

Are You Aware...?

When was the last time you were asked, “*Are you aware...?*” It happened to me last week and I am certainly glad. Moments prior to standing before a group, to whom I’d been invited to speak, a man I did not recognize asked me, “*Are you aware that your zipper is down?*”

The previous week as I was backing out of a parking space at my favorite coffee shop, a kind lady sitting in the car next to mine frantically waved for me to stop and roll down my window. “*Are you aware that there is a cell phone and cup of coffee on the roof of your car?*”

I promise that I could go on telling stories like these but you get the point. Suffice it to say that sometimes I am not aware, neither do I feel alone.

Are you aware when the speed and pace of life, the noise and pressure, the outrageous frenzy of it, are simply too much for you to manage? *Are you aware* when you pack your calendar so tightly that you can hardly breathe? *Are you aware* that you will not begin to live more fully until you have the courage to say and do and savor and experience much less than usual and choose instead to take the time necessary to pay closer attention to your life and God’s presence within you?

One of my favorite writers and most helpful mentors in helping me become more aware is Frederick Buechner, also a Presbyterian minister, who says, “If God speaks anywhere, it is into our personal lives that he speaks.” Beyond any

shadow of doubt; I believe he’s right.

Are you aware that if you keep your eyes focused on it and your ears open, if you pay careful attention to it, your life will speak to you? It does not matter how limited or limiting your life may seem to you to be, it will speak to you and make you aware of vitally important things; if you will simply pay it your attention.

Are you aware of the possibilities this way of viewing your life opens to you? Kissing your spouse goodbye and taking the kids to school. Eating lunch alone or with a friend. Performing daily or routine chores. Driving to and from work. Listening to the wind blow through the trees. Prayerfully reading the Bible. Sitting still and starrng into the night sky. All of these moments become vitally important and worthy of our undivided attention as they make us more and more aware that all of life’s moments are significant moments.

Again Buechner says, “There is no event so commonplace but that God is present within it, always hiddenly, always leaving you room to recognize him or not to recognize him, but all the more fascinatingly because of that, all the more compellingly and hauntingly...”

Something worthy of our attention is always going on within or around our lives. Someone we love dies. Some unanticipated kindness or cruelty touches our heart or makes our blood pressure rise. We disappoint a friend or a friend disappoints us, and we are once again shocked at the ability we all have for wounding the very people in our lives we love and need the most.

Or perhaps nothing at all extraordinary occurs—just one day unfolds after another. We sleep and we wake. We work and we play. We laugh and we cry. We remember and we forget. And in the course of our living, even in the middle of one of our most humdrum of days, comes the question, “Are you aware that God is speaking to you through your life?” It is true. God speaks, not just through the sounds we hear, but through events and circumstances in all their intricacy and diversity, through the delightful and dreadful moments of all that happens.

There is no significant or seemingly insignificant moment through which God cannot speak—even when you’re going through the motions of some activity that you have repeated ten thousand times before, even in the moments when you cannot believe there is a God who speaks at all anywhere. Yes, in ten thousand voices and in ten thousand places, God speaks.

I am aware that sometimes we avoid listening for fear of what we may hear; sometimes for fear that we may hear nothing at all but the noise in our head or the noise that often surrounds us. Then, as always, it’s good for us to remember Jesus’ reassuring promise that he is perpetually, uniformly, and on every occasion with us.

“He says he is with us on our journeys. He says he has been with us since each of our journeys began. Listen for him. Listen to the sweet and bitter airs of your present and your past for the sound of him.”

-Frederick Buechner

A Personal Note from Fil:

You might recall that our Fall Newsletter was in response to a “*Are you aware ...?*” question that left me wondering, “Has Journey Resources failed to clearly express its purpose and why partners are needed to help fund its mission?” My hope is that we have sufficiently answered these important questions and that you are now aware.

From its inception, Journey Resources’ mission has remained simple and clear:

Journey Resources offers the message of God's love, grace and mercy for all people found through Jesus Christ. Providing thoughtful and creative opportunities to discover God's loving care, our mission extends as far as God leads and reaches through us.

The heart of everything we are attempting to say through retreats, conferences, workshops, spiritual direction and writing is this:

Pay attention to your life and the presence of God within and about you.

Following are several distinctive elements of our mission:

* It is our earnest intent to be as self-sustained as possible. Approximately one half of our essential funds are covered by fees for speaking engagements and proceeds from the sale of books.

* We charge no fee for spiritual direction. In addition, we regularly consult with individuals and groups and accept invitations to speak to groups with no associated fee. Although it may be possible to become more self-sustaining than we are currently, thus furnishing a larger portion of our essential funds, it would require charging fees for all services.

* We believe that the services we provide globally are enhanced and preserved by being well-grounded and involved locally. Therefore we deliberately attempt to place limits on out of town travel.

Mere words cannot express how grateful I am for the privilege of being engaged in this mission. It’s my desire to continue offering the message of God’s love, grace and mercy by providing thoughtful and creative opportunities to discover God’s loving care for years to come. Please accept my heartfelt thanks for partnering with us in whatever way you have in the past and are led again.

As you make decisions about end-of-year giving, please remember our financial needs. Many of you have made annual gifts in the past and have already done so this year. Many of you have partnered with us on a monthly basis and stated your intentions to do so again in 2007. *Are you aware* that we are extremely grateful? I certainly hope so and I wish to thank you again!

If you have not been led or able to partner with us in the past, would you pray about doing so now? All gifts are made to **Journey Resources** and are tax deductible.

Awareness Examen

The Awareness Examen is a gift made available to all followers of Jesus by Ignatius of Loyola, a priest and founder of the Society of Jesus in the 1500’s.

The brief reflective prayer practice is designed to help foster intimacy with self and with God. Self-intimacy comes when we become more aware of our inner life of thoughts and feelings, hopes and desires, fears and frustrations. Intimacy with God comes when we are able to recognize how

God is present and active in the whirl of events that make up each day. This prayer practice is a proven method in assisting busy people who wish to find God in all things. All it involves is carving out a few moments of solitude in the day so that we can reflect on what is going on and where our actions and choices are taking us. In so doing, we look concretely at events and ask: Where is God in *this* situation?

As a new year begins, perhaps you will find the enclosed bookmark outlining this simple practice a useful tool. We would recommend placing it inside your Bible, journal or by your bed.

We would love to hear from you if you find that it proves to be a meaningful practice for you or if you have questions about your use of this way of praying.

Fil’s 2007 Winter Calendar

January

7 West Market Street United Methodist Church, Greensboro, NC, contact Chester Brown, (336) 541-5514

10 First Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, NC, contact Brent Greene, (336)722-2558 x122

February

1-5 Retreat for East-West Ministries International, Faro, Portugal

6-8 Young Life Staff Silent Retreat, Southwind, FL

12-16 Spiritual Director in Residence, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Portland, OR

20-21 Quaker Pastor’s Retreat, Fort Caswell, NC

23-25 Lake Forest Church Men’s Retreat, Blue Ridge Assembly, Black Mountain, NC

March

16-18 Church-Wide Retreat, Roswell Presbyterian Church, Roswell, GA, contact Louis Imsande, (770)993-6316