



## the FORGOTTEN GOD

# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

May 1, 2016

### Discussion Guide

#### We Love (by the Spirit)

##### 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

- When someone says they love you, how do you know if they mean what they say? 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.)

- Using the notes, discuss the background and context of the concept of remaining

in John 15.

- Read John 15.9-13, aloud. Pause. Read the text once more, slowly, seeking to imagine Jesus speaking these words directly to you.
- According to Jesus, what does it look like to love him? To love others?
- What does love for Jesus typically look like? Love for others?
- In what ways are these similar or dissimilar to love as Jesus describes it? Could you elaborate?
- Jesus notes that the loving devotion his disciples have for him will be expressed in loving devotion to one another. In your mind, what might loving devotion to one another look like?
- Read Acts 2.44-45 and 4.32-37 aloud. Read the texts once more, seeking to imagine them in your mind.
- What did loving devotion to one another look like in the early Church?
- In the early Church, people laid down their lives in devotion to one another by laying down their stuff for one another.

Do you think this would be easy or difficult for people today? For you? Could you elaborate?

- In a loving relationship of devotion with Jesus, his thoughts and actions become our thoughts and actions through the presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14.15-18, 15.4-5, 9). How might the Holy Spirit's presence in you affect your actions of and attitude toward the expression of loving devotion to others?
- What might it look like to give yourself more fully to this kind of movement of the Spirit?
- Conclude in prayer, opening yourselves to the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### REMAIN

In the ancient world, the idea of remaining involved the choice to stay in one place, though in some instances the idea of remaining could be linked to something enduring or lasting. The authors of the Old Testament used various terms to express the idea of remaining in much the same manner, perhaps with some greater amount of emphasis being placed upon the idea of lasting or enduring. In these cases, the idea was often used in conjunction with God. His relationship with humanity was one which remained (Psalm 112.3, 9). His word endures (Isaiah 40.8). His truth remains (Psalm 117.2). The authors of the New Testament use a single word to refer to the idea of remaining with, John using this term the most often (67 out of 118 times in the New Testament). As in classical and Old Testament usage, the authors of the New Testament speak of remaining as choosing to stay in one place (Luke 19.5) with the occasional additional concept of enduring (Matthew 11.23). Paul uses the term with respect to holding onto right doctrine (2 Timothy 3.14), though this use might actually be another form of the concept of enduring,

with respect to doctrine in this case.

The one new concept we find in the New Testament is John's use of the term to refer to relationships, relationships within the Trinity and relationships between God and people. When John uses this term he is referring to the deepest relationship which might exist between two people, a relationship in which the actions or desires of one become the actions and desires of the other. Such is the case in John 14.10. In this instance Jesus notes that his relationship with the Father (a remaining relationship) is so deep that his words and actions are the words and actions of the Father. We find the same type of relationship referred to in John 15, this time with reference to the relationship between Jesus and his followers. The relationship Jesus has with his disciples is to be of the same depth and quality as his own relationship with the Father (John 15.9). It is difficult to translate the concept of remaining into English as the English cognate carries an immense emphasis upon spatial location rather than relationship. Some translators have chosen to use the term abide, though this too carries overtures of spatial location. Perhaps one might understand the term using the idea of absolute devotion, though the depth of this devotion is unlike any human devotion because it leads to inner union with the other person. The idea John seems to be expressing is that the mysterious relationship which binds together the members of the Godhead, is to be the same relationship Jesus and his followers are to have with one another.

## THE TEXT

### JOHN 15.9-13: *RELATING TO JESUS*

The conversation Jesus is having with his disciples in John 15 begins in John 14 with Jesus' discussion of the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14.15-18). In this conversation, Jesus instructs his disciples about how they are to live and carry on his work after his departure. In John 15, Jesus turns his attention to the nature of the

relationship his disciples are to have with him. The nature of this relationship is one in which Jesus remains in his disciples and they remain in him. Jesus uses the metaphor of a vine to express what he means when he says “remain.” What Jesus seems to be expressing is he and his disciples are to have a deep relationship in which an inner union forms, one in which Jesus’ life and power flow out of his disciples making ministry possible. It is hard to miss the echoes of the previous discussion of the Holy Spirit as Jesus speaks about remaining in his disciples. The Spirit makes it possible for Jesus’ life to be one with the life of his disciples. What is new in this discussion is Jesus’ desire that his disciples relate to him in the same way he is relating to them. Jesus desires this to be a two-way relationship. As he remains (is absolutely devoted) to them, so too they are to be absolutely devoted to him. The metaphor of the vine and branch stresses the deep union this relationship forms. While a vine and branch are separate and can be told apart, they are so deeply connected that their life is one and it is difficult to determine where one begins and the other ends.

Beginning in verse 9, Jesus expands upon this relationship of remaining/abiding he and his disciples are to have with one another. He does this by relating it to the love relationship which exists between himself and the Father. Jesus expresses his absolute devotion to his disciples in terms of the Father’s absolute devotion to him. Jesus’ use of love in this instance gives helpful insight to his meaning when he uses the term remain. The love the Father has for the Son is an absolute devotion which binds the Father to the Son inextricably. They cannot be separated but rather they maintain their individuality while at the same time experiencing such union that the actions and words of one become the actions and words of the other. Jesus notes that he has the same love for his disciples which infers that he has inextricably bound himself to his disciples.

Jesus then asks for the same relationship in return. To remain as a disciple, in Jesus’ mind, is to bind oneself inextricably to Jesus so that an inner union forms, not unlike the union experienced within the Trinity.

To request such a relationship leads to the question of how one engages in such a relationship. Jesus points to himself as the example of how this is done. In keeping the commandments of the Father, Jesus remained in the love of the Father. In the same way, by keeping the commandments of Jesus, one remained in Jesus’ love. At first blush it can seem as if Jesus is urging a type of performance which earns the uniting relationship with Jesus. Quite to the contrary, Jesus is pointing to the quality of a deeply devoted relationship. Those who are deeply devoted to one another seek to please one another. This submission to the other is at the core of the love within the Trinity. Therefore, to experience this type of relationship with Jesus requires a willingness to submit to Jesus. Therefore, to honestly seek to humble oneself before Jesus, taking up his commandments is to enter into this relationship of union. The submission in this relationship works both ways because the commands of Jesus are meant to bring about complete joy in the lives of his followers.

Jesus notes that the single command he has for his disciples is that of loving one another. Loving Jesus is assumed in this because the obedience of the command to love others one is the expression of love for Jesus. This love for the other is to be of the same quality as Jesus’ love for his disciples, a love which willingly gives and sacrificially devotes itself to the other. In other words, Jesus’ followers express their union with Jesus by seeking the same union with their fellow believers (Matthew 22.36-40).

#### **Acts 2.44-45; 4.32-35: *LOVING ONE ANOTHER***

Luke provides insight into the life of the early church throughout the book of Acts. In these passages, Luke shines a spotlight on the first

days of the Church as they experienced the aftermath of Pentecost. In this setting, the Church was marked with a deep unity which was expressed in a willingness to give of their possessions freely. It is hard to miss the echo of Jesus' calling to love one another in this brief snapshot. The disciples are seeking to be one (union) and to express this union through sacrificial giving and devotion to one another. It should be noted that such giving and devotion are more than coincidentally connected to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

### **REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:**

If I love Jesus, I will love you, the life I have with Christ overflowing to the life I have with you. OK. I can wrap my noodle around that, but what does it look like in practice? What does it look like to love you in the way I love Christ and he loves me? Jesus says it look like laying my life down for you. Sounds simple. Next time you are about to be hit by a bus I will jump in front of it to save you. Really, I will. See how I love you! This kind of thinking has dominated my understanding of what love within the Church is to look like. Should the need arise, we are to risk everything for one another. But this kind of thinking makes me believe my devotion to you is deeper than it really is. I know this because in the early church this isn't how they practiced loving one another. In the early Church they didn't practice loving one another by jumping in front of buses or rogue chariots. They laid down their stuff. They loved by laying down their stuff. In the early Church, believers were so connected with one another, so devoted, so at one with one another that when they saw another in need, they laid down what they had and depended upon so that the need of the other might be met. That is a dangerous kind of love because it messes with my stuff. Buses are one thing. My stuff is something of a whole different order. Yet, if I love you, if I am really for you I will not cling to my stuff in your time of need. I find I can understand this cognitively

but I find it difficult to release my grip on my stuff. What I am finding is that laying down my stuff requires the Holy Spirit. Only by the Spirit can I truly realize my devotion to you, the bond drawing us together. Only by the Spirit can I act on that devotion, his power and devotion becoming my action of devotion. Only in this way can our love become real and my life begin to resemble that of Christ.

### **REAL LIFE WITH YOU:**

Love one another. This is the foundation of everything. No really. Loving one another is at the heart of God's life, his life as three and one. As we connect with him and give ourselves to him, his life becomes our life. We begin to love one another. Loving one another is more than just uttering the words and shallow promises. Loving one another is demonstrated in our actions. We love when we lay down our stuff for one another because in laying down our stuff we are laying down our lives, the very things we need and depend upon. In laying down our stuff we are saying, "I am for you and with you." Sounds great, but no one likes to let go of their stuff. This week consider expressing your love for someone through giving. This can be in a one time way such as giving to World Vision's relief efforts in Ecuador or to the benevolence fund at Union Center. This can also be in a more ongoing way with something like sponsoring a child through Compassion International. Every time we give, we are acknowledging that our lives are bound to the lives of those to whom we are giving, and we allow the actions and devotion of the Spirit to become our own.



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