



NO MORE GLOOM

# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

December 11, 2016

### Discussion Guide

#### No More Sorrow

##### 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 encounter someone who is experiencing grief or deep sadness, what is your gut response? What does this response look like in terms of your actions? Why might this be?

##### 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 nature of Hebrew poetry.
- Read Isaiah 35:1-10 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more, seeking to experience the drama of the poetry as this prophecy unfolds. Pay attention to any emotions or longings this prophecy might elicit.
- In this prophecy, God speaks to those who find themselves overcome and despairing, perhaps with the thought of the coming exile. What hope does God offer to them? What feelings, if any, might you connect with this hope? Could you elaborate?
- When people experience times of despair, what feelings do they typically experience? In what ways do people typically respond to them? Do you feel this looks any different among the people of God? Could you elaborate?
- What might it look like to share the hope of God's coming with people who are in the throes of despair? Does this look anything like how you typically engage people who despair? Could you explain?
- Where do you see people around you who are despairing? What might it look like to

engage them with the hope of God's coming? What, if anything, keeps you from engaging them in this way?

- Consider closing by praying for those who despair and for the courage to engage them by offering hope.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### POETRY

Most ancient religious literature of the Near East was poetic in nature. This importance of poetry as a genre for religious texts is seen in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. The entire book of the Psalms consists of poetic compositions. Wisdom literature such as Proverbs and Job might be identified as poetry. Even the ancient lament of Jeremiah is poetry. However, the greatest source of poetry in Scripture is the prophets. Ancient prophets declared their pronouncements in poetry. In fact, almost every major speech of the prophets in the Old Testament is poetic in nature.

The differences between poetry and prose (narrative) can be difficult to define, particularly when it comes to Hebrew poetry because Hebrew prose is itself dependent upon the Hebraic poetic tradition. However, Hebrew poetry is set apart from prose with its high reliance upon intensified language, imagery, symbolism, and metaphor. Hebrew poetry also emphasizes the broader range of the human experience, highlighting emotions and intuition. But, the primary marker of Hebrew poetry is the use of repetition.

The basic building block of all Hebrew poetry is the repetitive pattern called parallelism. Parallelism is the expression of an idea followed by the repetition of that idea in a second or even third line. Often this repetition further clarifies or nuances the first idea. For example, in his prophecy regarding the outworking realities of the Day of the Lord, one can see this parallelism at work coupled with intensified language and metaphor.

*The burning sand will become a pool,  
The thirsty ground bubbling spring.  
In the haunts where jackals once lay,  
Grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.  
(Isaiah 35.7)*

One of the common mistakes made in the interpretation of these parallel passages is to interpret the repetitive statements as separate, free-standing statements. In this case, God's coming would result in pools, springs and the creation of wetlands. In this instance, rather than making a statement about three separate realities, Isaiah is speaking of one reality through vivid imagery. On the Day of the Lord, the dry and barren person, most likely, will find himself gloriously refreshed. Here the repeating phrases simply nuance and amplify the imagery. When two lines are present in parallel, they are typically synonymous. When a Hebrew poet uses three lines, such as in the example above, the first two lines are often synonymous and the third may go beyond the original statement. One might also find instances where the poet contrasts ideas in a parallel unit marking two ends of a single continuum. However, the use of these contrasts is used to make a single point found in the contrast of the two opposing statements.

The beauty and spiritual import of Hebrew parallelism comes to the surface when the reader stops reading literally looking for logical progression and begins to read experientially, seeking to grasp the multifaceted emotions of the poet's encounter with God along with the various perspectives this encounter brings to the poet. So, in the example above, the real impact of the text is found when one seeks to "experience" the drama of barren land being transformed into a lush paradise.

### THE TEXT

#### ISAIAH 35.1-10: *THE RESTORATION OF THE BARREN*

The book of Isaiah is a collection of prophecies spoken by the prophet Isaiah during the eighth-century B.C. These prophecies are stern reminders of coming judgment upon Israel for its apostasy, though hope seems to be held out that Israel might return to God (Isaiah 1.18-19). However, it seems that God knows that his people will refuse him. Therefore, he tells them of his coming judgment. Yet, in the midst of these prophecies of judgment are prophecies of hope. God's coming judgment is not punitive but corrective. God has not abandoned Israel, but he will restore her once more. These prophecies of hope form bits of light to sustain and

guide the Israelites through the dark time which was about to descend upon them.

Isaiah 35 is a prophecy which mirrors the prophecy found in Isaiah 34. In Isaiah 34, God uses Edom to represent the nations of the world and the judgement which will come upon them in the great Day of the Lord (Isaiah 34.8). God promises that the nations will be destroyed and their lush lands transformed into a desolate desert (Isaiah 34.10-15). In contrast, the Day of the Lord will bring an opposite result for the people of God. Their land was already like a desert, but it would be transformed into a paradise. Parched land would have its thirst quenched. Barren land would blossom with flowers suddenly. The glory of places like the cedar forests of Lebanon and the fertile planes of Sharon and Carmel would be commonplace, a result of God's coming and presence.

At this point, it is difficult to know if Isaiah is speaking about the land of Israel proper or if he is using the land to represent some other reality. With verse three, it appears that the latter is most likely in mind, the land being used to represent the people of God, probably those who find themselves overwhelmed with the coming exile. They find themselves helpless, a people of feeble hands, trembling knees, and fearful hearts. The imagery is difficult to translate into our English vernacular but the idea is that these people are overwhelmed and powerless. They are a people who throw up their hands because they see no way forward. To these, God speaks an encouraging word. He will come to save them. Their reality will be like the transformation of barren land into a paradise.

The marks of this transformation will include physical realities such as the healing of their infirmities, but it will include spiritual and emotional realities as well. Their barrenness (spiritual and emotional most likely) will be transformed into refreshing realities. What is interesting is that the Day of the Lord also creates a highway to the place where God dwells, Zion. Here the motif of journey comes to the fore. Somehow, the Day of the Lord makes it possible to journey

toward the presence of God in an ever-increasing way; that is God's coming makes it possible to experience more and more of God's presence. This journey is safe and not marked with the unclean or the fools. These statements are difficult to understand but it appears they refer to the security of those who travel. They will not slip or trip seems to be the idea. As those who travel this road draw closer to God they find that they have everlasting joy, gladness, and their sorrow and sighing fade. The mention of this journey is an important nuance to the typical presentation of the Day of the Lord. Typically, the coming of God is represented as a single event, but here it is presented as an event which initiates a journey which culminates at some undefined future point. This nuance is particularly important when understanding the ministry of Jesus.

In many ways, Jesus and his ministry is the fulfillment of this passage. In Jesus, the glory of God came. Through him, the blind saw. The deaf heard. The lame walked. The mute spoke. Through him people were refreshed, but most importantly, through him a way toward God was made. A faith journey to an ever-increasing experience of God's presence became a reality, a journey which culminates in the ultimate refreshing of those who travel its path.

## REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

Sadness. Sorrow. Grief. They are part of life, even my life. I am sad because something didn't go my way or upset because someone didn't meet my expectations. These are typical potholes in the road for most people, ones that we get over and move on to other things in life. But then there are the craters in the road, the ones we fall into that seem impossible to climb out of. Someone we love dearly dies. A marriage falls apart. Depression comes for a visit and decides to stay. Your body fails and you have no hope of healing. These experiences too are part of life and they bring sadness, sorrow, and grief. The difference is we don't seem to recover from these experiences. We carry them with us as we move forward, or for some of us, because we carry them we cannot move forward. I have experienced some of this in my own battle with depression and know others who have similar experiences with chronic pain and devastating loss. In these instances, the question for the one experiencing the pain becomes about how to move forward when doing so seems impossible. However, the question for those who surround them is quite different. The question for those connected to the one in pain becomes one of engagement. How do you engage the person in pain when any form of engagement seems fruitless? For both the sufferer and those who bear witness the answer is the same: God is coming. God is coming and his coming will refresh the driest and most pained soul, creating a way for an ever-increasing experience of his presence which leads to ever-growing joy. God is coming and so the pit of despair is not the end. God is coming and so the prospect of engagement is not fruitless.

In my own experience with depression, this hope of God's coming was most powerfully experienced when people were willing to be present, tangible symbols of the God who was coming. In my darkest times, what mattered most was not words or assurances but simple presence. In the moments when people were willing to sit with me, simply sit and receive me in the hope that God could refresh me I was able to receive the refreshment of God because I was able to see in their presence the reality of God's presence.

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

Hurt, pain, and sorrow are a normal part of life, but sometimes they can consume our lives. In these moments, should we be the one in pain, we do not know how to move forward, and should we be the one witnessing the pain we do not know how to engage. At best we throw platitudes and vague assurances of well-being and prayers and then run for the hills. Who wants to be part of the pain? Who knows what to do with the pain? The reality is that in life we hurt. Sometimes we hurt deeply and for long periods of time. However, God promises to relieve and refresh us with his coming. For the one suffering this offers great hope because it brings perspective upon the experience of suffering. It will one day end. For those who witness the suffering, it provides a means to engage. God's refreshment comes with his presence and the hope of this presence can be demonstrated through physical presence with the one who is in pain. A simple willingness to be present provides great hope because it demonstrates a tangible reminder of God's presence. This is difficult for many people because they feel they need to "fix" what is wrong or to hurry people through their pain. Neither approach demonstrates an awareness of how the "fix" occurs or how pain is experienced. The fix only comes as God's presence is experienced and the pain is lessened insofar as the experience of God is heightened. Therefore, the greatest and most healing gift is the gift of presence, God's presence. This week, consider someone you know who is experiencing pain. This might be physical pain or even emotional pain. Make plans to sit with them for an extended period of time. You do not have to say anything other than you wish to sit with them and be present. If appropriate, you might massage their feet or shoulders or serve them in some other manner. As you prepare to leave, simply say, "I want you to know that God is with you." Consider making plans to return. As you do, the reality of God's presence comes because experiential reality for the one suffering is in your presence.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP