



# COURAGEOUS RELATIONSHIP Affinity Groups

EPIPHANY 2020

## Week 1: Choosing Grace in the face of Shame

**Big Idea:** In our family lives, we all have to figure out ways to create healthy boundaries based on our baptismal identities “child of God” rather than the identities and roles placed on us by what others tell us we “should” be.

### Framing the conversation:

(Have people pair up with a person they don’t know, or don't know well)

·Round 1- Have each person spend 5 minutes introducing themselves to the other person and share about their family life journey (ie. Who is your partner/spouse? Who do you grandparent, what is your role as elder? What is your adult child experience right now? Who do you parent? How have your friends become family? ) If helpful: How long have you been at Westwood? Why did you choose Westwood?

·Round 2- Have each person take 5 minutes to share the joys and challenges for them in their family role.

### Get the conversation going:

Invite the group to compile a list of the joys and challenges of their (ie. mom, dad, elder, friend, grandparenting) lives.

What do we mean when we talk about Vocation?

Barbara Brown Taylor’s writing has helped us to hone in on our definition of vocation. At Westwood, we have defined “vocation” in these terms.

· *In our baptism each of us has been both CLAIMED and CALLED to be God’s hands and feet in the world in all the realms of our life. We use the word vocation to speak of this calling. Therefore, we confess that we have a “vocation” as a family member, as a friend, in our work lives, as a citizen of the country and world etc.*

In addition to the basic definition of “vocation” there are two other points to highlight in this reading.

1. The idea of “vocation” is not an idea that is about “doing more” or “being more” in any part of our life (in this case our family role). It’s about an

adjustment of how we understand our identity. In all parts of our lives, we are (as Taylor states on page 3) "God's people in and for the world."

2. The idea of vocation is one that challenges our imagination because it is "largely a matter of learning to see in a different way" (for instance our family/parenting life).

### **What are we talking about? An example of honor/shame vs. grace:**

(have someone read aloud)

I was in high school when our family was staying in a hotel in the neighboring state. As we were entering our room for the night, we walked by the neighboring room that had its door slightly ajar which allowed us to hear the yelling that was going on. The walls were thin, and we were able to hear them yelling before our parents turned on the TV to drown it out. Through this we picked up that in the family next door, the mother and father were yelling at a teenage son who was drunk. In the course of the yelling we picked up one line in particular. "You would have to pick a family gathering as the time to do this when everyone would know!" I still remember that line to this day because it raised a hard question. What was the real issue? Was this confrontation about the health and well-being of the young man who choose to get drunk or was it about how the family would be seen by others?

The writer of 1 Peter declares *"By the great mercy God has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (1 Peter 1:3)."* This is confessional language about what we believe happens in baptism. We are reborn into a living hope and into an inheritance by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's interesting to note the word "inheritance" and how it's used. "Inheritance" is a family word. It's what one receives usually from a previous generation as a result of one's identity. Note how this inheritance is described. It is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. This inheritance is based on a promise. Nothing can change it. It's locked in based not on what you do, but on what Jesus has done. This is the first and foremost a significant difference between a worldview based on grace and one based on honor/shame. In an honor/shame culture there is always an *if*. Your identity is conditional based on how others perceive, rate you or your behavior, your status, your achievements etc. A culture of grace has two foundational confessions. First, in your baptism God has declared you as beloved, as claimed as a child of God forever. No ifs. Second, in your baptism you are called to participate in what God is up to for the sake of the world God profoundly loves. In other words, because of your giftedness, despite your shortcomings and mistakes (of which we all have plenty), who you are matters because your neighbor matters.

So, what does this mean in the scenario I experienced many years ago? Does it mean that the young man shouldn't have been held accountable or not confronted? Absolutely not. What was being demonstrated was destructive behavior certainly for the young man and likely for others. A true culture of grace will always be committed to deep truth telling. But the reason for addressing the issue is never based on how others will be evaluating him or the family. Nor is the attempt to shame him likely to help the situation. In the long run it's likely to create more issues (which may already be present). The issue at hand is how to confront, hold accountable, and create boundaries based on his established identity as a beloved child of God and to help ensure that any destructive behavior is restrained for the sake of both his well-being and the well-being of others.

### **1 Peter discussion**

Spend a few moments reflecting on the question from 1 Peter 1:3. Note the use of the word "inheritance". Have you ever received an inheritance? What was it? Why did you receive it? If you did, was it seen as a gift or something you were owed? What did you do with the inheritance?

Share any stories with each other.

Now wonder about this from the perspective of God's gift of a "living hope". If that was actually true in your everyday life, including your callings in your family, how does that affect how you see others and yourself? How is a "living hope" different than the story named above where one's concern is about how one is seen/rated by others?

### **Make it personal: Shame vs. Grace**

Take a minute to think about a story of shame in your family. Share if you are comfortable. (it may or may not involve you directly)

Now take a minute to share a story of grace in your family. Share if you are comfortable.

Are you familiar with this challenge between shame and grace in your own family? If so, you are certainly not alone.

We invite you to wonder about the stories you shared of shame and grace in your own journey.

What are the effects on you in this stage of life?

If you do business with these stories how will it affect your well-being and your ability to seek your thriving of your neighbor?

### **Spiritual practice**

**Meta awareness-** We have two parts in our minds. One part talks to us all the time. The other part, let's call it the balcony, observes how we talk to ourselves. In the balcony we can observe if we are hard on ourselves and our self-talk leaves us feeling discouraged and anxious or if our self-talk encourages us. For this week, observe from the balcony daily and maybe keep a note of what you observe. Our faith model teaches us to love ourselves and others. Is your self-talk loving? If not, try to think of a generous and loving way to talk to yourself if you observed you were critical and note how it feels to talk with love.

### **Close with the prayer of good courage.**

O God, You have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen