##### **WHAT-IFs**

John Eldridge in *THE JOURNEY OF DESIRE*: “To desire something and not to have it – is this not the source of nearly all our pain and sorrow?”

This mental real estate, located part way between What Is-ville and Perfection Peak, is our “trusting place,” a place to acknowledge, and even revel in our weakness and human condition.

Here’s today’s Big Question:

**Chances are, in more than one area of your life you’re experiencing a sense of unfulfillment, of not having reached your potential, of languishing with second best, of wishing things were different, even of failure. How do you cope with these “if onlys” and “what ifs?” (DISCUSSION)**

Misunderstanding has always been around. Job was the wealthiest, most influential, godliest person on earth 40 centuries ago.

When God allowed Satan to strip him of family, possessions, health, everything but his life, Job’s “friends” hit him with a guilt trip, saying he must’ve done some nuclear Sin, and God was out to zap him. But they had totally misread the cause of Job’s tragedies.

Fast-forward 2,000 years to when Jesus was misunderstood big time.

The Sunday before Passover He came into Jerusalem where thousands of pilgrims had convened for this holy season.

People spread cloaks and branches in His path, shouting, “Hosanna,” meaning “Save us from the Roman occupation!” Jesus had come as the sinless Lamb of God to be the Sacrifice for our sins, not as the national liberator whom the crowds wanted. Question:

**What or who do people today want Jesus to be? (DISCUSSION)**

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah 700 years before Christ came to earth, here’s how God described His Son as He hung on the cross:

*2There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look. 3He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him, thought he was scum.*

*4But the fact is, it was our pains he carried--our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. We thought he brought it on himself,*

*that God was punishing him for his own failures.*

*5But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him--our sins! He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed.*

*6We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost. We've all done our own thing, gone our own way. And GOD has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on him, on him.*

*7He was beaten, tortured, but didn't say a word. Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered, a sheep being sheared, he took it all in silence.*

*8Justice miscarried … He died without a thought for his own welfare, beaten bloody for the sins of my people. 9 … even though he'd never hurt a soul or said one word that wasn't true.*

*10…The plan was that he give himself as an offering for sin so that he'd see life come from it--life, life, and more life. And GOD's plan will deeply prosper through him.*

*11Out of that terrible travail of soul, he'll see that it's worth it and be glad he did it. Through what he experienced, my righteous one, my servant, will make many "righteous ones," as he himself carries the burden of their sins. (Isaiah 53)*

Why hasn’t God cleared up all misunderstandings about Himself by telling us, with persuasive finality, just who He is and how He wants us to relate with Him? (DISCUSSION)

Paul knew what it was to be called a fool for Jesus. As young Saul of Tarsus, he was stalking and wiping out Christ’s followers. But after he gave Christ his life, and his old name, Paul was now misunderstood while serving Jesus, and explains:

*"The Message that points to Christ on the Cross seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction, but for those on the way of salvation it makes perfect sense. This is the way God works, and most powerfully as it turns out."* (1 Corinthians 1:18)

*"This ‘foolish’ plan of God is far wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is far stronger than the greatest of human strength."* (1 Corinthians 1:25)

Jesus knew what it meant to be misunderstood. He said:

*19”If you lived on the world's terms, the world would love you as one of its own. But since I picked you to live on God's terms and no longer on the world's terms, the world is going to hate you.*

*21"They are going to do all these things to you because of the way they treated me, because they don't know the One who sent me. 22If I hadn't come and told them all this in plain language, it wouldn't be so bad. As it is, they have no excuse. 23Hate me, hate my Father--it's all the same. 24If I hadn't done what I have done among them -- works no one has ever done, they wouldn't be to blame. But they saw the God-signs and hated anyway, both me and my Father. 25Interesting--they have verified the truth of their own Scriptures where it is written, "They hated me for no good reason.'* (John 15).

We all feel misunderstood at times. But Paul says what we KNOW trumps what we FEEL:

*5Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. 6He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. 7When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! 8Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death--and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.*

*9Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, 10so that all created beings in heaven and on earth--even those long ago dead and buried--will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, 11and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.* (Philippians 2)

Here’s how Jesus fielded history’s biggest misunderstanding:

*2Pilate asked him, "Are you the "King of the Jews'?" He answered, "If you say so." 3The high priests let loose a barrage of accusations.*

*4Pilate asked again, "Aren't you going to answer anything? That's quite a list of accusations." 5Still, he said nothing. Pilate was impressed, really impressed.*

*6It was a custom at the Feast to release a prisoner, anyone the people asked for. 15Pilate gave the crowd what it wanted … and turned Jesus over for whipping and crucifixion. 25They nailed him up at nine o'clock in the morning.*

*34At three o'clock, Jesus groaned out of the depths, crying loudly, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" 37Then Jesus, with a loud cry, gave his last breath. 38At that moment the Temple curtain ripped right down the middle. 39When the Roman captain standing guard in front of him saw that he had quit breathing, he said, "This has to be the Son of God!"* (Mark 15)

How can we best resolve misunderstandings? To find out, we zoom in on the official logo of being misunderstood, the cross:

*33When they got to the place called Skull Hill, they crucified him …*

*34Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them; they don't know what they're doing."* (Luke 23)

Because Christ has forgiven us of *all* our sins, we can forgive those who hurt us. In doing so, we come to understand, in the minutest degree, what God has done in offering us a clean slate with Him, free of guilt and accusation.

It begins by accepting God’s forgiveness and trusting Him with your life. Then you have the freedom to give to others that same grace you’ve received – and receive daily - from the great Grace-giver.

To whom can you offer unconditional, grace-filled forgiveness tonight or tomorrow?

His Deal

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www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

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