

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

February 28, 2016



THE STORY OF GOD'S GLORY



1. the GOSPEL
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Discussion Guide

God

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 would you describe the gospel?

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.)

- USING THE NOTES, EXPLAIN THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GLORY AND GOODNESS.
- READ GENESIS 1 ALOUD. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE ALOUD. SEEK TO EXPERIENCE THE TEXT AS A HYMN OF PRAISE CALLING YOU TO A RESPONSE OF WONDER AND AWE.
- IN ROMANS 1.20, WE SEE THAT ALL OF CREATION REVEALS THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD. AS YOU CONSIDER GENESIS 1, WHAT DIVINE ATTRIBUTES DID GOD MAKE PLAIN IN HIS CREATION? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY IN THE TEXT AS POSSIBLE.
- IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT GENESIS 1 IS THEOLOGY NOT HISTORY OR SCIENCE, A THEOLOGY CONCERNING THE "WHY?" OF CREATION. CONSIDERING GENESIS 1, WHAT MIGHT BE THE REASON BEHIND GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIONS? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- ON SUNDAY, WE PROPOSED THAT THE "WHY?" BEHIND CREATION WAS THE REVELATION OF GOD'S GLORY. IF GOD MEANT FOR ALL OF CREATION TO DECLARE HIS GLORY, WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT OUR PURPOSE AND DESTINY? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO LIVE OUT THIS PURPOSE IN PRACTICAL TERMS?
- DOES LIVING OUT THE PURPOSE OF GLORIFYING GOD SEEM EASY OR DIFFICULT? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- THE GOSPEL BEGINS WITH GOD AND HIS ACTIONS WHICH DETERMINE OUR TRUE PURPOSE AND DESTINY. IN WHAT WAYS IS THIS SIMILAR OR DISSIMILAR TO THE WAY PEOPLE

TYPICALLY DEFINE THE GOSPEL? WHAT DIFFERENCE MIGHT THIS MAKE?

- IF THE GOSPEL DECLARES OUR TRUE PURPOSE AND DESTINY, HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO DECLARE AND RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL? WHAT MIGHT SUCH A DECLARATION AND RESPONSE LOOK LIKE? IN WHAT WAYS IS THIS SIMILAR OR DISSIMILAR TO THE WAY PEOPLE TYPICALLY PROCLAIM AND RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL? IS THIS A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- CONSIDER CLOSING IN PRAYER. YOU MIGHT USE THIS TIME TO ASK FOR THE GRACE TO HAVE OPEN HEARTS IN EARS, A SPIRIT READY TO RECEIVE AND RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

GLORY AND GOODNESS

THE WORD GLORY IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT LITERALLY MEANS TO "BE HEAVY" OR "TO CARRY GREAT WEIGHT." RATHER THAN REFERRING TO ONE'S PHYSICAL BEING, THE TERM IS USED TO SIGNIFY THE VAST AMOUNT OF RICHES (GENESIS 31.1), POWER (ISAIAH 8.8), OR POSITION (GENESIS 45.13) A PERSON POSSESSES. THE TERM CAN BE APPLIED TO GOD IN THIS MANNER, BUT, PREDOMINANTLY, THE TERM IS USED TO SPEAK OF THE MANIFESTATION OF LIGHT BY WHICH GOD REVEALS HIMSELF, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THEOPHANY (LITERALLY GOD APPEARANCE). GLORY IS THEREFORE AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF HIS CHARACTER, THE PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF HIS PRESENCE.

GOODNESS IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST GENERAL TERMS. THEREFORE, IT CAN BE USED IN A MULTITUDE OF WAYS. IT CAN BE USED TO SPEAK OF SOMETHING AS BEING PRAISEWORTHY OR MORALLY UPRIGHT. IT CAN ALSO REFER TO THE PLEASING NATURE OF A THING, PERSON, OR EXPERIENCE. HOWEVER, IN SCRIPTURE, IT IS HARD TO MISS THAT GOODNESS COMES FROM GOD HIMSELF. THIS MEANS NOT JUST THAT GOOD THINGS COME FROM GOD (JAMES 1.17), BUT THAT GOODNESS ITSELF ULTIMATELY COMES FROM GOD; THAT IS, GOODNESS IS AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF GOD'S CHARACTER (MATTHEW 19.16-22). THEREFORE, TO SEEK THAT WHICH IS GOOD IS TO SEEK AFTER GOD (AMOS 5.4, 6, 14).

GLORY AND GOODNESS ARE BOTH ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF GOD'S CHARACTER, BUT THEY ARE NOT DISTINCT ASPECTS OF GOD'S DIVINE NATURE. THEY ARE, IN FACT, THE SAME ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF GOD VIEWED FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES. THE BRILLIANT MANIFESTATION WHICH IS PART OF GOD'S PHYSICAL PRESENCE IS NONE OTHER THAN HIS GOODNESS. MOSES DISCOVERED THIS IN HIS REQUEST THAT GOD REVEAL HIS GLORY TO MOSES (EXODUS 33.18). MOSES IS NOT ASKING FOR A SIGN, BUT FOR THE ABILITY TO SEE GOD IN AN UNHINDERED MANNER. GOD AGREES TO SHOW HIS GLORY TO MOSES, WHICH HE NOTES IS NOTHING LESS THAN HIS GOODNESS (EXODUS 33.19, 22). THUS, TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S GLORY IS MORE THAN TO EXPERIENCE GOD IN HIS BRILLIANCE AND MAJESTY. TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S GLORY IS TO EXPERIENCE THE BRILLIANCE AND MAJESTY OF ULTIMATE GOODNESS.

THE TEXT

GENESIS 1.1-31: GOD'S GOOD CREATION

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS IS A HYMN CELEBRATING THE WONDERFUL CREATION OF GOD AND GOD AS ITS CREATOR. WHILE OUR MODERN MIND TENDS TO VIEW THIS TEXT THROUGH THE LENS OF HISTORY OR SCIENCE, TO DO SO IS TO MISS THE POINT OF THE TEXT ENTIRELY. THE AUTHOR NEVER INTENDED TO ANSWER OUR MODERN QUESTIONS CONCERNING HOW GOD CREATED BUT RATHER INTENDED TO ANSWER WHY HE CREATED, BECAUSE ONLY THE LATTER PROVIDES PURPOSE AND MEANING FOR ALL GOD CREATED. IN OTHER WORDS, GENESIS 1 IS THEOLOGY NOT HISTORY OR SCIENCE.

THAT THE TEXT IS A HYMN IS EASILY SEEN IN ITS STROPHIC (VERSES) STRUCTURE, WHICH IS PICTURED BELOW. THE POINT OF THE HYMN IS TO HELP THE READER ENCOUNTER THE WONDER, MAJESTY, AND POWER OF GOD AS SEEN IN HIS ORDERLINESS AND POWER.

DAY	DIVINE ACTION	DIVINE ACTION	DAY
1	CREATION OF LIGHT (GEN. 1.3-5)	CREATION OF LIGHT HOLDERS (GENESIS 1.14-19)	4
2	CREATION OF FIRMAMENT: SKY AND SEAS (GENESIS 1.6-8)	CREATION OF INHABITANTS: SKY AND SEA (GENESIS 1.20-23)	5
3	CREATION OF LAND AND PLANTS (GENESIS 1.9-13)	CREATION OF INHABITANTS OF LAND WHO EAT PLANTS (GENESIS 1.24-31)	6

THE TEXT BEGINS BY NOTING THAT THERE WAS A MOMENT OF BEGINNING. THIS MOMENT IS NOT THE BEGINNING OF GOD BUT THE BEGINNING OF CREATION ITSELF. BEFORE THIS, GOD EXISTED. THEN, GOD CREATED EVERYTHING. THE WORD FOR CREATE IS USED SIX TIMES IN THIS PASSAGE AND IS ONLY ASSOCIATED WITH GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (GENESIS 1.1, 21, 27, 2.3). IN THE CONTEXT, IT BEARS THE MEANING OF CREATING COMPLETENESS FROM NOTHINGNESS. ONE MIGHT SAY THAT GOD CREATED MATTER, ALL THE MATTER WHICH EXISTS BUT IN ITS PRIMORDIAL STATE BECAUSE IT HAD NO FORM AND WAS DEVOID OF LIFE. HOWEVER, GOD IS NOT FINISHED WITH HIS CREATING. GOD'S SPIRIT HAS DRAWN NEAR TO THE MATTER GOD HAS CREATED. THE WONDER OF THESE FIRST VERSES IS THE WONDER AND AWE OF GOD'S GREAT POWER. GOD WAS AND THEN SUDDENLY ALL OF MATTER CAME INTO BEING. THIS CREATION OF MATTER IS NOT AN ACCIDENT, BUT GOD HAS A PLAN, A PLAN WHICH WILL BE PUT INTO PLACE BY HIS SPIRIT. THE UNFOLDING OF THIS PLAN WILL GIVE THE READER INSIGHT INTO WHY GOD CREATED THUS PROVIDING PURPOSE FOR THAT WHICH GOD HAS CREATED.

GOD SPEAKS AND CALLS FORTH LIGHT INTO THE PRIMORDIAL DARKNESS AND SEPARATES THE LIGHT FROM THE DARK BEFORE DECLARING HIS FIRST ACT OF CREATION COMPLETE. IN THIS MOVEMENT, GOD OBSERVES THE CREATION OF LIGHT AND DECLARES THAT IT IS GOD. ON THE SURFACE, THIS STATEMENT CAN AND DOES REFER TO THE JOY GOD FEELS AS HE CREATES (PROVERBS 8.30-31). HOWEVER, THE STATEMENT ALSO PROVIDES AN INSIGHT INTO THE WHY MOTIVATING GOD'S ACTIVITY. TO SPEAK OF GOODNESS IS TO SPEAK OF GOD'S GLORY, THE PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF HIS PRESENCE. THEREFORE, THE STATEMENT CAN INDICATE THAT GOD SEES A PART OF HIMSELF IN WHAT HE HAS CREATED, SPECIFICALLY THE LIGHT HE HAS SPOKEN INTO BEING. IF THIS IS THE CASE, THEN GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITY IS DESIGNED IN LARGE PART TO DISPLAY HIS DIVINE ATTRIBUTES, HIS CHARACTER OF GLORY. THUS, CREATION ITSELF EXISTS TO DECLARE WHO GOD IS WHICH IS WORSHIP. THIS IDEA CAN ONLY BE SUPPORTED IF THAT WHICH GOD HAS CREATED DEMONSTRATES GOD'S CHARACTER, SOMETHING WHICH LIGHT DOES FOR GOD HIMSELF IS LIGHT (1 JOHN 1.5). THEREFORE, GOD HAS CREATED SOMETHING WHICH REVEALS WHO HE IS.

THE SECOND DAY OF CREATION IS MARKED WITH AN ORDERING OF CHAOS. THE HEAVENS ARE SEPARATED FROM THE EARTH AND GOD MARKS THE COMPLETION OF THIS MOVEMENT. HE BEGINS HIS THIRD MOVEMENT BY SPEAKING THE SEAS AND LAND INTO BEING WHICH IS ANOTHER ACT OF ORDERING CREATION. HIS ORDERING COMPLETE, GOD DECLARES ONCE MORE THAT WHAT HE HAS DONE IS GOOD. CERTAINLY GOD DELIGHTS IN HIS ORDERING, HE DOES SO BECAUSE THIS ORDERING REVEALS AN ASPECT OF HIS CHARACTER. GOD IS A GOD OF ORDER (1 CORINTHIANS 14.33). HAVING ORDERED CREATION, HE THEN FILLS THE LAND WITH AN ASSORTMENT OF VEGETATION. THE POINT REPEATED IN THIS ACTIVITY IS THE PLURALITY OF VEGETATION CREATED. WITH THE CREATION OF THIS PLURALITY OF PLANTS, GOD DECLARES THAT WHAT HE HAS DONE IS GOOD. ONCE AGAIN, HE DELIGHTS IN HIS ACTIVITY BUT HE DOES SO BECAUSE THE PLURALITY POINTS NOT JUST TO HIS CREATIVE SPIRIT BUT TO HIS ESSENTIAL NATURE MARKED BY THE PLURALITY OF FATHER, SON, AND SPIRIT.

THE FOURTH CREATIVE MOVEMENT BEGINS WITH GOD SPEAKING THE LIGHT HOLDERS INTO BEING: SUN, MOON, AND STARS. HOWEVER, GOD HAS A PURPOSE FOR THESE LIGHT HOLDERS. THEY ARE TO MARK OFF SACRED TIMES, DAYS, AND YEARS; THAT IS, THE LIGHT HOLDERS PROVIDE AN ORDERLY RHYTHM TO CREATION. ONCE MORE GOD DECLARES HE IS PLEASED, AND HE DOES SO BECAUSE THE RHYTHMIC MANNER OF CREATION MIRRORS HIS OWN RHYTHMIC MANNER OF EXISTENCE (GENESIS 2.1-3).

THE FIFTH DAY IS MARKED BY GOD SPEAKING FISH AND BIRDS INTO BEING THUS FILLING THE SKY AND SEAS WHICH HE CREATED ON THE SECOND DAY. ONCE MORE THE EMPHASIS APPEARS TO BE ON THE GREAT VARIETY OF FISH AND BIRDS AND THIS RESULTS IN A DECLARATION OF GOODNESS. COULD IT BE THAT ONCE MORE GOD HAS PUT WITHIN CREATION SOMETHING WHICH POINTS TO WHO HE IS, A SINGLE BEING WHO EXISTS IN COMMUNITY?

ON THE SIXTH DAY, GOD SPEAKS A GREAT VARIETY OF LIVING BEINGS INTO BEING, AN ACTION WHICH PLEASES HIM. IT IS GOOD BECAUSE IT DEMONSTRATES HIS CHARACTER. HE THEN CHOOSES TO CREATE PEOPLE IN HIS IMAGE. WITH THIS STATEMENT GOD OPENLY DECLARES HIS CREATIVE PURPOSE. HE WISHES TO FILL HIS CREATION WITH THAT WHICH DEMONSTRATES WHO HE TRULY IS. HIS CREATION OF PEOPLE IS HIS MOST OVERT ACT, AN ACT WHICH IS ONLY DECLARED GOOD WHEN GOD HAS CREATED PEOPLE TO LIVE IN THE SAME DIVINE DANCE OF ONENESS AND PLURALITY (GENESIS 2.18, 1.17-31).

THE STATEMENTS OF GOD'S DELIGHT, THE GOODNESS OF HIS CREATION SEEM TO BE NOTHING LESS THAN DECLARATIONS OF GOD'S PLEASURE AT SEEING HIMSELF IN CREATION. THAT GOD INTENDED TO MARK CREATION IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT DEMONSTRATES HIS DIVINE CHARACTER IS CONSISTENTLY TESTIFIED TO IN SCRIPTURE (PSALM 19; PSALM 119.64; ROMANS 1.20). THE QUESTION THAT REMAINS UNANSWERED IS WHY? WHY CREATE IN THIS MANNER? THE POINT SEEMS TO INVOLVE PEOPLE AND THE DECLARATION OF GOD'S GLORY. GOD'S CREATIVE INTENTION INVOLVES ALL OF CREATION EXISTING TO PROCLAIM WHO HE IS. THIS PROCLAMATION IS CALLED WORSHIP. WHILE ALL OF CREATION PARTICIPATES IN THIS WORSHIP BY DESIGN, PEOPLE HAVE AN IMPORTANT PART BECAUSE THEY EXIST TO GIVE VOICE TO ALL OF CREATION'S WORSHIP (PSALM 19.1-4). PEOPLE WERE CREATED TO DECLARE FOR THEMSELVES AND ALL CREATION THE GREAT GLORY OF GOD.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM BEGINS WITH AN IMPORTANT QUESTION. WHAT IS THE CHIEF END OF MAN? IN OTHER WORDS, WHY DO WE EXIST? THE ANSWER? MAN'S CHIEF END IS TO GLORIFY GOD, AND TO ENJOY HIM FOREVER. THESE ARE NOT JUST THE WISE WORDS OF DRY THEOLOGIANS. THIS PURPOSE IS SEEN IN CREATION ITSELF. GOD CREATED EVERYTHING. HOW HE DID IT Baffles ME, BUT WHY HE DID IT IS CLEAR. GOD CREATED TO DECLARE HIS GLORY. EVERYTHING HE MADE EXISTS FOR ONE PURPOSE, TO SHOUT LOUDLY WHO GOD IS. IN OTHER WORDS, EVERYTHING, INCLUDING ME, EXISTS TO WORSHIP. MY PURPOSE IN LIFE, THE VERY REASON I EXIST IS TO MOVE ABOUT DECLARING WITH MY WORDS AND ACTIONS WHO GOD IS. I DO THIS NOT JUST FOR MYSELF, BUT I DO THIS FOR ALL OF CREATION. I GIVE WORDS TO WHAT THE REST OF CREATION CANNOT BUT CLEARLY IS TRYING TO SAY IN EVERY SUNSET AND MOUNTAIN TOP GRANDEUR. WHAT STRIKES ME IS HOW READILY I TURN FROM THE VERY THING I WAS CREATED TO DO. I GET DISTRACTED, SIDETRACKED, OFTEN WITH PETTY DESIRES AND GRIEVANCES. MY GAZE QUICKLY TURNS INWARD RATHER THAN UPWARD. I CEASE TO WORSHIP. THERE ARE REASONS FOR THIS. HOWEVER, GOD IS GRACIOUS AND HE CALLS ME TO TURN ONCE MORE TO HIM AND I RECOGNIZE THAT WHAT I MOST DESIRE IS NOTHING SHORT OF HIM AND THAT LIFE IS BEST LIVED IN WORSHIP. THIS IS THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL. THE GOSPEL REMINDS ME OF WHO I AM AND WHY I AM HERE. THIS IS WHY IT IS GOOD NEWS.

IT GIVES ME GUIDANCE FOR HOW I AM TO LIVE, AND HOW I WILL LIVE FOR ETERNITY.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHY DO WE EXIST? THIS EXISTENTIAL QUESTION IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT IN LIFE BECAUSE IT PROVIDES US WITH DIRECTION AND MEANING IN LIFE. CULTURE TELLS US THAT WE EXIST FOR MANY REASONS, REASONS RANGING FROM PLEASURE TO SHEER HAPPENSTANCE, A COSMIC CRAP SHOOT. HOWEVER, THE GOSPEL PROVIDES ANOTHER ANSWER. THIS IS WHY THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS. THE GOSPEL PROCLAIMS THAT CREATION ITSELF DECLARES WE EXIST TO WORSHIP. EVERYWHERE WE LOOK WE SEE THE GLORY OF GOD, HIS DIVINE NATURE AND POWER DISPLAYED IN THE BEAUTY OF A SUNSET, THE WONDER OF THE SONGBIRD, THE POWER OF THE VOLCANO. EVERYWHERE WE TURN WE SEE MARKS OF OUR GOD, INCLUDING WHEN WE LOOK IN THE MIRROR. WE, LIKE THE REST OF CREATION, WERE MADE TO DISPLAY GOD'S TRUE NATURE, HIS ETERNAL GLORY AND GOODNESS. WE FULFILL OUR ETERNAL PURPOSE WHEN WE ORIENT OUR LIVES SO THAT OUR WORDS, OUR ACTIONS AND OUR INTERACTIONS DECLARE FULLY WHO GOD IS. WE FULFILL OUR ETERNAL PURPOSE WHEN WE WORSHIP! THIS IS THE GUIDING TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL. THE GOSPEL GIVES US PURPOSE AND MEANING, ETERNAL PURPOSE AND MEANING. THIS WEEK, WE INVITE YOU TO SPEND SOME TIME OUTSIDE IN ORDER TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF YOUR PURPOSE AS DEFINED BY THE GOSPEL. GO FOR A WALK AND LOOK AROUND, REALLY LOOK AROUND AND SEE IF YOU CAN'T CATCH GLIMPSES OF WHO GOD IS IN THE SNATCHES OF BEAUTY AND POWER YOU SEE. AFTER YOUR WALK, TAKE SOME TIME TO GIVE VOICE TO WHAT YOU SAW IN CREATION. YOU CAN DO THIS IN SONG, IN WRITING, OR SHALL WE SAY IT, EVEN DANCE! WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO THE VERY THING FOR WHICH YOU WERE MADE, WORSHIP.



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