 15:25-32

"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

3. **In light of Luke 15:2 – "And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'", what does Jesus want to teach the Pharisees in verses 25-32?**
4. **Is there someone in your life that resembles the older son in this parable? How can you help them change their attitude?**
5. **Why does Jesus leave the story open-ended as to how the older brother responded to his Father's plea?**

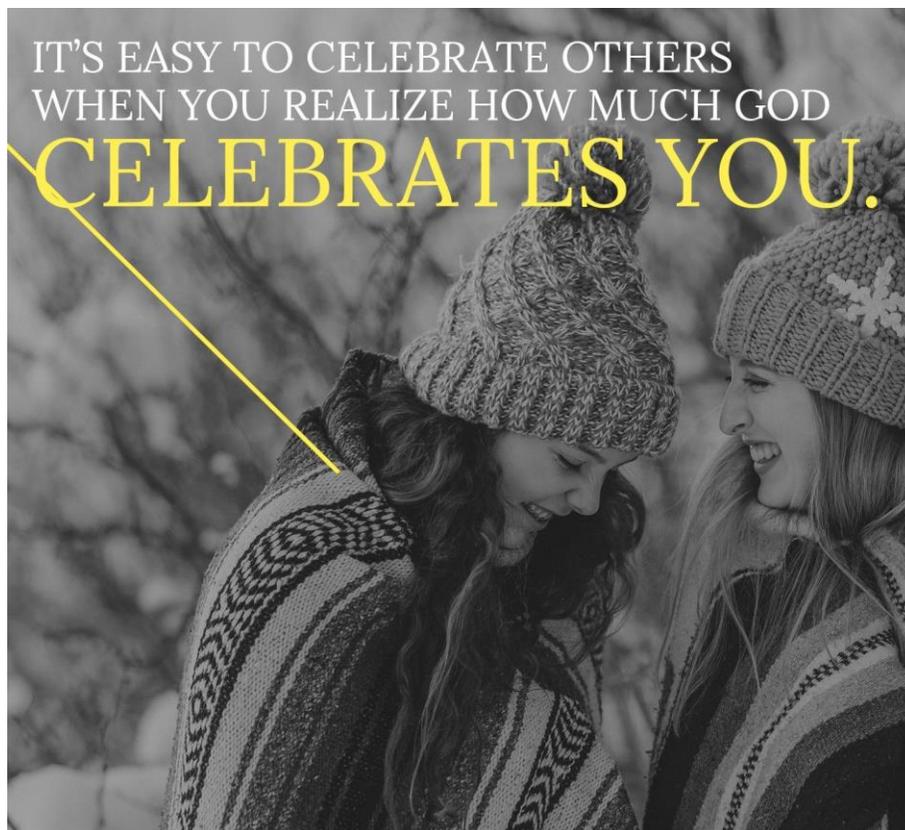
We can be lost in the far country and we can be lost at home. Kyle Idleman says it like this, “The bad son was lost in his badness. But the good son was lost in his goodness.” We are naturally inclined to be judgmental when we witness a prodigal at church. We define them in terms of what they’ve done and the sins they’ve committed. We shame them for who they’ve hurt. We keep our distance. We require the lost to get their act together before we accept them again.

But this is the Father’s house. The Father recklessly loves his children. He would’ve been right to punish both of them, but He doesn’t. He runs to them and wraps His loving arms around each of them. “You are home” and “All I have has been yours”, He says.

We don’t have to clean up our act to come home – we can come home just as we are. And, if we aren’t celebrating a prodigal’s return, we’re likely to be in need of our own Awakening, Honesty, and Action.

6. Who do you see yourself in more: the prodigal son or the obedient brother?





“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

Luke 15:7

God is a celebrating God, and He wants to celebrate the return of His children. He never gets tired of seeing the dark figures of His children approaching from the distance, He never gets tired of running out past the front porch, He never gets tired of welcoming home the ones that were lost but now are found. And if you look closely, you might see Him running out to meet you.

■ Kyle Idleman

- 7. How do you know if you need to repent of something? Are you considered “lost” if you made a mistake that you are sorry for?**

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

When was your first AHA moment? When have you tasted the allure of the distant country? What made you come back home?

The action needed to come home from the far country may be simple, but oftentimes staying home doesn't seem so simple. Furthermore, not becoming lost while at home can be downright tricky. What spiritual practices are you employing in order to stay closely connected to God? If your spiritual practices are not leading you toward the Father's heart, toward greater love, joy, peace, they aren't spiritual practices, they are merely religious rituals. What fruit is your practice producing?



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