

THEMES/TOPICS: Love, The Wisdom of Aging, Gratitude for Less-than-Obvious Love we've all received

Below is adapted from Krista Tippett's website, On Being newsletter, Jan 7, 2023

Time, and its passing, seems to be so present in the magnificent "Those Winter Sundays" by Robert Hayden, from his *Collected Poems* (1966, Liveright). A man recalls the gestures of love enacted by his father during Detroit winters, gestures that perhaps were not noticed, or valued, by the son at the time. I always think that the poet is older now, perhaps after the death of his father, or perhaps of a similar age his father was when the boy-poet's memories were forming... From here, ... he reflects.

*Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.*

*I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,*

*Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?*

Look at those adjectives: blueblack, cracked, weekday... chronic, austere, lonely. And the other descriptors — adverbs...: ached, splintering, breaking, slowly, indifferently. This is a poem of reflection, a poem that looks back with the kind of wisdom only time and aging can do. I don't find it to be a sad poem, even though it's a poem that doesn't deny sadness. I find it to be a grounding poem about the actions of love, even in a house with those "chronic angers".

(Read the poem again aloud, then ask the question below. Discuss in groups of 3-5.)

And what better way to start the year than with a question about love:

Q: What, now that you are the magnificent age you are, do you now recognize as love, even if it was difficult to recognize at the time?

[If time permits, when small groups are done, invite people to share briefly with the whole group something that emerged from their small group discussion. Respect confidentiality.]

THEMES/TOPICS: Transformation, Purpose of the Church, Home Groups as “Higher Ground” groups

One way to describe the primary task or purpose of a Christian congregation is summarized in our Diocese’s “Gather-Transform-Send” Model, which states: “The unique purpose of a congregation is to **gather** those called by God into Christ’s body, the Church—a community of **transformation** of mind, heart and action—and to **send** these same people into the world both to be and to act as Gods’ loving and transforming presence.” At the center of this model is the call to transformation, and allowing our lives to be changed, healed and re-formed by the Spirit of God and by our life together as the people of God.

One of our hopes for our community life together within Grace Church, and particularly for the Home Groups of Grace, is that we will experience our Home Groups not just as **social** groups, or groups that gather to fulfill **tasks** (e.g., serving together on Sundays), but groups that are actually **transformational** for the people who participate in them. Groups that contribute to transforming our relationships with God, with creation, and each other.

All of us have likely had experiences that have been transformational in our lives. Experiences either good or bad that shaped us and changed us. So we’re in some ways a different person on the other side of that experience, and that differentness has stuck. Transformative experiences could be things like: birth or death of a child, finishing graduate school or a degree, military experience, falling in love, getting divorced, a significant encounter with God or a conversion experience, bankruptcy, AA or NA, or participating in a committed community or support group that serves the world in some meaningful way.

Group Discussion 1

Scatter into Small Groups of 3-4 people: (Print these questions out, give to each participant) (about 12-15 min)

- Describe a context or experience that you found to be transformational in your life. This could be drawn from any aspect of your life (e.g. social, educational, vocational, spiritual,
 - Briefly describe the context
 - How were you changed? How does that change inform you today?
 - What factors do you believe contributed to the transformational experience?

Regather everyone into one Large Group and explore: (10-15 min)

- As you reflect on the stories you shared with each other, can you recognize any **common themes**? Things that were often present, or that came up in more than one story?
 - *[After people share, you might add comments on Common Ground vs Higher Group groups. See below.]*
- Think about Home Groups at Grace Church, or possibly simply about our own Home Group experience. What might help our Home Groups be a context for transformation here at Grace?

COMMON THEMES (might be): *a high commitment to achieve a meaningful task, an intention toward growth, a shared experience with others, being open to change/outside our comfort zone, genuine authenticity/vulnerability creates space for change, struggle or “wilderness”, positive intention to change, a supportive community, encountering grace from God, failure or success, changes of understanding or capacity.*

NEXT STEPS: *A follow-up discussion after this general topic of transformation could be a discussion that focuses on the “Sources of Transformation” (i.e., the various sources in the church that contribute to our transformation and show us HOW to experience transformation). The Diocese of Olympia has various models of ministry that it teaches. Model 1 is “Gather-Transform-Send” and focuses on transformation in general terms. Model 2 is “Sources of Transformation” and focuses on HOW that transformation occurs in the church, through various means (i.e., Study and Learning, Action, Life in Community, Prayer and Worship). Handouts are available for each of these models, to help introduce them and to guide people deeper. Or they could be sent ahead of time or in between meetings to help deepen discussion when your group gathers.]*

COMMON GROUND vs. HIGHER GROUND GROUPS: Many people have studied groups and the kinds of groups that are not just effective but transformational. One model distinguishes between “Common Ground” groups and what they call “Higher Ground” groups. In **Common Ground groups**, people come together for the purpose of accomplishing a task or tasks. When they have effectively accomplished the task, the group has served its purpose. All of have probably been involved in many such groups. In **Higher Ground groups**, people come together aiming for a somewhat higher purpose. They aim to get a task done but to do it at an exceptionally high level. This commitment to excellence calls for them to make a correspondingly higher commitment to one another. The relationships have to go deeper because to move the quality of their work to a higher level, individual participants need to: let go of their own certainty, be open to learning from each other and being influenced by the wisdom of others, and allow themselves to embark together on a path of mutual growth and exploration. The quality of the **work** that such groups can accomplish, combined with the quality of the **relationships** that develop in the shared pursuit, results in people experiencing such groups as transformational and deeply meaningful. These are “Higher Ground” groups. We’d love to explore how our Home Groups might contribute to that “transformation” which is at the heart of God’s purpose for the church.

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THEMES/TOPICS: Sources of Transformation (Prayer and Worship, Study, Action, Life in Community)

Sources of Transformation

- **Prayer and Worship:** Holy Eucharist, Daily Office and Personal Prayer
- **Study and Learning:** Mind, Heart, and Practice
- **Action:** Stewardship, Service, and Evangelism
- **Life in Community:** Conversation, Food, and Silence/Listening

Small Group: 3-4

- In what ways are these elements of transformation manifested in your life today?
- If you were to increase your commitment in this context by 10% during 2023, what might that look like?
- How might Home Groups be a context for transformation at Grace?

The Love Map 20 Questions Game

(From: The Seven Principles that Make Marriage Work by John Gottman.)

Play this game together in the spirit of laughter and gentle fun. The more you play the more you'll learn about the love maps concept and how to apply it your own relationship.

STEP 1: Each of you should take a piece of paper and pen or pencil. Together randomly decide on 20 numbers between 1 and 60. Write down the numbers in a column on the left hand side of your paper.

STEP 2: Below is a list of numbered questions. Beginning with the top of your column, match the numbers you choose with the corresponding question. Each of you should ask your partner this question. If your spouse answers correctly (you are the judge), he or she receives the number of points indicated for that question, and you receive one point. If your spouse answers incorrectly, neither of you receive any points. The same rules apply after you answer. The winner is the person with the higher score after you've both answered all 20 questions.

1. Name two of my two closest friends. (2)
2. What is one of my favorite musical group, composer or instrument? (2)
3. What was I wearing when we first met? (2)
4. Name one of my hobbies. (3)
5. Where was I born? (1)
6. What stresses am I facing right now? (4)
7. Describe in detail what I did today, or yesterday. (4)
8. When is my birthday? (1)
9. What is the date of our anniversary? (1)
10. Who is my favorite relative? (2)
11. What is one of my unrealized dreams? (5)
12. What is my favorite flower? (2)
13. What is one of my greatest fears or disaster scenarios? (3)
14. What is my favorite time of day for lovemaking? (3)
15. What makes me feel most competent? (4)
16. What turns me on sexually? (3)
17. What is my favorite meal? (2)
18. What is one of my favorite ways to spend an evening? (2)
19. What is my favorite color? (1)
20. What personal improvements do I want to make in my life? (4)
21. What kind of present would I like best? (2)
22. What was one of my best childhood experiences? (2)
23. What was my favorite vacation? (2)
24. What is one of my favorite ways to be soothed? (4)
25. Who is my greatest source of support (other than you)? (3)
26. What is my favorite sport? (2)
27. What do I like to do with time off? (2)
28. What is one of my favorite weekend activities? (2)
29. What is my favorite getaway place? (3)
30. What is my favorite movie? (2)
31. What are some important events coming up in my life? How do I feel about them? (4)
32. What are some of my favorite ways to workout? (2)
33. Who was my best friend in childhood? (3)
34. What is one of my favorite magazines? (2)

35. Name one of my major rivals or “enemies”? (3)
36. What would I consider my ideal job? (4)
37. What do I fear the most? (4)
38. Who is my least favorite relative? (3)
39. What is my favorite holiday? (2)
40. What kind of books do I most like to read? (3)
41. What is my favorite TV show? (2)
42. Which side of the bed do I prefer? (2)
43. What am I most sad about? (4)
44. Name one of my concerns or worries? (4)
45. What medical problems do I worry about? (2)
46. What was my most embarrassing moment? (3)
47. What was my worst childhood experience? (3)
48. Name two of the people I most admire. (4)
49. Name my major rival or enemy. (3)
50. Of all the people we both know, who do I like the least? (3)
51. What is one of my favorite desserts? (2)
52. What is my social security number? (2)
53. Name one of my favorite novels. (2)
54. What is my favorite restaurant? (2)
55. What are two of my aspirations, hopes, and wishes? (4)
56. Do I have a secret ambition? What is it? (4)
57. What foods do I hate? (2)
58. What is my favorite animal? (2)
59. What is my favorite song? (2)
60. Which sports team is my favorite? (2)

Play this game as frequently as you'd like. The more you play, the more you'll come to understand the concept of a love map and the kind of information yours should include about your spouse.

36 Questions to Take Relationships Deeper

Designed originally for couples/partners, but many can be used for any significant relationship. They could also be linked to issues of spirituality or faith, or set in the context of our spiritual community, or used in conjunction with one or more of our core values (inclusion, service, discovery, gratitude). There are lots of possibilities. Be creative. Adapt them for your purpose.

Set 1 Questions

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?
3. Before making a phone call, do you ever rehearse what you're going to say? Why?
4. What would constitute a perfect day for you?
5. When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
6. If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you choose?
7. Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?
8. Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.
9. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
10. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
11. Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.
12. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained one quality or ability, what would it be?

Set 2 Deep Questions

13. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?
14. Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?
15. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
16. What do you value most in a friendship?
17. What is your most treasured memory?
18. What is your most terrible memory?
19. If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are living now? Why?
20. What does friendship mean to you?
21. What roles do love and affection play in your life?
22. Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of five items.
23. How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people's?

24. How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?

Set 3 Deeper Questions

25. Make three true “we” statements each. For instance, “we are both in this room feeling...”
26. Complete this sentence: “I wish I had someone with whom I could share...”
27. If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for him or her to know.
28. Tell your partner what you like about them: Be honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you’ve just met.
29. Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.
30. When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?
31. Tell your partner something that you like about them already.
32. What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?
33. If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven’t you told them yet?
34. Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
35. Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?
36. Share a personal problem and ask your partner’s advice on how he or she might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

Read more at: <https://www.scienceofpeople.com/deep-questions/>

