

# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

June 19, 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 someone hurts you, how do you typically respond?

## 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.

- Using the notes, discuss the background of 1 Peter.
- Read 1 Peter 3.8-18a aloud, slowly. Read the text once more aloud, seeking to hear it with the ears of someone who is experiencing the hurtful effects of people powering up.
- In what ways are followers of Christ to respond to those who hurt them? Seek to find as many as possible.
- Is this how believers typically respond to those who harm them? Could you elaborate?
- Peter argues that a Christ-like response to suffering points people to God in the same way that Jesus' response to suffering pointed people to God (1 Peter 3.17-18a). How might this be the case?
- Do you feel that responding in this manner is easy or difficult? Could you explain?
- What might it take for someone to respond to the experience of suffering in a Christ-like manner?
- What, if anything, hinders you from responding in this manner?
- In what ways, if any, might the Kingdom of God grow if we responded to suffering in a Christ-like way?
- Conclude your group by discussing what it might look like to practice responding to suffering in a Christ-like way in the safety of community and how you might encourage one another in this community to open to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### 1 PETER

The letter of 1 Peter is addressed to the elect of God, scattered like exiles in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ancient Roman provinces which make up modern Turkey (1 Peter 1.1). The address indicates that the letter was intended to be a circular letter, one shared among the many churches in the region. The vast area ensures that many of the churches founded by Paul and each of the churches addressed in Revelation 1-3 are included. To our knowledge, Peter did not start any of these churches and we know only of his involvement with the churches in Galatia (Galatians 2.11-21). However, Peter's presence in Galatia indicates at minimum a second-hand knowledge of the churches in Asia Minor through the Galatians and may imply first-hand knowledge of many if not all of the churches through his itinerant-apostolic ministry. It appears that Peter moved about the Mediterranean strengthening churches as an apostle, including churches started by Paul and others (1 Corinthians 3.21-23; Galatians 2; Acts 8.32). While many deny Peter wrote this letter because of the proficiency of the Greek, the reliance upon traditional teaching drawn from the Old Testament, and Pauline-like phrases, none of these preclude Petrine authorship. Peter does not claim to have penned the letter, but notes that Silas was his amanuenses or scribe (1 Peter 5.12). Second, the reliance upon the Old Testament would fit one of Jewish descent, and the introduction which is thoroughly Jewish with its mention of the diaspora includes Gentiles which is a very Petrine thought (Acts 10-11). Finally, the Pauline-like phrases would not be unusual as Peter and Paul knew one another and ministered in the same churches.

Peter's letter is a letter of encouragement to the churches of Asia Minor who, in his mind, are suffering. This suffering appears to be cultural rather than state-sponsored. We know that Christianity spread rapidly in Asia Minor and that the people there did not look favorably upon it. Pliny the Younger wrote to Emperor Trajan in 112-113 A.D. asking how to deal with the rapid

spread of Christianity stating, “the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms” (Ep. 10.96). Most likely the suffering experienced entailed rejection, ostracism, labeling, and unfair treatment. This would have resulted from the conclusion that Christians were pagans or even atheists because they rejected the ancient gods and unpatriotic because they refused to bow to Caesar. While rejection or ostracism may seem minor to us, in an honor-shame society which is group oriented, to be rejected would be devastating because it would involve the loss of identity which was always derived from the group and not the individual. In response, Peter encourages these congregations by noting they form a new group as the people of God, and that their future is secure with God (1 Peter 1.1-2.10). Peter then turns to an exhortation of how to deal with a culture which rejects and spurns those associated with Christ. He points to Christ as the example of how to deal with suffering and notes that the imitation of Christ provides a powerful apologetic for faith (1 Peter 2.11-5.11).

The exhortations about belonging to one another as the people of God and to follow the example of Christ have led some to argue that this letter is an ancient form of catechesis or possibly even a baptism homily. Most likely, Peter is simply demonstrating pastoral concern, giving insight and encouragement to help these believers navigate their difficult world as followers of Christ.

## THE TEXT

### 1 PETER 3.8-18A

1 Peter 3 is a practical exploration of daily life based upon the exhortation to imitate the example of Jesus in 1 Peter 2.11-25. Peter knows that the churches in Asia Minor are suffering for following Christ. Therefore, he reminds them that the people of God are called to suffer because Christ himself suffered. Further, they are called to suffer like Christ which includes refusing to retaliate in like manner, but rather responding with blessing. According to Peter, Jesus responded in this way in order to point people to God. He then encourages the believers

in Asia Minor to respond to their suffering in the same way, blessing those who harmed them in order to point them to God. Simply put, the Christian's response to suffering should form an apologetic for faith.

Peter first explores what this manner of responding to suffering as an apologetic for faith looks like for believers who have an unbelieving spouse (1 Peter 3.1-7), but then he turns to what it might look like in everyday life. Peter first reminds his readers that those who follow Jesus love others. They first love one another by seeking unity, and demonstrating compassion and humility in their relationships with one another. He then reminds them this love extends to their fellow person in the form of blessing, even to the blessing of people who are persecuting them. He notes this loving of people, even those who persecute the believers, is the calling of God's people and that living into this calling places one under God's favor. Quoting Psalm 34.12-16, Peter argues God's favor comes because in returning blessing for evil, the believers are avoiding evil by pursuing peace all the while entrusting themselves to God for their defense and justice. At this point Peter lays the groundwork for his larger point of how a Christ-like response to suffering can form an apology to the faith. By entrusting oneself to God for one's defense and justice, the people of God act as if God really does exist. They demonstrate they are not atheists as their neighbors charge but they really do believe in a God and demonstrate this belief with their actions.

Peter explores this idea of a Christ-like response to suffering being an apology for faith by first noting that it is rare to suffer for doing good. This is something of a common-sense maxim which in most cases is true, but not in the present case. Therefore, he notes believers who are persecuted even though they are behaving properly in their context should recognize they still have God's favor. Suffering does not imply God is displeased with them. Because they are under God's favor they have no reason to fear. God will care for them. They should only remember to continue to follow the example of Christ, revering him as Lord, by responding to their suffering properly. This entails responding to their persecutors with gentleness and respect which demonstrates the behavior of the persecutors to be shameful. According to Peter, this is good because

it is an imitation of the actions of Jesus, actions which pointed people to God thereby implying that this Christ-like response to suffering will point their persecutors to God.

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

How do we deal with people who refuse and reject us? If we want the Kingdom of God to grow, we respond to them gently. We refuse to speak the language of power to get our way, but we treat people with a soft touch which speaks to their heart. Honestly, it all sounds a bit idealistic if you ask me. My initial response is that if I am gentle people will walk all over me. They will take advantage of me. They will hurt me. They will see me as the weak link, the person who is the pushover. I have to be strong. Gentleness will never work, and I am right, as long as I am talking about building my kingdom. Then again, this is not what we are talking about at all. We are talking about building the Kingdom of God, about pointing people to a life oriented around him. If I am gentle, people will harm me. They will walk over me and abuse me. This is only natural because I am refusing to play the game of power to get my way. But if I remain gentle the Kingdom can grow even in this. Somehow my gentleness in the face of the experience of violence and power points people to God in a way that leads to the growth of God's Kingdom. How? I am beginning to see that my gentle response demonstrates that I believe God is real with my actions and not just my words. When I play the games of power and violence I actually act like one who doesn't believe in God, an atheist. I power up because I have no one to help me, protect me, or care for me. However, if I am gentle in the face of power and violence I say with my life, I am trusting that God will care for me, even in the face of what you are doing to me. My gentleness says loudly that God is real. It demonstrates his transforming work in me because I will not play power games. This might be painful for me but it declares loudly that God and his Kingdom are real because they are real in me, and that, at the end of the day, is what matters most.

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

How do we deal with people who resist or reject us? We are gentle. I know. Sounds crazy. Gentle people get walked on. Better to be strong and make sure no one mistreats you and gets away with it. This is a wonderful plan if we are building a kingdom for ourselves but this is not how we labor for the Kingdom of God. If we are gentle people will hurt us. Gentleness looks like weakness to our culture and weakness is almost always preyed upon. It is our response to this experience which determines which Kingdom growth results. When we power up to protect ourselves, our kingdom grows. However, when we respond to this experience in a Christ-like way, with gentleness, the Kingdom of God grows. How? Our response demonstrates that we believe in God and that he is real. When we seek to defend ourselves we behave as if God is not real. Simply put we act like atheists who can only rely upon themselves. However, when we return blessing for evil, a gentle response, we show that we are trusting in someone outside ourselves. We show that we have been transformed so we are free from the rules of engagement set by our culture. Our lives point to a reality beyond ourselves, God. People see this, even if only those who witness our response as spectators, and are confronted with tangible proof that God is real and that he can be real for them too. This week, we encourage you to begin to open your life to the Holy Spirit so that responding to the experience of power and violence with gentleness might be natural because our human response is to defend ourselves. Our encouragement is to begin small by practicing in the safety of Christ-centered community. This means you will need to find Christ-centered community with which you meet on a regular basis. We are more than happy to assist you with this. Second, in this community you will naturally experience hurt. This is not purposeful. It is just the reality of messy people who are in process coming together. In this experience, respond with gentleness rather than defensiveness. If you fail, ask forgiveness. Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and move forward. Over time, the Spirit will develop your heart and mind so that this is a natural, go-to response.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP



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