

WOEs (Working On Excellence)

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For several weeks after our discussion about woes (people with whom we Work on Excellence), I was uncertain of what to write for this blog post. I wasn't sure if Adrienne Maree Brown's concept of woes, which she talks about in a one-on-one context, could be extended to a group setting like we have at Young Adult Group. I wasn't even sure I wanted to be a woe. Did I have the skills to hold others accountable? Did I have the energy to want to be held accountable myself? However, further conversation helped me realize that I'd been putting the concept of woes and its definition on a pedestal. In this post I'd like to explore what I initially found compelling about this concept and how we could apply it to Young Adult Group.

One aspect that initially drew me to the concept of woes was the idea of growth supported by a community. Transformation is a challenge no matter what, but it comforted and invigorated me to think about ways important people in my life could help me keep my hopes up and guide me if I started to stray from my values.

Someone who is your partner in transformation would have to hold you accountable, particularly if you're going astray. However, the word "accountability" often leaves me feeling nervous, so I'd like to unpack what I mean by that. When I feel antsy when I hear "accountability," it's usually because I'm thinking it demands certainty about the "correct" course of action for your woe to take. This makes me uncomfortable because no one can really know what's best for anyone else. But accountability as I would like to use the term means assisting your woes in coming to their own conclusions through prodding questions that can lead to deeper reflection.

Having someone who holds you accountable can also increase your capacity by helping you know that you did your best to root your decisions in your values. Recently, when I had to make a decision about applying for a teacher certification course, I sought out someone who I knew I could be completely honest with and who I knew could ask me questions that would help make up my mind, not by telling me his opinion about my aptitude, readiness, and motives but by helping me discern my own opinion about those matters. After I decided to apply, I felt more relief for having had that conversation because I felt more confident in my decision.

I'm wondering how we can build our agitation and accountability skills within Young Adult Group. The only way to get better at asking the right questions the right way is to practice. This could be as simple as making a point of requesting agitating questions from other group members or as structured as devoting a session to agitating each other on anything from our career and job choices to our role within the church and how we want to live out our values.