

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
June 15, 2014

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Discussion Guide

Driven

Matthew 6.25-34

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

- Would you classify yourself as a worrier? Would you elaborate?

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 context of Jesus' words and the nature of worry.
- Read Matthew 6.25-34 aloud, slowly. Pause to allow the words to sink in and then read these verses once more, seeking to imagine Jesus is speaking them directly to you.
- According to Jesus, what reasons do people have for avoiding worry?
- Worry has been defined as the present attempt to deal with future possibilities. How might you define worry?
- What worries people? In what ways does worry impact people?
- React to the following statement: Worry drives people to work in the present to avoid what might be in the future.
- About what, if anything, do you worry? If you worry, in what ways, if any, does your worry affect you? Would you elaborate?
- What connection, if any, do you see between worry and drivenness? Could you explain?
- In what ways, if any, is faith the antidote to drivenness? What might make such faith easy or difficult?
- Read Matthew 6.25-34 once more aloud. Allow people to respond to God in prayer as they feel led through confession, intercession, and praise.

Context and Background

Worry

To worry or be anxious is to be preoccupied in the present with future potential dangers or needs and to take present steps to reduce the likelihood of these future dangers. Worry is a typical human reaction to the very real threats we face as we live our daily lives: poverty, hunger, and the troubles of daily life. Worry is based on the assumption that our lives are fated to experience trouble or need and that we are on our own to avoid or alleviate these. It is this assumption that we are on our own that makes worry unnecessary and forbidden for the followers of Jesus (Matthew 6.25-34). While the presence of trouble is always a real possibility in a world marred by Sin, Jesus notes that we are not alone. We have a good God who loves us and is watching over us, ready to care for our basic needs (Matthew 6.32). Further, Jesus posits that our attempts to address future possibilities are feeble and powerless, making such attempts a futile waste of time and energy (Matthew 6.27). Rather, Jesus instructs his followers to entrust themselves to the loving provision of God (faith) and to pursue the more worthwhile endeavor of taking up the life of God (Matthew 6.33).

The Text

Matthew 6.25-34: *If I don't... I won't...*

Jesus' instructions concerning worry are part of a longer discussion concerning the nature of faith. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs his disciples to entrust themselves fully to the care of God rather than to depend upon other things or people for what they need in life. In this discussion, Jesus urges his disciples to look to God for their sense of worth and well-being (Matthew 6.1-8; 16-18) and to look to God for the provision of their needs (Matthew 6.9-16; 19-24). In this context, Jesus' words about worry/anxiety form a conclusion in which he explains the futility of looking beyond God for the provision of what his followers might need.

In life, the experience of need is a present reality. For Jesus' followers, their experience of need was not so much future oriented but consisted of a very real need in the present; give us today our daily bread (Matthew 6.11). The normal human response to the experience of need is worry or anxiety. Worry is concern and effort in the present meant to address the future possibility of the experience of need. (See Worry.) However, Jesus argues that faith makes worry unnecessary. His followers are not to worry (to expend mental or physical energy) about their lives or their bodies. Here Jesus touches upon the two basic needs of people: physical and emotional needs. With the reference to life, Jesus is highlighting that people have very real physical needs such as food. With the mention of the body and clothes, Jesus is recognizing that people have a basic need for a sense of self-worth and value, for clothes in Jesus' day were often associated with one's standing in society. Jesus instructs his disciples that they have weightier matters to pursue than their physical and emotional needs (Matthew 6.25).

To hear that one has weightier matters to pursue than the meeting of needs does not address the presence of needs. Therefore, Jesus speaks to how his followers will experience provision. Jesus' words follow a typical argument from logic that flows from lesser to greater. He first addresses the issue of physical needs. He calls his followers to consider the birds. Birds are some of the most industrious of all creatures, always active. However, they take no concern for what they might need in the future. They depend solely upon God who feeds them. Thus, if God feeds the birds, will he not feed those who are created in his own image? Likewise, the flowers of the field are clothed in such a way that indicates they are of great standing, even greater than King Solomon. However, they are of limited worth because they die or are used for fuel. If God grants such worth to flowers, will he not do much more for people?

Jesus' words are plain. People do not need to concern themselves with the provision of basic needs and worth. God is loving and good and will provide these things. Rather than worry, people are to respond to God in faith, entrusting themselves to this loving God. This response of faith frees people to pursue what matters more, the taking up of the life and purposes of God (Matthew 6.33). Jesus indicates that this is a difficult enough task to focus upon. People do not need to concern themselves with what lies outside their control, the future.

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 find ourselves breathless and overcome.

We want to stop but we find that we cannot. We are driven, driven to keep working. What is driving us? If we could stop and consider our lives, we would discover that what most often is driving us is a present concern over potential future needs. We are concerned about how people will think of us, a need for love and self-worth. We are concerned about the future of our children, a need for physical provision. We are concerned with our bodies, our finances, our houses, our cars, our spouses, and everything that touches our lives. Our concern is not with what is but what might be. We need these things, but we are afraid that if we don't work now then we won't have what we need in the future. We are driven, driven in the present to ensure that we have what we need in the future. This drivenness is futile except in one area. It is effective at wearing us out and down. But, we often think we do not have a choice. We believe that we are on our own and so we allow ourselves to be driven. This is not the path the people of God tread. The people of God are not lazy. They work hard, but they realize that hard work is not the means by which they provide for themselves or their needs. Provision comes from the hands of a gracious and loving God, and the people of God entrust themselves to this God. This entrusting allows God's people to work hard and then to stop and rest. They can stop because they are not driven.

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



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