

“Hello” to here
—Week 1, Day 1—

O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
Psalm 139:1

“If you find the courage to name ‘here’ – especially in the place where you do not wish to be – it can help you be there...The pain is only deepened when the location is resented or, even worse, unnamed. Hello to here.” Pádraig Ó Tuama, In the Shelter

When life as we knew it shut down in March 2020, I first dreamed of foreign language acquisition, ukulele sing-alongs, and idyllic homeschooling. Not surprisingly, these scenarios didn’t materialize. I struggled to name the place I found myself—to accept it, take it as my starting point, and try (really really) hard not to resent it.

The world offers us many escape routes to avoid the place we call “here.” We would so much rather go exercise, watch a show, or read a book than face the clutter we accumulate, the hard tasks of parenting, our regrets and loneliness, or the reality that we tend to numb our pain.

But here, in this moment, the challenge is to do that hard work of naming our “here”—with all its messiness, challenges, and confusion, and to know that in telling the truth about our “here,” we move ourselves toward freedom.

“To begin where you are may take courage, or compromise, or painful truth-telling. Whatever it takes, it’s wise to begin there. The only place to begin is where I am, and, whether by desire or disaster, I am here. My being here is not dependent on my recognition of the fact. I am here anyway. But it might help if I could learn to look around.” Pádraig Ó Tuama, In the Shelter

Telling the truth can bring freedom.

Something to consider:

Make a list of all that characterizes and troubles your “here.”

(kab)

Who Am I?

—Week 1, Day 2—

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Psalm 139:2-6

Do you want to X-ray your psyche? How about the Myers-Briggs personality test? Then, there's those inkblots. Lately the Enneagram has become the rage.

You can find these on the internet and take them on your own time in the privacy of your home. If you don't like the results, try an alternate test or maybe retake the same one, only tweak your answers so as to profile a more palatable version of yourself.

We generally don't balk at standardized testing that reveals “blood type.” Yet when asked to share secret thoughts and feelings, we either run or throw up a smoke screen.

Authentic introspection scares us with levels of honesty that can feel like a lethal dosage. That's why we painstakingly fabricate a presentable version of ourselves that hangs on a peg by our front door. We put it on whenever we're entering a scrutiny zone.

It's okay for them to know my favorite color, the college team I pull for, maybe even my political persuasion. But nothing deeper. In fact, I've kept that area restricted so long, I'm no longer sure I know what or who I'm hiding there.

This pandemic is forcing us to look inside. So I have to ask myself: am I so fragile that knowing my truth will destroy me?

You'll never be able to live life to its fullest until you truthfully know who you are.

Something to consider:

Write about who you are when no one is looking—your most real self...your secret desires, fears, and dreams...and what you wish others knew.

(wcvv)

The Sum of the Moments

—Week 1, Day 3—

Teach me to number my days aright, that I may gain a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12

When I was 21, I was sure that my hard work would pay off and that I would accomplish big things for God. By the time I was 38, I was so exhausted by two small children, five moves in five years, medical issues, and job uncertainty that I wasn't sure what to think—except to suspect that my 21-year-old self would have been so disappointed with what I had become.

I mark my self-reinventions based on where I lived and what I was doing. Since I've lived in seven different cities, it's a helpful tagging system. Through the past two decades, my family, theology, and professional life have evolved such that I have often wondered if these versions of me could be integrated. Would my college friends still recognize me? Would I want them to? What do my parents think of who I've become? Are they disappointed?

Sometimes I feel tempted to make myself larger or smaller in some misguided attempt to feel like I belong. But as I become more at home with naming and being who I am, I return again to Brené Brown's words:

“True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness. *True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are.*”

—Brené Brown (emphasis added)

My authentic self is some combination and integration of the good and the bad moments. Thomas Wolfe says, “But we are the sum of all the moments of our lives,” and I think he's right.

Somehow it all holds together. I am neither my greatest success nor my worst failure. Moreover, my most authentic self remains consistent—no matter who I am with, or even if I am alone.

Something to consider:

Write about the parts of your story that seem like they don't belong.

How have they become part of who you are?

(kab)

The Struggle is Real
—Week 1, Day 4—
Read Romans 7:14-25

Have you ever walked away from a conversation beating yourself up about that stupid thing you shouldn't have said? *Sometimes I say what I don't want to say.* Have you ever tried to stop yourself from making what you know is not a good decision—and yet you just couldn't get yourself choose otherwise? *For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep doing* (Romans 7:19).

I know these tendencies about myself, *and* I still like to imagine that my life is in my control: that I am one sticker chart away from getting my kids to be compliant; that practice makes perfect; that if I study I'll get an A; and that my actions can guarantee the outcome.

Years ago, I came across a Peanuts cartoon in which Lucy is asked what she wants to be when she grew up. "Perfect," she responds. Something in me resonates with her desire, for I am embarrassed by my inadequacies and weaknesses. *I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out* (Romans 7:20).

In recovery movements, our recognition of our own powerlessness—that our lives are out of our own control—is the first step. This must be why even when I want so badly to maintain the illusion of my own capacity, I find freedom in telling the truth: *control is beyond my reach.*

Because maybe no one has it all together. Maybe we live in a broken world among broken people, which means none of us have can transcend fully this state of affairs. Maybe we find healing in our relationships with God and with others. Maybe through self-

reflection, therapy, and other group experiences we can learn some skills to mitigate the effects of our brokenness, and, as Maya Angelou says, when we know better, we can do better.

And maybe *these* are truths that set us free.

And so we say, *Thanks be to God, who delivers us through Jesus Christ our Lord!* Romans 7:25

Something to consider:

Write about your flaws and how you see them.

(kab)

God Calling Us in Our Losses

—Week 1, Day 5—

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14

Instead of a reading, today's "text" is a video, an excerpt from a sermon Pastor Adam Shourds preached on April 28, 2018 entitled, "God Calling us in our Losses" [\[Link\]](#)

Something to consider:

Write about people, relationships, or dreams that you have grieved or need to grieve.

Here is an excerpt:

"If we really grieved, we would change our orientation in life.

When we stop running from pain and loss, we get to stand on the truth in a way that allows us to rebuild and reorient our lives.

When we give up our running and our avoiding, and we give up control and surrender to God...

When we look our losses in the eye and see them for what they are, peeling away guilt and shame... it changes things.

Something starts welling up in us that's truer and more real than what was there before. And we would call that word hope, but we need to be very clear...it's resurrection hope.

It's hope in the midst of loss, it's hope through real honest grief, it's hope that's been through the fire—and might still be in the fire. *If we learned to grieve, I think we would ultimately learn to hope."*