

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

June 12, 2016



THE POWER OF GENTLENESS

Discussion Guide

The Great Temptation

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 you come up against someone who resists or rejects you, how do you typically respond? 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 OF LUKE 9 HIGHLIGHTING THE MESSIANIC HOPES OF THOSE WITH JESUS.

- Read Luke 9:51-56 aloud. Read the text once more, seeking to experience the scene as one of those traveling with Jesus.
- James and John are tempted to speak culture's language of power in order to assist the progression of the Kingdom of God. What reasons might they have for feeling this way? Seek to find as many in the text (and from history) as possible.
- Are people today still tempted to resort to speaking the language of power and using the currency of force to accomplish their will? In what ways do you see this in culture? In the Church?
- What effects does pursuing one's will in this manner have?
- In what ways, if any, might these effects give rise to Jesus' rebuke of James and John? Could you elaborate?
- Jesus chose to accomplish his will by controlling his power and approaching people with a soft touch (gentleness). Read the following texts and identify how gentleness is an aspect of God's character. (Isaiah 40:9-11; 42:1-3; Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 11:28-30; Galatians 5:23).
- Do you feel that gentleness is viewed as an appropriate means of pursuing one's desires? Could you elaborate?
- What might it take to become a gentle person?
- Consider closing in prayer, confessing any objections you might have to moving through life gently. Be honest with God, but ask that his Spirit would work in your heart so your heart might be his heart.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

GENTLENESS

The images with which we associate gentleness are not always positive. In a culture which values strength and understands relationships in terms of power, gentleness often becomes associated with weakness or passivity. However, in Scripture, gentleness is anything but weakness. Rather, gentleness might better be understood as strength controlled, or strength channeled into a soft touch.

In the ancient world, gentleness was often understood to be a spirit of friendship or something which provided a soothing quality. Thus, the term was often used to qualify other words. For example, the term gentle was used to speak of mild words, soothing medicine, tame animals, or benevolent people. In each case, the qualification given was positive.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the term gentle came to take on aspects of poverty, humility, and defensiveness. The term was often used to speak of victims of exploitation (Job 24:4; Psalm 37:11, 14; Isaiah 32:7). In each case, though defenseless, the associated connotation with those described is positive.

In the New Testament, something of an amalgamated understanding of gentleness emerges, combining the ancient and Old Testament uses of the term. The poor and defenseless can be described with the term, and yet these are understood to be favored by God (Matthew 5:5). What is important to note is that this gentleness leads to ultimate victory, the inheritance of the entire earth. Gentleness, or a general spirit of strength under control, is listed several times as a virtue of love (Colossians 3:12; 1 Timothy 6:11; 1 Peter 3:4), and is held forth as the appropriate way to deal with overt hostility (1 Peter 3:15). Gentleness is associated with wisdom which comes from Heaven (James 3:17) and an outworking of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Jesus even uses the term to describe his own character (Matthew 11:28-30). Rather than being understood as weakness or defenselessness, the New Testament holds forth gentleness as a virtue, a character trait consciously developed which ultimately leads one to victory by intentionally refusing to exercise power.

THE TEXT

LUKE 9.51-56: DEALING WITH REJECTION

Luke 9 marks an important turning in Luke's Gospel, a transition from Jesus' ministry in Galilee to his ministry of suffering upon the cross and ultimate resurrection. The context surrounding this turning provides important insight into the minds and attitudes of those who accompanied Jesus at this time. Beginning in Luke 9, Jesus has sent forth heralds into the surrounding villages to proclaim the Kingdom of God (Luke 9.1-9). This action is not unlike that of a King sending forth ambassadors and emissaries to announce his arrival, an action not missed by the presiding ruler of the land, Herod Antipas (Luke 9.7-9). Next, Jesus feeds over 5,000 people, an action which echoes the actions of Roman authorities feeding the masses. Once more, this king-like behavior is not missed by the crowds because they attempt to make him their king (John 6.15). Jesus' own disciples recognize Jesus as an authority figure with Peter declaring Jesus to be the long-awaited messiah (Luke 9.18-20), a pronouncement which is affirmed by events surrounding Jesus' transfiguration, not the least of which is God's own affirmation of Jesus' identity (Luke 9.35).

It is difficult to miss the building anticipation within the narrative. Jesus is the long-awaited King of the Jews, the messiah sent by God to restore Israel and make it chief among the nations. Images of the establishment of a messianic reign along with the implicit socio-political and economic realities based on the prophecies of Isaiah are most likely flowing through the minds of those who accompany Jesus (Isaiah 49.8-12, 22-23).

At this high point, Jesus chooses to journey to Jerusalem. His determination is seen in the language used which depicts Jesus setting his course like hardened flint. As he moves toward Jerusalem, the de facto economic and power center of the Jewish universe, Jesus sends messengers ahead to prepare the way with the first messengers being sent to a village in Samaria. This unnamed village is probably the closest village along Jesus' intended path indicating he intends to pass through the region of Samaria. Samaria was officially part of the region ruled by the Roman procurator Pilate but it was viewed as a different area by the Jews. Originally, the region was the ancient Kingdom of Samaria or the

northern Kingdom of Israel until it was defeated by the Assyrians in the 8th century B.C. The population was deported, leaving only the poorest in the land. Refugees from other conquered nations were imported and the two groups intermingled creating something of a hybrid Jewish race who followed a Torah-based version of Judaism (2 Kings 17.24-40). The region existed as a separate entity until an attempt was made to unify the southern Kingdom of Judea and Samaria in the 2nd century B.C. The result was the forcible Judaizing of the Samaritans and the burning of their temple upon Mount Gerazim. This action formed a deep political, economic, and religious rift between the Jews and the Samaritans, a rift only deepened when Rome chose to build its capital in the region of Samaria rather than in Jerusalem, thus relegating Jerusalem to something of a backwater town politically. The sending of these messengers to a Samaritan village along with Jesus' intended path through the region signals that he wants more from the Samaritans than a place to stay. He is inviting them to join him in his messianic movement, thus unifying the land and people. However, the hopes of Jesus' entourage are quickly dashed when the messengers return having been rejected by the Samaritans.

The messengers went to the village inviting the Samaritans in a messianic movement, to join in the creation of a new political, economic, and social reality. However, the Samaritans wanted nothing to do with this movement because it involved Jerusalem. They could not look past the already existing political, economic, and social rifts. Deeply concerned with this rejection and what it might mean for the success of Jesus' messianic movement, the brothers James and John step in offering to use the power Jesus had given them (Luke 9.1-2, 10) to call down fire and destroy the village. Their desire is far from punishing the Samaritans. They are acting in the spirit of Elijah who called down fire upon the troops of Ahaziah, the King of Samaria, for the purpose of affirming Elijah as a man of God (2 Kings 1.1-17). In likeness of this episode, James and John offer to demonstrate the power of their movement in Samaria so that the rest of Samaria will fall in line with this messianic movement. However, Jesus rebukes the brothers and simply moves on to another village. He will have no part with demonstrations of power and might which frighten people into joining his movement because his movement has nothing to do with the exercise of power through might. Rather, Jesus, in his role as

messiah, stands as one who exercises power through gentleness (Isaiah 40.9-11; 42.1-3; Matthew 11.28-30), a gentleness which withholds might to the extent of the experience of suffering (Luke 9.21-27, 43b-45) so that victory might be won by losing.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

How do we deal with people who refuse and reject us? This is no hypothetical question. It is real life, every single day. I have my ideas of how things should go. As long as I am on my own, this is not a problem. Whenever I encounter another person, sparks fly because they too have their idea of how things should go. For instance, I believe that your bedroom (and every other room in the house) should be picked up and neat. Addison is of a different opinion. Words like disaster area or tornado path more aptly describe her understanding of how a house should look. Needless to say, these two visions of the proper arrangement of a home clash like a cold and warm front. As a parent (and the one who pays the mortgage!) I have the right and authority to determine the way things go in our small piece of real estate. The question is how I go about inviting Addison to join me in the carrying out of that vision. My great temptation is just to make her, to power up and demand that she clean her room, all the while uttering threats of punishment and pain beyond her wildest imagination. Sounds about like the average Monday morning exchange, but I am coming to see that I need a new approach. I was raised in a home where powering up was the way you got your way. I never really thought anything of it because this is the way our culture works. When you bump into someone who doesn't see things your way, you make them. Experiences with red-faced politicians and religious leaders ranting only served to reinforce what I saw on television and read in the paper. The language of power and the currency of force were offered as the best and most expedient ways to get what you want done, except I am discovering what I really want done is never accomplished when I use them.

At the end of the day, what I want most is not a clean room, though I don't think it is too much to ask. What I really want is a daughter whose heart loves God and others as she works for the Kingdom. When I speak the language of power and use the currency of force, I get a clean room but I don't get a daughter with a loving heart. I get a daughter who simmers

with anger looking for ways to come out from under my power. I need a new way. I am coming to see that way in Christ. If anyone could have spoken the language of power and used the currency of force it was Jesus. He had legions of angels at his beck and call, and yet he never used them. Jesus controlled his incredible strength and chose to be gentle, to interact with people using a soft touch. In the end, he got what he wanted, proving true his statement that the gentle inherit the earth. Gentleness is the way of Jesus and when he wielded it, it held great power, Kingdom power. As I seek to be like him, I am learning to do the same. I don't always get it right. Monday morning conversations still drift at times into old territory, but I continue to look to him asking for grace to be gentle so that I might see true power bring about what really matters.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

How do we deal with people who resist or reject us? That is easy. We force them to see things our way! The language of power and the currency of force and violence are standard ways of being, of accomplishing our visions of what should be. However, this language and currency are not to find a place among the people of God. In imitation of our savior, the people of God are to speak a different language and use a different currency, the language and currency of gentleness. While we may have great strength, we control it approaching people with a soft touch. It sounds impossibly naïve to think that any such approach could actually accomplish anything worthwhile. Yet, it was gentleness which established the Kingdom of God in the work of Christ, and it is that same gentleness which can move that Kingdom forward today. This week, we encourage you to consider the audacious choice of Jesus to reject power and choose gentleness as a way of being. Consider and meditate upon Isaiah 40.9-11 as a means of seeing how this is not just Jesus' choice, but an essential aspect of how God relates to us as his people. Talk to God about any reservations you feel about moving through life gently. Raise your objections and ask for grace to wrestle with what we see in the life of Christ, with what we are called to imitate: gentleness.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

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