



# RHYTHM OF LIFE

## GOING DEEPER

### DISCUSSION GUIDE

November 20, 2016

## Discussion Guide

### Rhythm of Celebration

#### 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

- DO YOU FIND IT EASY OR DIFFICULT TO CARVE OUT TIME TO CELEBRATE? 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 SABBATH REST.

- READ DEUTERONOMY 16.1-17 ALOUD. SEE IF YOU CAN IMAGINE YOURSELF HEARING MOSES SPEAK THESE WORDS TO YOU. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.
- WHAT ARE THE ASPECTS OF THE CELEBRATIONS COMMANDED BY GOD? SEE IF YOU CAN FIND AS MANY AS POSSIBLE.
- DO YOU SEE THEMES OR TRENDS ACROSS THESE CELEBRATIONS? IF SO, WHAT MIGHT THEY BE?
- IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THESE CELEBRATIONS WERE MEANT TO BE WINDOWS IN THE PRESENT GIVING PEOPLE INSIGHT INTO WHAT THEIR FUTURE WITH GOD WOULD BE LIKE. IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT THESE THEMES POINT TO THIS FUTURE?
- IF CELEBRATING IN THE PRESENT WAS ABOUT CATCHING A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE, WHAT, IF ANYTHING, MIGHT CHANGE IN THE WAY PEOPLE CELEBRATED?
- CONSIDER THE WAY YOU CELEBRATE. ARE THERE THEMES OR TRENDS IN HOW YOU CELEBRATE? WHAT MIGHT THESE BE?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT THESE TRENDS BE INVITATIONS TO SEE IN THE PRESENT WHAT LIFE WITH GOD IN THE FUTURE WILL BE LIKE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO CELEBRATE WITH THESE INVITATIONS IN MIND?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO CELEBRATE AS A GROUP IN A WAY THAT SERVED AS A WINDOW TO OUR FUTURE LIFE WITH GOD? WHAT, IF ANYTHING, KEEPS US FROM CELEBRATING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN THIS WAY?

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### SABBATH REST

THE IDEA OF SABBATH REST IS A THEME WHICH TRAVERSES SCRIPTURE. THE CONCEPT OF SABBATH IS THE MEANS GOD CREATED FOR MARKING TIME (GENESIS 2.2-4). THE SABBATH CREATED A CYCLE WHICH CULMINATED IN A TIME OF REST. HOWEVER, THIS CYCLE WAS MORE THAN A CONVENIENT MEANS OF MARKING TIME. GOD CREATED THE SABBATH FOR THE GOOD OF PEOPLE, A MEANS OF FREEING PEOPLE FROM THE TYRANNY OF TIME AND WORK SO THAT PEOPLE MIGHT ENGAGE WITH THE HOLY AND ETERNAL (MARK 2.27).

THE THEME OF SABBATH REST WAS CENTRAL TO THE WAY THE ISRAELITES WERE TO LIVE THEIR LIVES. SABBATH REST IS THE FOUNDATION FOR EACH OF THE VARIOUS FESTIVALS WHICH MARKED THE SEASONS OF LIFE TO BE CELEBRATED BY THE ISRAELITES (LEVITICUS 23). IN HIS INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THESE FESTIVALS, GOD NOTES THAT THE SABBATH IS A CONTINUING FESTIVAL AND THAT ALL OTHER FESTIVALS ARE TO CARRY FORTH THE SPIRIT OF THE SABBATH. IN FACT, EVERY FESTIVAL PRESCRIBED INVOLVES THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH. HOWEVER, ONE SPECIFIC ASPECT OF THE SABBATH SURFACES ACROSS EACH OF THE COMMANDED FESTIVALS, THAT OF SABBATH REST (LEVITICUS 23.3, 7, 21, 24, 28, 32, 36, 39). CLEARLY, GOD WANTED THE CONCEPT OF SABBATH REST TO BE CELEBRATED AND REMEMBERED, SOMETHING UNDERSTOOD AS FOUNDATIONAL TO ENGAGING WITH THE DIVINE AND ETERNAL. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE JEWS DID NOT INTERPRET THESE INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE REGULAR CELEBRATION OF SABBATH REST TO POINT TO DAYS OF COMPLETE ACTIVITY. RATHER, THEY USED THEM AS DAYS OF INTENSE PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING TO GOD (JUBILEE 50.9).

THE CONCEPT OF SABBATH REST ALSO APPEARS IN THE EXODUS NARRATIVE WITH REST SERVING AS THE END GOAL OF THE EXODUS JOURNEY. GOD PROMISED THAT WHEN THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL CAME TO THE LAND OF CANAAN THEY WOULD BE GIVEN REST (EXODUS 33.14). IT WAS THE PROMISE OF REST WHICH WAS GIVEN AS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO CONTINUE FORWARD WHILE WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS (DEUTERONOMY 12.9). WHEN THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL FINALLY ENTERED AND POSSESSED THE LAND OF CANAAN, THEY WERE SAID TO HAVE BEEN GIVEN THIS REST (JOSHUA 21.44). HOWEVER, THE JEWISH PEOPLE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THE TRUE SABBATH REST INTENDED FOR THEM WAS FOUND IN THE POSSESSION OF CANAAN, SOMETHING OF WHICH THE ONGOING FESTIVALS REMINDED THEM. IN THEIR MIND THE SABBATH REST THEY WERE CELEBRATING STILL LAY AHEAD IN THE FUTURE, THE

CONCLUSION TO A LARGER SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF GOD'S PEOPLE. THIS THEME OF A LARGER FUTURE SPIRITUAL REST APPEARS THROUGHOUT JEWISH APOCALYPTIC TEXTS. WHILE PRESENTED IN VARIOUS WAYS, THE CONCEPT OF SABBATH REST IN THESE BOOKS POINTS TO AN ESCHATOLOGICAL REST EXPERIENCED IN GOD'S NEW CREATION (4 EZRA 8.52; 2 BARUCH 78-86; 1 ENOCH 45.3-6; TESTAMENT OF LEVI 18.9). PHILO, THE FAMOUS ALEXANDRIAN JEWISH PHILOSOPHER, TIED THE CELEBRATION OF SABBATH REST TO THE EXPERIENCE OF THE REPOSE OF GOD; THAT IS, IN SABBATH REST ONE WAS FREED FROM THE DECAYING WORLD TO TASTE THAT TRUE SPIRITUAL WORLD OF GOD WHICH WAS COMING (CHERIBUM 87). EVEN THE GNOSTIC DOCUMENTS OF THE SECOND CENTURY, HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY JEWISH MYSTICISM, POINTED TO SABBATH REST AS THE ESCHATOLOGICAL PLACE WHERE ONE FOUND HER TRUE HOME WITH GOD (GOSPEL OF THOMAS 50; GOSPEL OF PHILIP 72.23-24).

THE CONCEPT OF SABBATH REST IS EVEN CARRIED INTO THE NEW TESTAMENT IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS WHERE IT STANDS AS SOMETHING YET TO BE FULLY GRASPED BY GOD'S PEOPLE (HEBREWS 4.8-11). WHILE IT IS DIFFICULT TO TEASE OUT EXACTLY THAT TO WHICH THE AUTHOR IS REFERRING, THE CONTEXT SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT HE HAS A FUTURE ESCHATOLOGICAL STATE IN MIND MUCH LIKE THAT OF THE JEWISH APOCALYPTIC AUTHORS. ACROSS THE BIBLICAL AND NON-BIBLICAL TEXTS, THE TESTIMONY CONCERNING SABBATH REST AND ITS CELEBRATION INVOLVES THE CELEBRATION OF SOMETHING WHICH POINTS TO A GREATER REALITY. COMMENTING ON LEVITICUS 23.3, AUGUSTINE PROCLAIMED, "THE SABBATH WAS GIVEN TO THE JEWS TO BE OBSERVED LITERALLY, LIKE OTHER THINGS, AS RITES SYMBOLICALLY SIGNIFYING SOMETHING DEEPER" (SERMON 270). IT APPEARS THAT THE CELEBRATION OF SABBATH REST WAS UNDERSTOOD TO POINT TO A REALITY WHICH COULD ONLY BE EXPERIENCED IN THE FULL PRESENCE OF GOD. THAT THE OBSERVANCE OF SUCH REST WAS REGULARLY TIED TO CELEBRATION AND REDEMPTION SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT THIS SABBATH REST SYMBOLIZED A FUTURE FOR GOD'S REDEEMED PEOPLE. IN THE REGULAR CELEBRATION OF THIS REST, THE PEOPLE OF GOD GAVE THEMSELVES GLIMPSES OF WHAT WAS YET TO COME, THE FUTURE REDEMPTIVE END OF GOD'S LARGER SPIRITUAL EXODUS. IN THESE GLIMPSES, GOD'S PEOPLE FOUND HOPE AS THEY WERE REMINDED THAT THEIR FUTURE WAS GOOD AND SECURE EVEN IF ITS REALITIES WERE NOT YET EXPERIENCED.

### THE TEXT

#### *JESUS AND CELEBRATION*

JESUS CELEBRATED. THIS SHOULD NOT SURPRISE US BECAUSE THE ENTIRE JEWISH CALENDAR WAS GOVERNED BY THREE ANNUAL

CELEBRATIONS: PASSOVER, TABERNACLES, AND PENTECOST. CLEARLY, GOD INTENDED HIS PEOPLE TO CELEBRATE ON A REGULAR BASIS. IT APPEARS THAT JESUS GREW UP IN A FAMILY WHICH FOLLOWED THE CUSTOM OF CELEBRATING REGULARLY AS HIS FAMILY CELEBRATED PASSOVER EVERY YEAR (LUKE 2.41). JESUS CARRIED ON THIS PRACTICE AS AN ADULT. JOHN PUTS JESUS IN JERUSALEM CELEBRATING TABERNACLES (JOHN 7), TWICE AT PASSOVER (2.23; 13.1), AND AT ANOTHER UNSPECIFIED FESTIVAL (JOHN 5.1) WHICH COULD BE ANY ONE OF THE THREE ANNUAL FESTIVALS. HOWEVER, JESUS DID NOT CONFINE HIS PRACTICE OF CELEBRATION TO THREE ANNUAL FESTIVALS. JESUS ATTENDED WEDDINGS WHERE PEOPLE CONSUMED SO MUCH WINE THAT THEY RAN OUT (JOHN 2.1-12) AND WENT TO BANQUETS FROM WHICH HIS OPPONENTS DREW THE CONCLUSION THAT AS AN UP-AND-COMING RABBI, HE ATE AND DRANK TOO MUCH (MATTHEW 11.18-19)! JESUS TOOK TIME TO STOP AND CELEBRATE PEOPLE, LIFE, AND GOD, AND HE LED HIS DISCIPLES TO DO THE SAME (JOHN 2.2; 11.55; 12.12). IN THIS RHYTHM OF STOPPING TO CELEBRATE, JESUS CARRIED ON THE JEWISH TRADITION OF PUNCTUATING REALITY WITH THE REALITY OF SABBATH REST. IN SO DOING, JESUS CELEBRATED, IN THE PRESENT, THE FUTURE REDEMPTIVE REALITY OF GOD.

### ***LEVITICUS 23: THOU SHALT CELEBRATE!***

LEVITICUS 23 CONTAINS THE LEGAL GUIDELINES FOR ISRAEL WHICH DIRECTED THEM TO CELEBRATE AS A PEOPLE. IN THESE RULES CONCERNING CELEBRATION, WE FIND FIVE FESTIVALS OUTLINED, THREE OF WHICH BECAME CENTRAL TO THE YEARLY RHYTHM OF THE ISRAELITES. THE INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THESE CELEBRATIONS ARE LAID OUT IN AN IMPORTANT MANNER WITH SABBATH COMING FIRST AS AN ONGOING CELEBRATION WHICH IS HELD UP AS THE PATTERN FOR ALL OTHER CELEBRATIONS. THE ASPECT OF THE SABBATH WHICH IS MOST IMPORTANT TO THIS PATTERN IS IDENTIFIED AS SABBATH REST (LEVITICUS 23.3). THIS REST APPEARS IN THE INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING PASSOVER (LEVITICUS 23.7), PENTECOST (LEVITICUS 23.21, 24), DAY OF ATONEMENT (LEVITICUS 23.28, 32), AND THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES (LEVITICUS 23.36, 39).

WITH THESE CELEBRATIONS, GOD DEFINED TIME AND MARKED THE SEASONS FOR THE ISRAELITES. PASSOVER AND PENTECOST WERE FALL FEASTS WHILE ATONEMENT AND TABERNACLES WERE SPRING FEASTS. THE FESTIVAL OF TRUMPETS WAS REALLY JUST THE MARKING OF THE END OF ONE AGRICULTURAL YEAR AND THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER IN THE SEVENTH MONTH OF THE YEAR AND SERVED AS A CALL POINTING TOWARD THE

DAY OF ATONEMENT TWO WEEKS LATER. IN THESE INSTRUCTIONS WE DISCOVER THE CELEBRATION OF ENDINGS (HARVEST) AND THE CELEBRATION OF NEW BEGINNINGS (PLANTING), THE VERY FRAMEWORK FOR THE LIFE OF AN AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY. BY MAKING SABBATH REST CENTRAL TO EACH OF THESE CELEBRATIONS, THE CONCEPT OF THIS REST IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CENTRAL FRAMEWORK OF LIFE, ITSELF BECOMING PART OF THE FRAMEWORK OF LIFE. THUS, THESE CELEBRATIONS CALLED THE ISRAELITES TO EXPERIENCE SOMETHING BEYOND THEIR PRESENT, TO SOMETHING CONSTANT ACROSS ALL ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS. THESE CELEBRATIONS GAVE THEM OPPORTUNITIES TO REMEMBER THAT SABBATH REST WAS THE TRAJECTORY OF ALL OF LIFE OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

### ***DEUTERONOMY 16.1-17: MORE PARTY INSTRUCTIONS***

IN DEUTERONOMY, MOSES IS PREPARING THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL TO ENTER THE LAND OF CANAAN. HE DOES THIS BY RECAPITULATING THE LAW GIVEN TO THEM IN THE WILDERNESS. WHEN HE COMES TO THE LAWS GOVERNING CELEBRATIONS, HE RESTRICTS HIS COMMENTS TO THREE FESTIVALS: PASSOVER, PENTECOST, AND TABERNACLES. THIS IS IN PART BECAUSE THE DAY OF ATONEMENT WAS BY DEFINITION A DAY OF SOLEMN ASSEMBLY AND THESE FESTIVALS OF TRUMPETS AND FIRST FRUITS WERE TECHNICALLY PART OF PENTECOST AND THE DAY OF ATONEMENT.

IN HIS INSTRUCTIONS, MOSES GOES BEYOND THE TECHNICAL INSTRUCTIONS OF LEVITICUS 23 TO ENGAGE THE ISRAELITES ON A MORE PRACTICAL LEVEL, PROVIDING MEANING AND SCOPE TO THE ANNUAL CELEBRATIONS. WHEN CONSIDERED AS A WHOLE, A CLEAR PATTERN IS EASILY DISCERNED REGARDING THESE INSTRUCTIONS. FIRST, THESE INSTRUCTIONS INDICATED THAT THESE FESTIVALS WERE PILGRIMAGE FESTIVALS WITH PEOPLE JOURNEYING TO A SPECIFIC PLACE CHOSEN BY GOD (DEUTERONOMY 16.5-6, 11, 15, 16). SECOND, THESE FESTIVALS WERE TO SERVE AS REMEMBERING GOD'S PROVISION AND REDEMPTION (DEUTERONOMY 16.1, 10, 15). THIRD, THESE FESTIVALS WERE MEANT TO DRAW TOGETHER ALL PEOPLE, INCLUDING THOSE OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL (DEUTERONOMY 16.11, 14). FINALLY, THESE INCLUSIVE FESTIVALS WERE TO PROVIDE EXTENDED EXPERIENCES OF JOY TO THE PARTICIPANTS (DEUTERONOMY 16.7, 10, 13).

WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THIS PATTERN, IT APPEARS THAT WHILE THE FOCUS OF EACH OF THE FESTIVALS WAS DIFFERENT, THERE WAS A UNIFYING PURPOSE WHICH UNITED THEM. THIS PURPOSE SEEMS TO INVOLVE BRINGING ALL PEOPLE TO GOD SO THEY MIGHT EXPERIENCE HIS REDEMPTION AND ENJOY HIS PRESENCE.

## REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

Celebrations. We all have them. We celebrate birthdays. We attend weddings. We gather around the table at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. Life is punctuated with parties, but what is the point of the parties? For me, the point has often been about family or slowing down, or maybe in some seasons of my youth, seeing how much food I really could consume. These are all fine and wonderful and there is a measure of truth to each of them. However, I am coming to discover that they are not enough, enough to bring me to a point that I actually celebrate. I might show up. I might eat. I might visit, but my heart is often not full of joy. I am not brimming with excitement. Actually, sometimes I want to know when I can go home. Why is this the case? I think it is the case because I don't understand what I am really celebrating.

I am learning that celebrating isn't so much about what we claim we are celebrating; that is, birthdays are not really about birthdays and Thanksgiving isn't really about thanks. I know. That sounds weird. Hang with me. What I am learning is that celebrations are really about tasting something in a moment which we are meant to enjoy forever. In those birthday celebrations or Thanksgiving feasts we are actually experiencing the wonder, joy, and delight of our future life with God. In our celebrating we are reminding ourselves that what is will not always be but that the redemptive future of God is full of joy and delight. Our celebrations are windows in the present which provide insight into the future. When I think about celebrations in this manner, I find that I am much more present and alive. I am able to enjoy the moment and pay attention to all that is around me. I actually don't want the celebration to end because in those fleeting moments I am glimpsing my future. In glimpsing my future, I taste and see that what God has for me is good and I am buoyed with hope, but I return to the banquet table once more because the glimpse I caught can fade and I can forget. In my forgetting I grow burdened and weary, until I sit once more at the table and enjoy the feast and see that what is my present will not be my future.

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

Everyone loves a party. Well . . .almost everyone, but it is hard to find time for the parties. It is easier to send a card or text a "Happy Birthday" than it is to carve out time to sing and eat cake. It is easier to rush through Thanksgiving dinner in order to catch the game than it is to linger around the table for hours, long enough to get hungry enough to go back for the leftovers, laughing and reminiscing. It is hard to carve out time to take the time to celebrate because we don't see the point. We are fine with being happy and rejoicing in things, but we are busy people. Can we rejoice in a hurry? Perhaps the way we celebrate would change should we grasp the reason we celebrate. When we celebrate, we are actually doing something far greater than marking the passing of a birthday or a holiday. What we are in fact doing is opening a window so that we might glimpse our future. In our celebrating we taste and see the joy and happiness which will one day be unceasingly ours in the full presence of God. We come to the banquet table, we throw parties, we laugh over glasses of wine in order to remind ourselves that what we experience in the everyday will not always be. We keep coming back because we are tempted to forget and we grow discouraged, but we remember and our hearts are filled with hope when we return and are reminded of our future in our present celebrations. We encourage you to approach the upcoming Thanksgiving celebration with new eyes. This year, see if you can be aware of what is around you. Pay attention to the joy and laughter. Eat and savor the food. Linger at the table. See if you can soak in everything. As you do, see if you can hold in your mind this thought, "This is the way it will one day be." Try to see your experience as a small window into your big future in the presence of God. At the end of your day, take some time and journal what you experienced and what God might be inviting you into regarding celebrations.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP

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