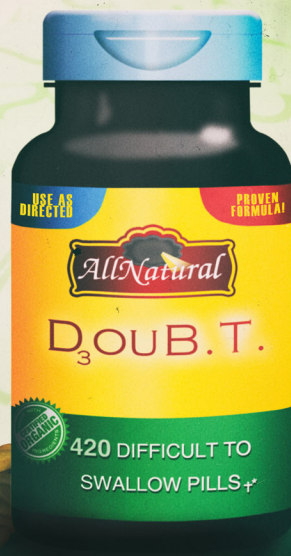


GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

July 24, 2016

THE BENEFIT OF THE



Discussion Guide

Screaming at the sky

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

- IF GOD HAD A COSMIC COMPLAINT BOX, COMPLETE WITH BLANK FORMS, AND HE MADE IT AVAILABLE TO YOU, WOULD YOU FILL ONE OUT? 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 development of the story of Job and how Job laments his situation with God.
- Read Job 42.1-10 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more seeking to witness these events first-hand in your mind.
- In what ways does God respond to Job's lament and the friends' certainty? What, if anything, is surprising about God's response?
- In what ways do people expect God to respond to the leveling of a complaint against him (lament) like that of Job? In what ways does our expectation line up with Job's experience? Could you elaborate?
- When Job leveled his complaint against God, God was pleased because Job was speaking truthfully to him (verse 7). How might this be the case?
- What might it look like to speak truthfully with God? In what ways, if any, is the expression of doubt speaking truthfully with God?
- What, if anything, might hinder us from this kind of gritty honesty with God? How might God be inviting us to address these hindrances?
- What might it look like to give space for lament/complaint in our community of faith? How might this provide an opening to deepen our faith?

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

LAMENT

The lament is one of the oldest literary genres (type of literature) in the Old Testament. At its core, a lament is a complaint bemoaning the troubles one is experiencing. In the Old Testament, there are four types of laments: funeral dirges, city laments, individual laments, and communal laments. Funeral dirges were sung by families contrasting the glorious life of their loved one with the sadness of the present experience of loss (Jeremiah 38.22; 2 Samuel 3.33-34. City laments were like funeral dirges except the loss of a city was bemoaned as if the city was a person (Lamentations; Psalm 137; Isaiah 15.1-16.14). Individual laments were the most common and they mourned the present state of an individual (Psalm 3, 6, 13, 22, 28, 31,

51, 88, 102). Communal laments acknowledged the experience of a community in crisis (Psalm 42-44, 58, 60, 74, 83, 106, 125).

As with most literary genres, laments consist of specific elements which set them apart from other literary styles as laments. True laments address God, noting that things in the present are not right. Next, the one lamenting begs God for assistance stating that the present circumstances are intolerable. Finally, the lament typically concludes with an assertion that it is God's responsibility to address the situation accompanied by a measure of confidence placed in God.

While laments can appear to be nothing more than the people of God venting their feelings, in fact, they are cries for help. They often contain strong language and even stronger accusations of God but they express deep faith because they are still addressed to God. The book of Job is replete with laments, most of them addressed to God. Time and again, Job levels his complaints against God, even accusing God of injustice (Job 27.2-3). However, Job is not expressing a loss of faith but deep faith because he continually cries out to God.

In modern times, laments have all but disappeared within Western Christianity, most likely because many elements of laments are awkward. Laments often contain strong outbursts of anger against one's enemies. They include "irreverent" accusations of God. They are full of doubt in God's movement on behalf of his people. These and many other features make modern believers uncomfortable in viewing laments as a viable model for addressing God. It has been said that modern Christianity has intentionally ignored the lament and replaced it with confession and positive thinking. However, laments are useful and provide a wonderful dimension to one's faith. Laments provide the children of God the ability to admit deep pain and disillusionment while at the same time still cling to faith because the one who suffers has permission to complain to God. Laments strip faith of any pretense allowing the believer to be fully present and authentic before God. Because laments allow for such deep authenticity and intimacy with God, it should not surprise us that it was a lament that Jesus uttered from the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Psalm 22.1)?"

THE TEXT

JOB 42.1-10: GOD'S RESPONSE TO JOB'S LAMENT

The book of Job contains one of the most ancient stories of Scripture. While the book as we have it today probably was written sometime between the time of Solomon and the exile (10th – 6th century B.C.), the story itself is much older, reflecting a time long before the nation of Israel. The bulk of the book is poetry but it is classified as Wisdom Literature because it wrestles with how one might understand and navigate life, particularly the experience of suffering. Theologically, the book wrestles with the idea of divine retribution; that is, the book seeks to understand if people really get what they deserve.

The book begins with a brief narrative which sets the scene for the theological ponderings about divine retribution. Job is presented as a faithful and upright man who fastidiously ensures he maintains a proper relationship with God (Job 1.1-5). However, Job is unaware that all is not well in Heaven. Satan encroaches upon the presence of God challenging God concerning the relationship he has with his people. God responds that there is a man of real faith by the name of Job, a fact Satan debates. This insult by Satan must be addressed by God which results in Satan being granted permission to torment Job by removing all he holds dear, his possessions and family (Job 1.6-20). Through the experience, Job remains faithful and pious thus demonstrating a whole relationship between God and his people. God wins the first round, but Satan comes back for a second.

Satan once more encroaches God's presence and challenges God concerning Job. This leads to Satan being granted permission to torment Job physically while maintaining his life. Once more, Job maintains his faith and piety (Job 2.1-10). It is important to note that these actions are not capricious on God's part. They are a necessary reaction in order to maintain his honor before the heavenly court, but these realities are unknown to Job. He simply suffers terribly.

Three of Job's friends hear of his experience and they journey to comfort him, sitting with him for seven days (Job 2.11-13). At the end of this period, Job breaks his silence by lamenting his birth. In his mind, it would have been better if he had never been born. The pain he is experiencing

is just too much (Job 3). This lament sets the scene for the rest of the book because it calls into question the reason for Job's suffering. The three friends each address Job stating that Job is suffering because of the presence of sin. Eliphaz argues that it was Job who sinned (Job 4-5). Bildad argues that perhaps Job's children sinned (Job 8). Zophar argues that may Job sinned unwittingly (Job 11). However, each argue that Job is suffering because of the presence of sin, wrongdoing. If Job would simply repent of his wrongdoing, all would be restored to him. Each of Job's friends displays a facet of classic retributive theology. They all believe that Job is getting what he deserves. The problem is that throughout the book, Job maintains his innocence.

In the face of constant accusation, Job maintains that he has done nothing wrong. Therefore, his experience of suffering does not make sense; that is, Job questions retributive theology, the idea that God always gives people what they deserve. Job's friends press him, so Job reaches out to God in lament. He expresses his deep pain and disillusionment, and accuses God of behaving unjustly (Job 27.2-3) and demands that God show up and answer him (Job 31.5-6, 35). God does show up to answer Job, but he does not give Job the answer he sought. God begins by reminding Job of who is God (Job 38-39) and he expands Job's understanding of what it is that it is like to be like God in the universe (Job 40-41). God meets with Job and expands his understanding and appreciation of the divine but he does not answer his questions about the nature of Job's experience of suffering. At this point, Job responds.

Having encountered God, Job has a new appreciation for who God is and what he can do. He acknowledges that God can do all things with no plan of God being thwarted. Further, Job acknowledges that he spoke foolishly when he accused God of injustice. He did not understand fully the complexity of running the universe. Job states that he knows these things not because someone has told him about God but because he has encountered God personally. This statement is important because it indicates a deepening of Job's understanding of God. Previously, Job possessed something of a "hearsay" theology, knowing about God through what he had heard. Now, he possesses an "experiential" theology that is richer and deeper because he has encountered God. He therefore despises himself and repents. This statement at face value seems to affirm the arguments of the friends, but this would

undo the entirety of the book. Most likely, Job is not repenting of sin but of foolish thoughts about God which are in need of correction but not sinful. Job is acknowledging his place before God in humility.

After this, God speaks to Eliphaz as the representative of Job's friends, noting that he is angry with the three men. It is important to note that God's anger is not once directed toward Job but to his friends. God's anger is rooted in the way the friends spoke concerning God. While the NIV translates the preposition as "speaking about God," the more likely translation is "speaking to God." God was pleased with Job because of the way he spoke to God while he is angry with the friends because of the way they spoke to him. The difference seems to be in the willingness to lament, to engage God in a raw, authentic manner. The friends believed they fully understood God. He gave people what they deserved. Job was willing to question this, to the point of leveling accusations against God and demanding an answer. This gritty, honest faith pleased God while the faith which consisted of set doctrines and platitudes displeased him. The friends are instructed to repent of their sin through sacrifice and to receive the healing prayer of Job which is followed by God's double restoration of Job.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

What is doubt? Doubt consists of the questions we ask when what we expect doesn't match up with what we experience. We all ask these questions. However, we are often afraid to ask them of God. So many times in my life I have wondered why things are occurring, but it rarely occurred to me that I could wonder why with God. It seemed that to ask my questions of God would result in something terrible. . .for me. I don't know what I really imagined, but probably something like a divine body slam followed by something like, "Don't you ever question me again!" So I kept my questions to myself which means I was less than honest, with others, myself, and God. Then Hurricane Katrina hit and I hurt. I hurt worse than I had ever hurt to that point. I was crushed, depressed, overcome. More than once in the months that followed I found myself in tears behind the wheel of my pickup screaming silently at God. Yep, at God. I was mad. I hurt. I wanted to know why. You know what happened? Nothing. No rebuke. No smack down. No divine body slam. God simply listened, and the

more I think about it, the more I think he smiled. I know, that sounds terribly sadistic, but his smile wasn't about my pain. I believe God smiled because for the first time, I was fully present. In almost 25 years of following him, I was the most real in those moments behind the wheel of a F150 pickup and that pleased him. Looking back, those moments planted seeds, they created openings that God would work with over the years, openings he is still working with. My faith began to deepen when I was willing to scream at the sky because in my scream I stopped hiding and I stepped fully before God, and that was what he wanted all along.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

What is doubt? Doubt consists of the questions we ask when our expectations don't match what we experience in life. However, to whom can we address these questions? Certainly, we can ask these questions of friends, of pastors, of ourselves, but the only one who can really answer them is God. However, sometimes we are a bit hesitant about asking God what we really want to know. Perhaps we will hurt his feelings, or worse, make him really angry. So we keep our questions to ourselves. But, when we don't ask, when we hold back, we are forced to pretend, with others, with ourselves, with God. When we ask our questions, even when we ask them and they drip with pain we stop hiding and this pleases God. God loves to have us come before him with our doubts, to have us lament before him because in so doing we are with him, fully with him. In our pain, in our screams, in our laments before his throne we are no longer pretending. We are no longer hiding. We are no longer trying to be who we think God wants us to be but we are just who we are and that is what God really wants, who we really are. This week, continue pondering what it might be to ask your questions of God. You might even consider writing them down as a lament to God. Your lament is anything but an abandonment of faith but by addressing your lament to God you are speaking honestly with God which is one of the most essential elements of faith.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP



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