



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

March 26, 2017

Discussion Guide

WHAT IS THE GOOD LIFE?

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 hear the phrase, “the good life,” what does this mean to you? 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 geographical context of Jesus’ parable about the flood

and the two homes.

- Read Luke 6.46-49 aloud. Seek to be present in the crowd, listening to Jesus. Read the text once more. Pay attention to how Jesus’ words make you feel or what response, if any, to which they invite you.
- As you listen to Jesus, what responses, if any, do you have? Could you elaborate?
- Jesus invites his audience to hear and act upon his words. What reasons does he give for doing so? Can you trace Jesus’ reasoning out into real life illustrations? What might these be?
- Do you feel that people are tempted to hear and not act on Jesus’ words? Why might this be the case? Do you see any of Jesus’ reasoning working out in the lives of these people? Could you elaborate?
- What might it take to motivate someone to hear and act upon Jesus’ words? What might it take to motivate you?
- G. K. Chesterton said, “The Christian life has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.” In light of Jesus’ words, how might you react to this statement?
- Imagine for a moment that you heard and fully acted upon Jesus’ words, as he invites. In what ways, if any, might this

lead to a good life, a life which thrives as it navigates the perplexities of life. Could you describe this life in words? Is this life enticing and inviting to you? Could you explain?

- Consider closing by discussing what it might look like to walk with one another in a way that led to the encouragement to hear and act upon the words of Jesus. You might close in prayer, offering yourselves in faithful relationship to God, asking for the grace to hear and act upon the words of Jesus.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

WEATHER IN PALESTINE

The climate of Palestine is typically arid. However, in the autumn, the area can experience sudden and heavy downpours, accompanied by high gusts of wind. The nature of the rocky and semi-mountainous landscape exacerbates the effects of these rains, often leading to devastating flash floods. While these floods can occur at any place, such as at the bottom of a mountain due to runoff, these floods can often be predicted to occur in something called a wadi. A wadi is a river, brook, or stream bed in Palestine which flows seasonally. They are undependable sources of water. However, they are dependable sites of flash flooding, often breaking over their banks with sudden force.

When Jesus concluded his sermon with a parable about building (Matthew 7.24–29 and Luke 6.46–49), he most likely had these wadis and the effect of the autumn rains in mind. In his parable, Jesus envisioned a person who has chosen to build, perhaps unwittingly, close to one of these wadis, probably during a dry season. When the rainy season approached, he discovered the nearness of his house to the wadi as its waters overran its banks and rushed against the walls of his house. The person who had built upon a solid foundation found that even though the torrent pummeled his walls, the house stood firm. However, the person

who had simply built his home upon the ground discovered that the dirt and sand eroded, and his house was completely destroyed.

THE TEXT

LUKE 6.46–49: *THRIVING OR SURVIVING?*

As Jesus begins to conclude his sermon about the essential particulars of life in the Kingdom of God, he does so by underscoring the necessity of responding to his sermon in a positive manner. In so doing, Jesus not only invites people to hear and act upon his words, but he discusses a final particular concerning life in the Kingdom of God. Living as Jesus has described results in a good life. The issue of a good life is one which concerns all people, an essential life-question, as it involves the question of how one might navigate life in such a way that one is able to deal successfully with the inevitable challenges and problems of life. In these dealings, the desire is to do more than survive these challenges, but to deal with them in such a way that the person thrives, a life which is better and more solid.

Jesus concludes his sermon by calling people to make a choice. They must choose what to do with his words and the life to which they point. Jesus points to the illogical response of calling him Lord and then refusing to act upon the words he has spoken. In the context, the word “Lord” need not have Christological overtones. However, it does bear the weight of acknowledging that the one addressed has power and authority. Further, the repetition of the term highlights an emotive response on the part of the one speaking; that is, they are asserting that Jesus not only has power and authority, but they are acknowledging that power and authority over themselves. To make this claim and then to refuse to live as Jesus has just described is to behave in an illogical way. That Jesus would highlight this response indicates that it is not only possible but a prevalent response in his audience. Jesus never identifies those to whom he is speaking, but one might imagine the Pharisees could

have been a part of his audience, as they often approached Jesus with honorific terms, but then refused to believe or act upon his words (Matthew 22.15-22).

Jesus invites his audience to hear the words he has spoken and willingly take up the life to which they point. He offers a parable to support this response, a parable rooted in the common experience of living in Palestine. In Palestine, the autumn often saw heavy rains which resulted in flash flooding throughout the land, but particularly in areas around wadis, seasonal river and streambeds. In Jesus' story, two men have built near one of these wadis, perhaps in the dry season, unaware of the location of their homes. One man, the man who Jesus likens to those who hear and act upon his words, chose to dig down through the topsoil until he hit solid rock. Jesus notes that the man had to dig deep indicating much effort. The other man chose an easier route. He built his house upon the ground. Both homes would have had the same rock, baked brick, and plaster construction, only differing with respect to their foundation.

When the rainy season came, both men discovered the terrible locational choice of their building as the nearby wadi filled and rushed over its banks. Jesus describes this flood as slamming into both homes with torrential force. The one built upon the rock withstood the pounding of the water, but the one built upon the ground was utterly destroyed.

Some have argued that Jesus is talking in eschatological terms; that is, Jesus is describing the final judgment. The one who builds his life upon the teaching of Jesus stands at the final judgment. The one who does not, is not safe at the final judgment. While this is certainly true, the follower of Jesus must not only relate to Jesus, but act upon his words, taking up Jesus' life (1 John 2.6). One need not interpret Jesus' words solely in eschatological terms as Jesus does not explicitly invite his audience to do so. Rather, Jesus appears to

be speaking about the everyday experience of life. In life, problems and issues arise suddenly, often breaking upon people with horrific force. The question in these experiences is what it might take to not just survive but thrive. Jesus points to his sermon and basically says, "People who live as I have just described are those who survive and thrive in these experiences." This is the case because they have chosen to "dig down deep" to that which is most solid, taking up the essential Kingdom life Jesus has outlined. Those who are unwilling to base their life upon these deep truths/principles discover that when (not if!) life becomes chaotic, life itself falls apart in a way which cannot be rebuilt.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

Who am I? What am I here to do? How do I deal with what is wrong? These are all big questions, important questions which we all ask, but there is perhaps one more for which we desire an answer: what is the good life? It seems like this should be an easy question to answer, but really it isn't. You see, living a good life doesn't have anything to do with what we have or don't have. It doesn't have anything to do with whether people know our name or we leave a legacy. Living a good life has everything to do with making it to the end of life in one piece.

The reality is that life is hard and it throws all manner and sort of stuff at you. The question is not whether life will have its bumps and bruises, but rather when they will come. We know that these come and we do our best to prepare. We do our best to insure we survive. We buy health insurance to account for the unexpected illnesses. We buy auto insurance to deal with the unpredictable but inevitable fender-bender when everyone around us forgets how to drive. We purchase life insurance to offset the unexpected costs of checking out before we planned or before we had enough to provide for those we have left behind. We create savings accounts and IRAs to care for ourselves in retirement. We do these things and more to "insure" we are safe, that we survive, that we thrive. Only, they don't always work. In fact, rarely

do that always work. Health insurance is great, but sometimes it doesn't make you well or cover the medicine you need. I am speaking from personal experience on this front. Auto insurance is great, but while cars can be replaced, auto insurance can't ameliorate the trauma we experience when fender-benders are much worse than a bumper car experience. IRAs and 401k's do what they are meant to do, unless inflation or a bad run of the stock market wipes them out. We do all we can to "insure" we make it through life, but many times life is too unpredictable. We cannot account for everything. So, what then? How do you make it through life, a life which seems bent on throwing more at you than you can handle. By the way, that whole idea that the Bible says God won't allow you to experience more than you can handle isn't in the Bible! Life really does throw more at you than you can handle! What then? How do you survive? No. We want more than that. How do you thrive? This is the question of the good life.

In my family, the answer was, you simply sucked it up and put one foot in front of the other. Honestly, that can get you through the ups and downs if you have a Spartan mentality, but it leaves you battered, weary, and not all that pleasant to be around. Historical tidbit: Spartans were mean, nasty hombre's that no one liked! They were so mean they used nails for money. Nails! I don't know about you, but I want more than a Spartan life. Where do I find that?

Enter Jesus. Jesus approaches and invites me to listen to what he has to say about what life is all about, and to do more than listen. He invites me to act upon what he says. He invites me to begin to view myself through the lens bearing a blessed identity, and then allowing that identity to lead me to a life of radical love which he describes. It is not easy to do this. It takes some effort on my part, effort which mostly consists of leaning hard into relationship with God, a relationship in which God transforms my heart thus enabling me to act upon Jesus' words. But. . .if I will listen and act, Jesus promises I will survive and more. He promises I will thrive. He promises that what he is offering is nothing other than the good life.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

Who are we? Why are we here? What do we do with what is wrong with the world? These are all important questions, questions which help us navigate our world, but how do we know if they lead us to navigate it successfully? How do we know they will lead us to a good life? This final question is perhaps the one which is most important to us as we think about what life is all about. We want to know what it takes to make it to the other side of life in one piece, one happy, joyous, thriving piece. Simply put, we want to do more than just survive, though sometimes surviving seems like a far-fetched option.

The reality is life is unpredictable. Perhaps one of the few things we can count on is that it will throw more our way than we can handle. No, the Bible does not say God will not give us more than we can handle. Go look for yourself. I promise you won't find it. In life, we do get more than we can handle, but we never know when it is coming. When it comes, we are overwhelmed and we wonder if we are going to make it, make it to the end in one piece. This is where we want to know what it takes to live a good life, a life which navigates the roller coaster ride that is our everyday life.

Jesus invites us to consider that perhaps the life he has described is just that life. Could it be that a life built upon the Kingdom essentials he has outlined is able to navigate the perplexities of life in a way that leads to good? Jesus states that it does, but we will never discover if we do not hear and act. It has been said that the Christian life has not been found wanting. It has simply been left untried. What would happen if we tried, if we acted upon Jesus' invitation? Might we discover it leads to a life which is good? This week, we invite you to consider Jesus' invitation to act upon his words, to take up the life he offers. Perhaps you can ponder his invitation personally, meditating on Luke 6.46-49, allowing Jesus to speak to you directly. Pay attention to his invitation and how it makes you feel. Notice areas of desires and issues of resistance. Rather than judging them, hold these before God and ask him to help you understand them and for grace to deal with them. You might journal your experience.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

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