

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

June 8, 2014

betw|SPACE|een

(space between)

Discussion Guide

Limited

Exodus 20.8-11

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- Are you a person who schedules every minute of the day or do you prefer space between activities and appointments? What does this look like in real-life terms?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes and comments to explain the Ten Commandments and Sabbath.
- Read Exodus 20.8-11 aloud, slowly. Pause to allow the words to sink in and then read these verses once more.
- What are God's thoughts about the presence and experience of margin (Sabbath) in the lives of his people? Seek to discover as many as possible from the text.
- What do people today think about the presence and experience of margin? Where might these thoughts originate? Could you elaborate?
- Is planning and experiencing margin difficult or easy for you? Would you explain?
- What might life with margin be like? When you ponder this type of life, what thoughts come to mind?
- Planning and experiencing margin is difficult. Consider taking some of your group meeting time to experience margin. You might allow people to go for a 30 minute walk or to sit alone outside. Do whatever gives space with only one condition: no work or task may be performed! Plan to come back together and share what this experience was like.

Context and Background

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20.1-17) are some of the most recognizable words of Scripture, audibly given by God to Moses and later written by God on tablets of stone. Within their original context, these “commandments” serve to divide the book of Exodus into two parts. In Exodus 1-19, we discover the story of God’s deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. In Exodus 20-40, we learn the parameters for how God desires the freed Hebrew people to live in covenant relationship with him. The parameters for this covenantal life take the form of codified law, but these laws are prefaced by ten exhortations (Ten Commandments) which are not technically law but function more like an introduction to the laws which follow. In many ways, the Ten Commandments function much like our own U.S. Constitution: legally binding but more than just mere laws. The Ten Commandments form something of a set of guidelines or guardrails for the life that God desires his people to live. These commandments are themselves divided into two parts: commandments dealing with how to relate to God (Exodus 20.1-11) and commandments concerning how to relate to other people (Exodus 20.12-17). As such, these Ten Commandments encompass the entirety of life.

Sabbath

The word “Sabbath” is derived from the word for rest. For the Jews, the Sabbath was the seventh day of their week (Saturday), a day on which they ceased from all unnecessary labor or production. The honoring of the Sabbath was based upon the command to honor the Sabbath, a command which had its theological grounding in the activity of God in his creative activity (Exodus 20.8-11). The Sabbath was meant to benefit the Jewish people, giving them not just a time to recuperate, but

sacred space to connect with and learn to depend upon God for their most basic needs (Exodus 16). To not keep the Sabbath was to refuse to connect with God, a choice which was punishable by death (Numbers 15.35). Because the Sabbath was to involve the cessation of work, Jewish rabbis debated what did and did not constitute work. Jesus himself waded into the debate (Mark 2.23-3.6), reminding his audience that the Sabbath was about something bigger than work; it had to do with God’s intentions for people in the experience of life as it was meant to be (Mark 3.4).

The Text

Exodus 20.8-11: *Take a break!*

The commandment to honor the Sabbath is the fourth of a series of ten exhortations which we refer to as the Ten Commandments. (See The Ten Commandments.) These exhortations describe the guardrails of what a life of freedom in covenantal relationship with God looks like in terms of how free people are to relate properly to God and others. The longest of these commandments is the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath. The length of this exhortation in comparison with the others does not mean it is more important, but the length does seem to imply that this command needed additional explanation for people to grasp and apply.

The command to observe the Sabbath begins with the exhortation to remember the Sabbath, which will result in setting the Sabbath day off as something special (holy). (See Sabbath.) The choice to set a day apart each week as different from the rest would naturally create a rhythm in which the people of God labored and produced for six days and then ceased from all labor on the seventh day. This rhythm of work/rest was not only to be honored by the Hebrew people but they were to extend it to everything and everyone as a gift intended by God.

The exhortation to cease from work would have sounded strange to a people who were formerly slaves. Slaves do not enjoy the privilege of leisure or rest, but these people are now free and according to God, free people are meant to rest. This rhythm of work and rest had its theological grounding in the creative activity of God. God himself labored for six days and then rested (Genesis 1.1-2.3). Closer study of this creative rhythm of God reveals that God built a rhythm of work and rest into each day and week. God himself labored during the day but then ceased each evening as it became night (Genesis 1). After six days of working during the day and ceasing at night, God ceased from all activity for an entire day and night (Genesis 2.1-3). God did not create in this manner because he needed to do so; that is, God did not grow weary. He created in this way in order to build a natural cycle into creation, a cycle which he intended all creatures—including people!—to honor with their lives.

Application:

Most of us live life in fast forward. We are pushing to make it to the next event, the next sports practice, the next appointment, all the while running further and further behind. We get to the end of the day, our checklist only half-completed wishing for a few more than twenty-four hours and longing for time to rest and catch our breath. But right now there is no space, no time to do more than dream of what it might be to have a bit of breathing room. Life was not meant to be lived this way. Life was meant to be lived with something called margin. Margin is the space that exists between our load and our limits. Simply put, life was designed to be lived so that our load (our obligations and activities) is less than our limits (the time and energy we have available to us). The word Scripture uses for margin is the word Sabbath. Sabbath (margin) is not an optional thing, but part of the way God designed and commanded us to live. In living this way we recognize that we are not God and must depend upon him rather than upon ourselves to provide what is necessary for life. It is in our times of margin that God smiles and we find room to breathe.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at BlakeShipp.blogspot.com



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