

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

August 17, 2014

BE GOOD.



Discussion Guide

Hope

Romans 5.1-5

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

- On what occasion do we use the word "hope?" In what ways do you use it the most?

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 Going Deeper notes and comments to explain the background of Paul's letter to the Romans and the nature of hope.
- Read Romans 5.1-5 aloud, slowly once more.

- Paul states that the practical outworking of the presence of real faith is an experience of God's person and power (grace). He notes that once people get a taste of God they want more (the glory of God). When, if ever, have you experienced this longing for God? What was it like for you? Could you elaborate?
- This longing for God becomes hope when we believe that it is actually possible to possess more of God. Paul notes that this hope transforms how we live in the present (boast in hope). How might hope that one might possess more of God transform how one lives?
- Hope is transformative, and the more hope one has, the more life is transformed. According to Paul, what is required to grow in hope?
- What, if anything, keeps people from growing in hope? To what, if anything, do people turn rather than seeking to grow in hope?
- What might it look like to grow in hope? What, if anything, keeps you from seeking to grow in hope? Could you elaborate?
- Paul states that hope will not let us down because we know it is possible to possess God since we already possess God. As you close your time together, bring forward areas of suffering which you are now experiencing. Provide time for group members to simply state these without comment. Once members have identified these areas, as a group, hold them before God and allow him to affirm that he is present, available, and loving even in these experiences. You might consider reading Psalm 23 to affirm God's loving presence. Sit silently in God's presence for several minutes and then provide time for group members to respond to God in a way that fits your group dynamics.

Context and Background

Hope

To have hope is to have the expectation of the fulfillment of a desire in the future. Central to the concept of hope is the very real potential for what is desired. We hope when we yearn for what we know is possible but not present, but we hope against hope when we long for what is not possible. Because hope is a deep yearning for something that is possible, the presence of hope is a sustaining and stabilizing force which gets a person through life. He knows that in spite of what he now experiences, he will one day possess that which makes him happy.

Where people differ on the definition of hope is in the identification of what will make a person happy; that is, people differ on the object of hope. For the people of God, the object of hope is God himself, for God is the object of our happiness and fulfillment (Psalm 16.1; 28.7; 37.4). God is, by definition, the only possible source of true fulfillment, for people are made in his image and are intended for him (Genesis 1.27).

When the people of God place his hope in God they discover a foundational component of a righteous life (Proverbs 23.18; 24.14). Those who place their hope in God discover that he cares for them (Isaiah 7.4) and that their lives are marked with joy, confidence, and stability (Romans 12.12; 15.13; Hebrews 3.6; 6.18-19). Paul encourages the Roman congregation to live in light of the hope they have; that is, to live as if that for which they hoped was already realized (Romans 5.2). He noted that one might grow in their hope by leaning into the experience of suffering since suffering confirms the presence of God, the object of the believer's hope.

The Text

Romans 5.1-5: *We hope*

Paul's letter to the churches in Rome is an attempt to achieve unity between divided factions by outlining the commonality these parties have in their need for and experience of grace (Romans 12-15).

As such, the letter of Romans serves as an outstanding explanation of the outworking of God's redemptive grace in the person of Jesus.

Paul begins Romans by noting that the default position of people is to be deserving of God's wrath (Romans 1.18-32). This is true because all people turn their back on God and go their own way (Romans 2-3). The only means of averting the experience of God's wrath is the experience of God's grace, received through the expression of faith in the person of Jesus (Romans 3.21-31). Paul holds up Abraham as an example of what such faith looks like and notes that such faith is what leads to life (Romans 4; Genesis 15.6).

Having stated that faith leads to life, Paul moves to outline the nature of this life given by God (Romans 5-8). He begins by stating that the life given by God to those who express faith in Jesus is fundamentally different from the life they experience apart from such faith. Rather than experiencing wrath, those who have faith find they have been justified (made right) with God so that they now have peace (wholeness) in their relationship with him. Simply put, those who entrust their lives to Jesus find themselves reconnected with the very person of God in a real and tangible way. Second, those who express faith in Jesus discover that they have ongoing access to the grace (effective power) of God. God's power is ever present—believers stand right in the middle of God's power—rather than being something they experience only in the moment of justification.

According to Paul, faith in Jesus brings about the experience of a new reality, the experience of God's person and power. This new reality is but a small taste of what God is like. This taste of God's person gives birth to hope, the yearning for the fullness of God's person, something Paul defines as the glory of God (Romans 5.2). (See Hope.)

This hope for the experience of the future fullness of God transforms how the followers of Jesus live in the present. They boast in the hope they have which implies that they live as if they already possess it.

Living in light of this hope is in itself transformative, for it provides the believer with the stuff that helps her make it through life with a joyful confidence in all situations. While hope is itself a gift from God, a product of faith, it may be nurtured and grown. The nurturing of one's hope can lead to a further transformation of life in the present, but such nurturing requires the willingness to experience suffering. In suffering, one is presented with the reality that life is not yet as it should be and that one does not yet experience the fullness of God's person. If this painful experience is endured and not avoided, then the believer discovers they can make it through to the other side because of the presence of God's power in them. This experience shapes one's character—character is linked directly to virtue—and the character formed is deeper hope. This way of living does not disappoint those who engage with it for they know by the present experience of God through his Spirit that a future experience of the fullness of God is possible.

Application:

Hope is the stuff that helps us to make it through life. The reality is that life is difficult, full of pain, suffering, and sorrow. Those who place their faith in Jesus discover that they begin to experience the very person of God and it makes them happy. The more they experience of God, the more they long for more of him. Hope is the realization that such a reality is not only possible but is in fact a future reality for the followers of Jesus. Such hope transforms how the follower of Jesus lives, for it gives her peace and joy in the midst of difficulty because what is will not always be. Hope is not static but may grow as the believer willingly leans into the reality of suffering and discovers that even in suffering God is present and real. This knowledge affirms that the possession of God is possible and assures her that life will be different even though what is experienced seems to proclaim the opposite.

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