The Power of Reception: Becoming Porous People

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THE PATTERN:

In the opening chapter of the Gospel of John the writer states..

> *The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own **did not receive him**.*

God arrives in human form, the one who came to bring life and life to the fullest degree, and his own creation does not have the ability to ***receive*** him.

THE WARNING:

Reception being open and porous to receive, is critical because once we stop receiving, we will stop growing. A mentor used remind me that bodies of water that have no flow coming in and out of them become stagnant and over time start to smell rancid. Open wounds need to be flushed out in order to heal. If humans want to grow and be healthy, we must always be developing the art of reception.

There are many reasons why we stop ***receiving***. There are experiences in life that make us self-protected, even things done to us that create barriers. As people accumulate years many times we tend towards becoming more set in our ways and beliefs. This rigidity becomes harder and harder to shape and mold. The soil of our hearts become dried and parched, and that kind of soil loses its capacity to ***receive*** the seeds that would bring forth new life.

The Prophet's Promise: The prophet Isaiah promises God can take a heart of stone and make it a heart of flesh. Is it possible that Jesus entered humanity to teach his creation how to become people of radical reception; ones who can receive from God, themselves, their neighbors and the world? Ones that can help turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh?

The Sponge and the Screen: Of course not all things received are healthy or good to take in. It takes wisdom and discernment to understand what to receive and let permeate our being. When we imagine being a porous people there are several images

that come to mind but one that is most typical is a sponge. Yet I would contest the sponge is not the best example of being a receptive and porous person. The sponge takes things in and holds them. We usually cannot see what is inside until pressure is exerted. Many times it is this overload and holding onto things that can make us unable to take anything in and when the pressures of life presses down upon us everything spills out, sometimes in the worst ways. So may I suggest the image of a screen.

The screen is porous, allowing for reception, but has a natural filtering, or discernment, barrier which allows the good to enter in and for those things that may not be beneficial to be held at bay for a longer discernment.

THE POSTURE:

Recently, an unexpected encounter in the produce section of a grocery store with a couple who used to attend a church I pastored, proved to be an opportunity to practice being a porous and receptive person. Within a few minutes of small talk this couple launched into a real and deep theology questions based out of their experience. It was obvious from the start we were coming from quite different perspectives but over the course of 25 minutes somehow, we ended our time in a posture of reception and gratitude. Here are some key traits that were evident in this interaction that made it one of reception and our hearts one of porousness.

PROXIMITY:

Coming close, being in proximity with people, is critical. This doesn't always have to be physical but most of the time being in physical proximity does have a greater impact. The very story of Christianity is how God came close.

John 1:14
“The word became flesh and made his dwelling among humanity…”

John 14:17
"The Spirit of truth…lives with you and will be in you”

There is close proximity with God. God is not a distant God but one who comes close to his creation. That proximity is part of becoming a people who are open, porous, and receptive. When we are proximate to each other, we have a better chance of seeing, understanding, and empathizing with each other. That encounter in the grocery store brought three relative strangers close to each other and out of that proximity there was a chance for connection…

CONNECTION:

Throughout scripture the encounters Jesus had with people, especially those overlooked or marginalized by the majority culture, always began with a connection. I’m reminded of the woman at the well. Jesus needed a drink of water. He was exhausted by his travels and made a connection with a lone woman drawing water from a well. This connection was paramount to their ongoing conversation and the ability to enter into a deeper realm with each other. In the grocery store, within the first couple minutes, this couple and myself made a connection over our spiritual journey and our faith. It was out of that connection, proximate to each other, that allowed us to be more receptive.

CURIOSITY:

One of the core tenets or principles of The Open Table Collective is that God and people are not problems to be solved by mysteries to be embraced. In order to embrace mystery we must be people of curiosity.

Once God and people become problems to be solved there is a risk of this life being stripped of its mystery. The tendency of human beings is to lean towards certainty. In general, people desire to believe they are in control of their life, destiny, faith, and future. The reality is we are not in control NOR absolutely certain of much in this life. Faith is not something we can have full certainty around; hence the definition of faith found in Hebrews 11…

The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen

There is a mystery to this life and to faith. When we see God and people with absolute certainty, we risk stripping this life of its beauty and mystery. French enlightenment Philosopher expresses a bit more intense view of certainty by writing,

“Change is annoying, but Certainty is Absurd.”— Voltaire (paraphrase)

Once God and faith become something that is based in certainty, faith becomes something that needs defending and proven. Lines are drawn. People become projects and problems to be solved. God becomes a one-sided conversation.

Now this does not mean we have nothing to hold us in place, that we as a people are completely unmoored and wondering aimlessly. It does not mean “anything and everything goes” and is acceptable; that there are no boundaries or rules. Not at all. But it does mean that what we hold true today, if the spirit moves and new information is discovered, we change, we mold, we grow.

Once certainty is the main mode of operation, the ground of certainty hardens, and it tends to not be open to receive. That ground has been cemented over, and nothing can permeate it. We must embrace the value of curiosity and always be open to change.

QUESTION BREAK:

- What is a belief or perspective you once help in certainty that changed over time?

VULNERABILITY:

To step into a space where your worldview could be challenged, changed, or altered. To step into a space where you could be rejected or where you may be despised. This takes vulnerability and courage, but I would contend there is no way to be open, porous, or receptive without vulnerability and courage.

One of the scariest parts of being receptive is to have our worldview challenged. A mentor once told me that worldviews are like Jenga towers, if you poke at them too much there is a possibility of the who tower of your worldview to come crashing down, and that is scary. BUT to truly grow we must be willing to offer what we know now and embrace the possibilities of our worldview being challenged, altered, or modified. There is a leadership principle that states,

People don’t fear change they fear loss.

When we live in the space of receptivity it is inevitable that change will come and loss will take place, but on the other side of necessary loss is growth, movement and flow in our lives.
In my conversation in the grocery produce section there was a moment when this couple realized that if they don’t change their approach and even their strong held theology, they may lose a family member whom they love dearly. I could sense their fear but also send their curiosity of what that might look like moving forward.

Receptive people come close, connect, are curious and vulnerable, and lastly they are present.

PRESENCE:

In a world filled with distractions like we have never seen in history it is so difficult to stay present in any given moment without being pulled away by our phones, emails, or constant state of sound happening around us. But truly receptive people learn the discipline of staying in a present moment with the situation they have been given in that particular time in their life. Presence is one of the rare precious traits that culminates from proximity, connection, curiosity, and vulnerability. It is the umbrella trait that embodies all of these other traits and one which I have found most rare in my daily life. But when someone is fully present with you in the moment it is a rare gift and one you don't forget. That person is surely a porous and radically receptive human, living in the present moment, growing with each interaction and experience.

QUESTIONS TO PROCESS:

- What is something holding you back from being open, receptive, and porous?
- What about this topic inspires you, challenges you, or confuses you?
- What would you add to this conversation that could make it more clear or impactful?