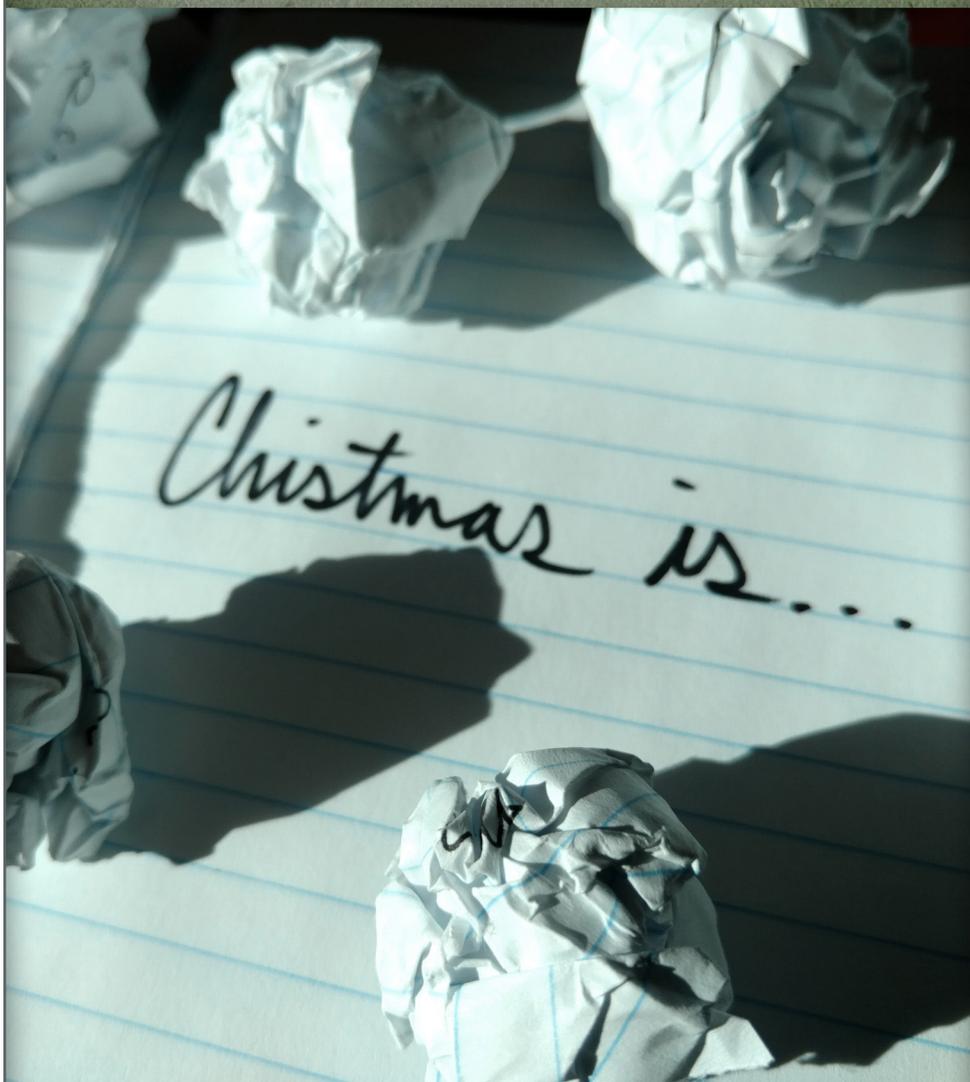


GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

January 3, 2016



Discussion Guide

Hope

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 state they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- How might you complete the following statement? Christmas is _____. 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 of hope.
- Read Titus 3.1-8 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more, allowing God to speak through the text to your heart.
- According to Paul, what tensions exist between followers of Christ and the culture around them?
- In what ways does Paul encourage believers to respond in this tension? Do you think believers typically respond in this way? Could you elaborate?
- Paul notes that the transformation brought about by the Holy Spirit leads believers to be different than the culture around them. However, this transformation is not yet complete. What are areas where you see this transformation as incomplete? What is the effect?
- Paul states that because God has appeared (birth of Jesus) and as a result, believers are changed, and we have hope of a

further transformed life (eternal life). What good might such a hope be for people who are wrestling with the transformation of their lives in the present? What might this hope be for you?

- What might it look like to remind ourselves of this hope on a regular basis? Since this hope is rooted in the appearance (birth) of Christ, how might this reminder be part of our Christmas celebrations?

Context and Background

Hope

To speak of hope in our modern context is often to speak of wishful thinking, the expression of one's desire for a specific, but often improbable, future. However, to speak of hope within the biblical context is to speak of something much weightier. Within the biblical framework, hope is essential to the life of faith, a critical component to one's worldview, how she sees and interact with the world. Biblical hope has both present and future components which provide the person of faith with endurance and patience in the present.

In the Old Testament, hope is part of the life of a righteous person (Proverbs 23.8; 24.14), because without hope, life itself loses meaning (Lamentations 3.18; Job 7.6). For the righteous person, hope is more than a wish grounded in desire, but true hope is grounded in the person of God who is faithful (Psalm 28.7; 71.5; Jeremiah 14.8). Because one's hope is placed in a faithful God, she can be free from anxiety (Psalm 46.2) because she knows that God will protect and help her (Jeremiah 29.11). While hope has temporal benefits, such as protection and freedom from anxiety, these temporal benefits flow from the future context of hope, God's eschatological movement (Isaiah 25.9; 31.16-17; Micah 7.7). Because of the certainty what God will do, his people have hope in the present.

In the New Testament, hope carries much of the same meaning as it does in the Old Testament. The Gospels rarely mention hope but when they do it is used to refer to Christ (Matthew 12.21). Primarily, hope is used by the authors of the various epistles found in the New Testament. Like the Old Testament, hope is rooted in the person of God, now identified as Jesus (Galatians 5.5), and this hope is based on God's future movement. However, in Christ, this future movement has

present realities which can now be experienced by the followers of Jesus (Romans 8.24-25). This creates something of a tension within the life of God's people in which they now have the substance of their hope but do not yet have the fullness of it. The identification of the object of hope varies across the New Testament with hope being linked to salvation (1 Thessalonians 5.8), eternal life (Titus 3.7), righteousness (Galatians 5.5), resurrection (Acts 23.6), seeing God and becoming like him (1 John 3.2-3) and experiencing the glory of God (Romans 5.2). While these may seem to be disparate items, they are all out-workings of God's eschatological movement through Christ which have both present and future realities. What is important is that hope is essential for the life of a believer, forming something of the essence of one's life (1 Corinthians 13.13; 1 Peter 1.3). This hope provides the believer a means of understanding present realities and experiences in such a way that they patiently await God's future reality which can be experienced in part in the present (1 Thessalonians 1.3).

The Text

Titus 3.1-8: *Living with hope*

The letter of Titus is often referred to as one of Paul's Pastoral Epistles. This category also includes both letters to Timothy. In these three letters, Paul addresses ministry companions who are pastoring churches with whom Paul is connected. Paul's main desire seems to involve providing guidance so these churches might develop leadership structures and learn how to live out the realities of the gospel in practical ways with their culture and one another. In Paul's letter to Titus, Paul begins by noting he has left (assigned?) Titus as pastor over a congregation in Crete (Titus 1.5). This church needs to develop a solid leadership structure (Titus 1.6-9) and learn how to live out the gospel in practical ways with one another (Titus 1.10-2.15). Beginning in chapter 3, Paul turns to how the realities of the gospel shape how a follower of Jesus interacts with his culture.

Paul begins with a command. Titus is to remind the congregation of what follows. The implication seems to be that this content was to be taught repeatedly. First, those who were followers of Christ were to subject themselves to those who held positions of power and authority. This is similar to Paul's teaching elsewhere (Romans 8.1-7), and is based on Paul's understanding that

governments drew their power and authority from God. This subjecting of oneself was to take the shape of obedience and good deeds; that is the believers were to be model citizens, obeying laws and being the first to seek the well-being of their community. This does not preclude political involvement but it is not to be equated with patriotism. Paul simply states that Christians are to seek the good of the place they find themselves.

In addition, Christians are to relate to their fellow citizens by not speaking disparagingly about them. Rather, they are to be peaceable people (seekers of peace) and considerate of others first as they maintain an attitude of gentleness with all. It is important to note that the qualities mentioned here are qualities Jesus himself possessed and encouraged his followers to possess (Matthew 5.1-13; 11.28-30). Basically, Paul encourages Titus to remind his congregation that they are to live like Christ in their context.

Maintaining meekness and gentleness is often difficult in antagonistic cultures, but Paul urged Titus to remind the congregation that they were once just like the culture around them. They were once foolish, living without a moral compass. They were disobedient, probably to their leaders, causing problems in their communities. They, like the culture around them lived for pleasure and the fulfillment of desire which led them into situations and lifestyles which enslaved and misdirected them. Like those around them, their relationships were antagonistic, full of division and loathing for the other person.

However, the Cretan believers were no longer like their culture and this was because the kindness and love of God had appeared in the person of Jesus. Here Paul directly mentions the incarnation. (Think Paul's version of the Christmas story.) God broke into the world and rescued people, like the Cretans, from their former life. His rescue was not based on their good behavior. They, like their culture, behaved despicably. No. His rescue was rooted solely in his character of mercy. This rescue worked its way out among the Cretans through the washing of rebirth (baptism) and the renewal of their lives, both coming from the work of the Holy Spirit which had been generously given by Jesus (John 14, 16; Acts 2). Here Paul seems to state that at baptism, probably the moment of the confession of faith, the Holy Spirit gave the Cretan believers new life and that from that moment on, he worked within them in such a way that allowed them to live into

the realities of that new life, which led them a life divergent from their culture.

This work of the Spirit not only led the believers to live differently in the present. It also gave them something their culture did not possess, hope. While the Cretans had been made right by the work of God, the fullness of what they would become had not yet been realized. They were heirs; that is, there was more to be possessed. This more is the hope of eternal life. Here Paul uses hope to speak of a certain future reality. The Cretan believers were already experiencing life through the Holy Spirit, but there was more of this life to be experienced. This more was to be hope for them, something to look forward to in the present. They would move even further from the dissolute life they had formerly lived and experience in a greater way the life they were meant to live. This truth, rooted in the incarnation of Jesus, was trustworthy and was to be stressed repeatedly as a source for living positively with their culture in the present.

Real life with Blake:

Christmas is _____. Depending on the day, I fill in the blank differently. When all I have heard is, "Daddy, I want. . ." I say, "stressful." When it involves long days of pulling off services and ministry endeavors, I say, "tiring." When I am bombarded with advertisements and commercials, I say, "overwhelming." In the midst of all of this, I am learning to say, "Hope." Hope is one of those funny things for people like you and me. You see, for the followers of Jesus, hope is more than wishful thinking. Hope is the assurance of a future reality, a reality we can glimpse and experience in the present. To have hope is to know that in spite of all I see and experience, I know where it is all heading, and because I know, I can endure. So, to say, Christmas is hope, is to say, Christmas tells me that no matter what I see, I know where it is all heading, so I can make it, one step at a time. What is the hope of Christmas? The hope of Christmas is that my life is headed to the life I was meant to live. Simply put, I am going to change. There are so many days when I need that hope. By the grace of God I am not what I once was, but truthfully I am not yet what I was

meant to be. Some days I wonder if I ever will be. I struggle with the demon of depression. At times anger wells up inside me and leads me to withdraw only to later come bursting forth as I lash out. I can catch glimpses of my pride in feelings of arrogance and the desire for accolades. The point is, I don't have it all together. Not that I don't try. I do try. I do pray. I do practice the disciplines, handing myself and the dark parts of myself to God, but some areas prove exceedingly stubborn. But Christmas gives me hope. Christmas reminds me that God has entered my reality and this changes everything. Christmas reminds me that God has come to be with me and when he is with me I change, I move toward the life I was meant to live. While I might not yet have arrived, I know where this is headed. I have hope.

Real life with you:

When we follow Christ, we are told that he will grant us freedom, that we will change. In some ways and in some areas we do, but others prove to be stubborn. We have habits that seem to have a firm grip on us. We have ways of thinking which we cannot fully let go. We have wounds which, while better, don't want to close up. We wonder if this is as good as it gets. Christmas tells us, "No." Christmas reminds us that God has entered our reality and that with his presence we do change and that change points to where it is all headed, life the way it was meant to be, a fully-transformed life. While we may not yet fully be all we were meant to be, Christmas gives us hope that one day we will be because God is with us.

If you are someone who desires to experience the present realities of the hope of Christmas, a transformed life, we invite you to join us on Monday nights at 6:30 pm for re-Generation, a Christ-centered ministry of transformation and healing.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

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