

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
June 22, 2014

betw|SPACE|een

Discussion Guide

Finite

Psalm 90

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

- Could you describe a time in which you “bit off more than you could chew?” What was this experience like for you? What might have led you to act as you did?

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 Psalm 90 and the wrath of God.

- Read Psalm 90 aloud, slowly. Pause to allow the words to sink in and then read these verses once more, giving space and time for the members of your group to ponder the words.
- Upon what does Moses reflect? (Seek to discover as many answers in the text as possible.)
- How might you paraphrase his reflections in a few words? Could you elaborate upon your paraphrase?
- What requests does Moses make? (Seek to discover as many answers in the text as possible.)
- What relationship, if any, do you see between Moses’ reflections and his request?
- In this prayer, Moses acknowledges that God is big and people are small and dependant upon the loving care of God. Do you feel this is an easy or difficult conclusion for people to accept? Would you explain?
- How might one live his life if he did not accept the conclusion that God is big and he was dependant upon God’s loving care? What might be the results of such a life?
- When you consider your own life, what do your actions say you believe about God’s nature? Your own?
- In what ways, if any, does your belief about your nature and the nature of God impact your ability to rest?
- What impact, if any, might an understanding of personal finiteness have upon your ability to experience margin?
- What steps might you need to consider taking to come to a point where you acknowledge and live in light of personal finiteness?

Context and Background

Wrath of God

The wrath of God is God's response to the presence of sin in the world and in the lives of people. As such, wrath is an action, rather than an attribute of God, an action flowing out of God's character of holiness and love. As an action rather than an attribute, one might say God is capable of wrath rather than saying God is wrathful.

As an action opposing sin, God's wrath is a personal response of his own free will, not simply the automatic or casual outworking of an abstract principle or law. God chooses to respond with wrath in an effort to actively punish sin by handing people over to the just outcomes of their willful disobedience (Romans 1.18-32). Thus, the presence of wrath demonstrates how fully opposed God is to the existence of sin. However, the presence of wrath is tempered by God's willful choice to redeem. Wrath is not the final word on the presence of sin, for God is slow to anger and abounding in mercy (Psalm 30.5; Isaiah 54.7-10). The same love which punishes sin reaches out to rescue people, not from wrath but from sin itself which in turn frees one from the experience of God's wrath (Isaiah 54.7-10; Romans 5.1-11; Ephesians 2.1-10; 1 Thessalonians 1.9-10). God does not choose to remove his wrathful response to sin, but he does wish to rescue people from sin so that they might not experience his condemnation of sin.

The Text

Psalm 90.1-6: God's everlasting nature

Psalm 90 begins with a note which attributes this psalm to Moses. If accurate, and we have no reason to doubt the authenticity of this note, then mostly likely, Moses wrote this psalm as a response to his experience leading the Hebrew people out of slavery to the Promised Land of Canaan.

As this psalm deals with the experience of wrath and rebellion, this psalm may be a reflection of the life of the Israelites during their years of wandering after failing to enter the Promised Land. (See Psalm 95 for another such reflection.) In this light, the psalm becomes a prayer in which Moses reflects on the present experience of the people in light of their sin and a petition for God's intervention and restoration.

Moses begins his prayer by reflecting upon the eternal nature of God and the transient nature of people. Moses chooses to start by affirming that the people of Israel find their dwelling place in God. This statement asserts that apart from God, the people of Israel have no home and no identity as both are derived from a place of dwelling (home). For God's people, home is nothing less than God himself. If God is home, that is, if God is the one who gives definition and identity to the Hebrew people, then one must inquire as to the nature of God.

According to Moses, God is everlasting (eternal). God was even before the mountains, which he created when he created the rest of the world. In fact, God's being stretches in both directions, past and future, without end. Another way to say this is to affirm with the ancient Church that "God was, and is, and is to come." God simply is, always has been, and always will be. This everlasting nature of God stands in direct opposition to the transitory nature of people. Unlike God, people have a finite end. In language that echoes Genesis 2.7, people return to the dust from which they were taken. People are limited, but not God. Time has no real meaning for God as he seems to be outside of it with a millenia being nothing but a short period for him. However, people have a short life, beginning and ending quickly.

Psalm 90.7-12: God's incredible wrath

After reflecting upon God's eternal nature, Moses turns to reflect upon God's awesome anger and wrath. It is important to note that these reflections are harsh because of the present experience of God's people. The people of Israel had rebelled against God, refusing to trust him by entering the land of Canaan (Numbers 14). The outcome of this rebellion was an experience of God's wrath (Psalm 95.8-11). (See Wrath of God.) While Moses' words are directly related to the personal experience of the people of Israel, they are applicable to all who oppose God and find themselves experiencing his wrath (Romans 1.18-32).

Moses notes that the people of Israel were consumed—they were literally dying in the wilderness—by the anger of God. At issue was the rebellion, open and secret, of God's people which led to the experience of God's wrath. Such wrath made life difficult and painful. (See Romans 1.18-32.) It was God's wrath in response to the rebellion of his people which led to the limiting of life and the experience of trouble and sorrow; that is, life is hard because of the rebellion of people. However, life might be different if people might come to grips with the anger and wrath of God. Simply put, if people realized the outcome of disobedience then they might experience life differently.

Moses concludes his reflection on God's wrath by offering a simple petition. He asks that God teach the people of Israel to number their days so they might be wise in their inner-being. In light of the opening lines of the psalm, to number one's days is simply to recognize the vastness of God and the smallness of people. In other words, it is to recognize that one is not God. This in itself is what lies at the heart of all rebellion, a desire to be one's own god (Genesis 3.5). One might paraphrase the petition as follows: "Teach us that we are not God." When a person comes to this realization they become wise; that is, they come to a proper understanding of how to live

in a proper way with God, themselves, and others (Proverbs 2-4).

Psalm 90.13-17: God's gracious blessing

Moses' entire prayer shifts after his petition in verse 12. Moses begs God to relent and to rescue people with his compassion. He calls out to God to take up his role as the one who satisfies and makes glad his people, to show his splendor once more. He calls upon God to bestow his favor upon his people and to establish them. In many ways, Moses asks God to do what the Israelites are trying to do for themselves (Numbers 14.39-45).

Application:

Rest is difficult, not because we do not understand it, but because we are not able to release our grip on the many things which we feel we must accomplish. Simply put, we believe we can and must do it all. Such an attitude reflects an understanding that we are unlimited in our resources and time which is rooted in a severe misunderstanding of our true nature. The reality is that we are finite in our resources and time while God alone is infinite. However, we struggle to live with this understanding, convinced that we are not unlike God himself, and we experience the just desserts of our attempts to be like God. However, it does not have to be this way. With God's help, we can come to a proper understanding of our true finite nature. With this understanding we can then loosen our grip on our load and allow God to satisfy us with what we cannot provide for ourselves.

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



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

 blakeshipp.blogspot.com
 twitter.com/blake_shipp

©2014 Union Center Christian Church