

**GOING DEEPER**  
**DISCUSSION GUIDE**  
December 7, 2014



**HOOKEE**

# Discussion Guide

## Homecoming

*Numbers 13.26-14.9*

### 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

- Does the thought of absolute freedom ever frighten you? Could 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 to explain the background and context of Numbers 13-14.
- Read Numbers 13.26-14.9 aloud, slowly. Pause. Re-read Numbers 13.26-14.9 aloud, seeking to imagine the scene in your mind.
- Of what are the Israelites afraid? To what does their fear drive them?
- In what ways do you see people returning to addiction (bondage) after they have experienced the freeing work of God? In what ways, if any, do their reasons mirror the reasons of the Israelites?
- Have you ever returned to or remained in a state of addiction (bondage) even though you have been set free? What might be your reasons for this? Would you elaborate?
- Read Numbers 14.8-9 aloud once more.

- In what ways, if any, do these words address the fears of the Israelites?
- If you could summarize what these verses say in a few words, what might they be?
- Read Numbers 14.8-9 once more and allow them to speak to you directly.
- What might God be saying to you about your own areas of addiction and the life of freedom he desires for you?
- Read Numbers 14.8-9 once more, allowing time for each member of the group to listen to what God might be saying to them directly. Conclude with a time of prayer, asking God for the grace to wait and rely upon him to lead into a life of freedom.

## Context and Background

### *Recovery (Freedom)*

Addiction is the experience of the controlling influence of a person, activity, or substance. We can be addicted to many things, including anger, approval, calendars, technology, eating, exercise, gossip, sex, tobacco, reading, money, power, and much more. The experience of recovery (freedom) is the experience of life apart from the controlling influence of that to which we were addicted; that is, to live in a state of freedom is to live apart from the coercion and constraint of anything.

Freedom from addiction is possible through the work of Christ, and it is the state of freedom in which Christ intends we live (Galatians 5.1). It is the ongoing experience of freedom which is often referred to as recovery. However, the irony of the experience of the life of freedom is that many people reject such freedom and return to their former state of bondage (addiction). (See Galatians 5.1.) Such a move backwards at first seems counterintuitive. Yet, when one considers the true nature of freedom, the movement back into addiction (bondage) does make sense. The experience of freedom through the work of Christ raises a fundamental question, one which many people are not yet ready to answer: How does one navigate the world as a free person? This seemingly simple question proves difficult for many people to answer because they have never had the opportunity to answer it. Their area of bondage has dictated important aspects of their lives such as, what is right and wrong, what is important, what direction to go, etc. Once freed from the area of bondage, a person discovers that he does not know how to live, nor is he prepared to determine what was formerly determined for him.

This creates a sense of disillusionment and fear as it can feel that all structure, meaning, ability, and purpose has been stripped from life. The immediate reaction is to reach for something which provides the structure and purpose which he is not capable of providing, typically the former bondage or a new form of bondage/addiction. This is often seen when addicts exchange one addiction for another. For example, a person who attempts to give up smoking may discover they begin to overeat.

The movement back into some form of bondage is an effort to alleviate the stress caused by one's inability to navigate the world as a free person. However, to return to bondage is to negate the very work Christ has done in bringing a person to freedom (Galatians 5.2). Yet, the answer to how to live as a free person remains. The reality is that, on our own, we are not capable of living as free people. Our areas of addiction have caused us to grow up in ways that our souls are stunted, malformed, and immature. In many ways, our first breath of freedom is not unlike the first breath of a baby unable to care for itself. We do need something to provide structure and meaning to life. Rather than returning to bondage, we may choose to live by the abiding presence of Christ as the person of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5.16, 25). This involves waiting upon the Spirit to guide, direct, and provide what the addiction formerly did (Galatians 5.5), something Scripture calls faith. It is in the orienting around and waiting upon the Spirit that one discovers how to live daily a life of freedom. In reality, this way of being is simply a continuation of the experience of our movement to freedom. The movement from bondage to freedom is the work of God from beginning to end, and the life of freedom is infused and directed by the presence of God from beginning to end.

## **The Text**

### **Numbers 13.26-33: *The challenge of freedom***

The journey from Egypt to the land of Canaan was a formative journey for the Israelites. On this journey, God stripped them of all power and vestiges of their life in Egypt so that they might learn to rely fully upon him for their very being. The Israelites depended upon God for the very basics: food (manna), water (from a rock), and direction (the cloud and pillar of fire). On this journey, God revealed what life in the Land of Promise would look like (the Law). After these formative events, God led the Israelites to the southwestern tip of the land at a place called Kadesh on the border of the Wilderness of Paran (Numbers 13.3, 17, 26).

In preparation of entering the land of Canaan, Moses sent 12 men to survey the land so that they might bring back a report as to the nature of the land, its fruit, the people, and the cities (Numbers 13.1-25). The men return, noting that the land was truly a bountiful land, a land of milk and honey (Numbers 13.27). It was so bountiful that two men were required to carry one cluster of grapes (Numbers 13.23). However, the land's bounty was matched by the power of its people and cities. The southern parts of the land were already occupied by the Amalekites. The central region was possessed by the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites. The western plain and the eastern valleys were held by Canaanites. These peoples had build large, heavily fortified cities and were less than willing to give up their land to the Israelites. If the Israelites were to enter this land and live in the freedom to which God had called them, they would have to do battle with the peoples of Canaan. The thought of going to war was terrifying for these former slaves. They had never had to fight nor had they been permitted to learn the art of war while slaves. Practically, they stood no chance against the people already in the land.

While a minority voice encouraged taking the land (Numbers 13.30), the majority's opinion was that entering the land was not possible. The people of Israel were not capable of attacking (doing battle) the people in the land because they were stronger than the Israelites. This opinion was solidified with the reality that some of the people in the land were descendants of giants (Numbers 13.22, 33). It quickly became apparent that if the people of Israel were to live in the land, it would require them to engage in activities for which they were not prepared.

### **Numbers 14.1-9: *The promise of presence***

The prospect of engaging in battle was too much to consider for many of the Israelites. They had not gone to war nor did they know how to engage in the art of war. Therefore, the dream of Canaan, the dream of living as free people began to die. The night of the report was filled with weeping and moaning. It seemed that the only path forward was death, which if death was the end, it would have been better to die in Egypt. It was better to die with no hope than to die with the dream of hope fading. With the reality of taking

Canaan seemingly out of the question, the people began to plot how they might return to Egypt.

Moses, Aaron, and two of the spies (Joshua and Caleb) urged the people not to entertain this idea. The land was good and they should enter it. The way they would enter it was the same way they had entered freedom, by God's movement. The path to the life of freedom was marked by God's action on their behalf. God would lead them and he would give them the land (Numbers 14.8). The people did not have to know the art of war, nor did they have to be a powerful people. The lessons of the wilderness were not to be lost. God would do what they could not if they would rely upon him. They could rely upon God because their experience of God's constant presence in the wilderness was the new normal. God would go with them. Therefore, there was no need to be afraid.

### **Real life with Blake:**

Sometimes I catch glimpses of what freedom looks like. I catch a glimpse of what it looks like to live free from my addiction to work and approval. It is a good life, a desirable life, a life free from so many of the stresses I feel in my daily existence. Sometimes it feels like that life is right within my grasp, but then I draw back. To be honest, I draw back because I am paralyzed by a single thought: "I don't know how. . ." I can't tell you how many times I have journaled some version of that line as God and I have chatted about his invitation to freedom in my life. I want it, but I don't know how. . . It isn't that I don't know how to be free. Christ does that. I don't know how to live free. I don't know how to interact with my work, my family, my friends, other people any other way than the broken ways I do now. My addictions have shaped and misshapen me to the extent that I am ill-prepared and equipped to live any other way than in bondage. I don't know how to live any other way, so I simply sit in my bondage because I don't know anything else.

I am coming to learn that it doesn't have to be this way. I think it is this way because I am under the impression that God takes me to the point of freedom and then kicks me out of the car and says "Have fun!" I am lost if this is the case, but this isn't the case. God is the one that takes me to freedom and it is God who enables me to live in that freedom. He never kicks me out of the car! The lessons I learn on the journey to freedom, lessons of dependence and reliance are important for they are the way that I live out my freedom. I learn

that I need God to be free and in learning this I learn to rely on the God who is with me so that I might live out my freedom. With this, I can step forward not knowing how freedom is to be fully lived because it is not on me to figure it out. I simply get up each day and say, "God, what's on the books today?"

### **Real life with you:**

Christ sets us free, and yet we often remain in bondage. It isn't that we don't wish to be free. The real issue is that we don't know how to live as free people. The prospect of living any other way than in our bondage is terrifying because we find that we are ill-equipped and ill-prepared to navigate life in any other way. We don't know how to be anything other than slaves. So we stay slaves, or upon tasting freedom we run back to the relative safety of our slavery. At least in our bondage we know how things work. Some of this is based on the faulty idea that God sets us free and then we are on our own to live in that freedom, something we are not prepared to do on our own. This could not be further from the case. The work and life of freedom belongs to God from beginning to end. The lessons we learn on the journey to freedom are taught to us because they form the key components of the life of freedom, specifically a life oriented around and reliant upon God. God remains with us as we move into the life of freedom and he promises to guide us if we will continue in our state of reliance upon him. This week consider memorizing and meditating upon John 15.1-5. This passage speaks about the abiding and guiding presence of God with us. As you ponder this passage you might ask God what steps he might want you to take to turn your attention more toward him. You might consider beginning each day with a simple prayer, such as, "Grant me grace, this day, to rely upon you for all things." You might script your own such prayer, or God may lead you into something else. Whatever your approach, look for ways in which you turn to God as the source of all things, not just freedom.



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