

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

February 7, 2016



Discussion Guide

“Why?” not “Who?”

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

- Do you believe there is a “right” person to marry? Could you explain?

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 Greek myth of round people as it relates to our modern idea of there being a “right” person to marry.
- Read Genesis 1.26-28 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more seeking to be present with God as he creates people.
- God created people to be his image bearers, to represent him physically and to do his work within creation. What aspects of this purpose do you find in the text? In what ways do people represent God?
- How, if at all, does being created as God’s image bearers influence our role and purpose as people?
- Functioning as God’s image bearer impacts our relationships, including the marriage relationship. Read Genesis 2.15-24.
- In what ways does Adam demonstrate God’s character? In what ways does marriage demonstrate God’s character?
- React to the following statement: If marriage is about demonstrating God’s character, then why we get married is more important than who we marry.

- Do people today believe that who we marry is most important or why we marry? Why might this be?
- What might be some implications for approaching marriage as a means of demonstrating God’s character? How might this approach influence how we function within our marriages?
- What, if anything, in your marriage might need to be addressed in order to demonstrate God’s character more fully within your marriage? What, if anything, keeps you from addressing these things?
- Consider closing in prayer, offering your lives and marriages to God for the purpose of demonstrating who he is.

Context and Background

“Mr. Right”

The modern concept of the perfect spouse, a Mr. or Miss Right, is common to western culture, an aspect of our conception of marriage and what it takes to have a successful marriage. However, many would be surprised to learn that this conception of love and marriage rests upon the Greek myth of “Round People” as told by Plato in his Symposium.

In his Symposium, Plato depicts a speech by the playwright Aristophanes discussing the nature of love. In this speech, Plato has Aristophanes state that “The original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, of which the name survives but nothing else.” Plato notes that this third type of person was round in shape, having four hands, four feet, one head and two faces. These “original people” posed a threat to the gods, threatening to overthrow them much like the Olympian gods had overthrown the Titans before them. Therefore, Zeus split these creatures in half in order to weaken them. However, the two parts responded by throwing their arms around one another in a desire to become one once more with such tenacity that they began to starve and die. Therefore, Zeus put great space between the two parts so people might not perish in their efforts to hold to one another. However, this physical separation sent people on a life-long search to find their other part, the part which would complete them. Plato states, “Each of us when separated, having one side only, like a flat fish, is but the tally-half of a man, and he is always looking for his other half.” And when this half is found, “the pair are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy, and one will not be out of the other’s sight, as I may say, even for a moment: these are the people who pass their whole lives together,

and yet they could not explain what they desire of the another.” (Symposium, Translated by Benjamin Jowett, Collected Works of Plato, 4th Ed., Oxford University Press, 1953).

The Text

Genesis 1.26-28: *Image bearers*

Genesis 1-2 provide two separate accounts of God’s actions involving the creation of what is our physical reality. In these accounts, Genesis 1 functions more like a strophic hymn, celebrating God’s act of creation, while Genesis 2 serves to underscore more of how God created. However, neither account fully explains, in detail, God’s creative activities; that is, these accounts do not go below the surface to answer “how” God created. Rather, the focus of these accounts centers squarely upon the “Why” of creation, providing purpose and meaning for creation as a whole and the human experience within creation.

Both accounts portray people as the pinnacle of God’s creation. In Genesis 1, this is represented not only with the creation of people coming last but more importantly with the nature of people as they are created. Previously, God has simply called the world and life within it into being. However, with people, God announces his plans to create people and to do so by creating them in his image. Two items of importance must be mentioned here. First, the text utilizes a plural pronoun to refer to God. While more modern interpretations have sought to take this as a reference to God and his angelic court, the juxtaposition of God as plurality and people as plurality (men and women) underscore the traditional interpretation of the plural pronoun as an early Scriptural reference to the Trinity; that is, the God who exists as three creates people in his image an image borne out in the plurality of sexes. Second, it is important to note the use of the term image which is the same term for idol used throughout the Old Testament. In the ancient world, idols were understood to be the image of a god, physical representations of the gods, bearing the essence of the god for the purpose of carrying out the work of the god. Idols had a specific purpose. The use of this term in connection with people is not coincidental, for it speaks to the purpose and destiny of people. People bear God’s image. Therefore, they bear something of his essence for the purpose of physically representing him and carrying out his work within creation. This point is made by God himself as he notes that people will bear his image so they might rule over creation, carrying out the work of God himself. This purpose is seen once more in verse 28 as people are instructed to fill the earth,

a role God himself has filled to this point within his creation. Simply put, people are created to be God’s image bearers so creation itself might experience the presence and character of God.

Genesis 2.15-25: *Marriage and the image of God*

The second creation account follows more of a “how” pattern with regard to creation, but it never delves deeply into this “how.” Rather, the “why” of God’s creative activity remains in the foreground, a “why” that relies heavily upon the creation of people as God’s image bearers. In this account, the man is created first, and is placed within God’s creation to care for it. Thus, the man is given his role of representing God to creation. However, it is noted that something is amiss. The man is alone and this is not good. This statement relies heavily upon God’s creative intent for people. God himself experiences life in community with himself as Father, Son, and Spirit. In this plural existence, he creates, reigns, and interacts. As people are to represent God, creating and reigning in a way which demonstrates God to creation, singleness becomes an issue. The man cannot adequately represent God because he is alone and God is never alone. To be like God, the man needs to experience life in community and must learn to act from this experience of community.

Therefore, God creates animals and brings them to the man. One might understand this to be God’s attempt to provide a suitable helper, but the focus seems to be more upon the man exercising. If anything, this act of God is to demonstrate to the man that something is amiss. He cannot adequately carry out his role within creation alone. Once Adam recognizes something is missing, God sets about the task for creating a partner for the man. He puts the man to sleep and takes a portion of bone and flesh from his side and creates a woman out of what he has removed. The imagery is important. The being fashioned by God is of the same stuff because she comes from the man and yet she is distinct because she is a woman and not a man. The theological tie to the Trinity is hard to miss. God himself exists as three who are of the same stuff (divine) and yet they are each distinct (Father, Son, and Spirit). When God presents the woman to the man, he immediately recognizes the significance of what God has done. He now has one who is of the same stuff but maintains her own distinctiveness. The narrator then concludes that this action of God forms the basis for the marriage relationship. Men and women come together, two distinct persons who are of the same essence become one. Once again, the Trinitarian imagery is hard to miss. Now people are prepared to carry out their role as God’s image bearers within creation. They can reign and create from within

the context of intimate community/union.

Real life with Blake:

Over the years, I have counseled my fair share of individuals and couples about the prospect of getting married. I have one such meeting this afternoon. It never fails that somewhere in our conversation, the discussion turns to the idea of “finding and marrying the right person.” Is this the right person? Is there a right person? How do we find the right person? Behind these questions is a simple assumption, the assumption that a good marriage rests upon marrying the right person. Marriage is all about “Who.” However, I am not convinced that this is actually what marriage is all about. Certainly, who we marry is important. We can marry poorly, a person who does not respect or care for us. Or, we can marry well, way above our heads, like me. I am not sure what Rachel did to end up with someone like me, but it must have been really bad!

The more I experience God and wrestle with his creative purposes for our lives, the more I am convinced that marriage is more about “Why” than “Who.” As God’s image bearers, we are meant to represent who God is to all of creation, and marriage plays a big part in the carrying out of this purpose, a means of displaying the unity and plurality of God. God is one and yet three, and in marriage Rachel and I experience much the same life. We are two and yet in many ways we are one, inextricably bound to one another. Out of this relationship of unity and diversity, God reigns, creates, leads, and so much more, the persons of God working in such harmony that there is but one God. Over our 19 years of marriage, I am coming to see that this too is how marriage, when it is at its best, works. And when it works, Rachel and I provide a brief glimpse of who God is. We give this glimpse to Addison and Hayden, showing them that depth and breadth of God’s person. We give this glimpse to our neighbors and friends, proclaiming in our relationship the presence and power of love which unites, cares, and submits. We shine forth the very image of God to creation as our relationship creates and lovingly cares for that which it has created. We don’t always get it right, but then again, the pursuit of getting it right is itself a way in which I experience God, an invitation to look to him as the one upon whom my own life is to be modeled.

Real life with you:

What does it take to have a good marriage? Many people will answer, “Marry the right person.” The assumption behind this statement is that there is a “right person” just for you and if you find that person, your marriage will be spectacular. Only, it doesn’t

always work out this way. The person who seemed so right six months or six years ago suddenly seems all wrong! What went wrong? Well. . .we didn’t find the right person, so we split up and begin a new search for the right person, or we spend the rest of our marriage trying to make the one we married be the “right” person. Ouch! Who we marry is important and can have a lasting impact on our marriage. However, the most important thing about marriage is not “Who” we marry but “Why.” Marriage is part of the means by which we carry out our divinely given role as image bearers of God, the means by which we display the plurality and unity that is the essence of our God (Father, Son, and Spirit becoming one God). When we enter marriage understanding why we get married and pursue this purpose in our marriages, our marriages take on new meaning and depth. We find we are pursuing a relationship that matters beyond our personal existence and happiness, and that the pursuit of this leads us to an experience for which we were created. Practically, the pursuit of unity and plurality in our marriages serves to form us, or better yet, transform us. The only way our marriages can work is if we ourselves take on the very character of the God whose life we are seeking to model with our marriage. In this way, our marriages become great sources of joy and grace; a means to experience life as it was meant to be. If you are considering marriage, consider this week why you wish to get married. Allow yourself to ponder what it might be like to approach marriage as a way to experience the life of God. If you are already married, consider this week what you are looking for out of marriage. Is your marriage about being completed or happy? Chances are you are unhappy if this is the focus, unhappy with your marriage and your spouse. Consider looking for ways to reorient your thinking about your marriage. Ponder what it would look like to approach your marriage as a means of experiencing the life of God. Consider what it would look like for you to live this way, not your spouse! Look for small ways you can practice this, consistently asking God for grace to take up his way of life.



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