



# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

May 7, 2017

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## Discussion Guide

### A COMMUNITY CALLED HOPE

#### 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

- HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE HOPE? DO YOU THINK HOPE IS A NECESSARY COMPONENT OF LIFE? WOULD YOU EXPLAIN?

#### 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 BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF HOPE.
- READ ROMANS 4.18-22 ALOUD. SEEK TO IMAGINE YOURSELF AS ABRAHAM, RESPONDING IN FAITH TO GOD. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.
- IN WHAT WAYS DID ABRAHAM EXPRESS HIS FAITH AS HOPE? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY EXAMPLES AS POSSIBLE.
- DO YOU THINK THAT MOST PEOPLE WOULD CONSIDER FAITH AND HOPE TO BE RELATED IN THIS WAY? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- CONSIDERING WHAT PAUL HAS SAID, IN WHAT WAYS IS HOPE AN EXPRESSION OF LIVING FAITH?
- READ ROMANS 4.25-5.5 ALOUD.
- IN THESE VERSES, PAUL ENCOURAGES THE ROMAN BELIEVERS TO EXPRESS THEIR FAITH AS HOPE. WHAT REASONS MIGHT PAUL HAVE FOR ENCOURAGING THE ROMANS IN THIS MANNER? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY REASONS IN THE TEXT AS POSSIBLE.
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE FOR PEOPLE TO EXPRESS FAITH AS HOPE? DO YOU THINK THIS MAKES FAITH EASIER OR MORE DIFFICULT? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT EXPRESSING FAITH AS HOPE AFFECT OUR VIEW OF LIFE? GOD? OURSELVES?
- WHAT MIGHT IT TAKE TO EXPRESS FAITH AS HOPE? WHAT, IF ANYTHING, MIGHT STAND IN THE WAY OF LIVING OUR FAITH IN THIS MANNER?
- CONSIDER CLOSING YOUR TIME AS A GROUP BY ASKING GOD FOR THE GIFT OF HOPE AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSING YOUR FAITH IN HIM IN THE EVERYDAY. YOU MIGHT

CONSIDER USING ROMANS 15.13 TO GUIDE YOUR TIME OF PRAYER.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### HOPE

On the journey of faith, hope might be defined as living faith or faith in action. In classical Greek, hope is a neutral word, the anticipation of future events whether good or bad. It was a term which had no religious overtones. However, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word "hope" was often chosen to translate Hebrews words for faith and trust. Some of these occurrences are secular uses such as the trust in someone's words or promises. But, most of the occurrences involve religious uses referring to one's trust in God. In these instances, God is the object of hope (Psalm 71.5; Jeremiah 14.8) and his promises form the reasons for hope (Psalm 42.5; Isaiah 8.17; Micah 7.7). Throughout the Old Testament, hope is the concrete expression of faith, the means by which one relates to God as she awaits, with expectation, the fulfillment of his promises in circumstances which seem to defy such fulfillment.

The authors of the New Testament carry forward this same use of hope, particularly in the New Testament Epistles. In the New Testament, hope is essential to the life of those who follow Jesus (1 Corinthians 13.13) with the life of faith being described as a living hope (1 Peter 1.3). The basis of hope is the person of Jesus (1 Timothy 1.1; Colossians 1.27) with the content of hope being the receipt of God's fulfilled promise of redemption made available through Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5.8; Acts 23.6; 1 John 3.2-3; Romans 5.2). As in the Old Testament, hope is the concrete expression of faith in the present, a present in which now the believer has the promises of God but does not yet have the fulfillment of these promises; that is, hope is the sure expectation of God's divine saving actions through Jesus. This hope is a gift of grace made available through the Holy Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2.16; Romans 15.13). As a gift of grace, a living expression of faith, hope makes it possible to be joyous as God's people in the face of otherwise unbearable circumstances

and experiences because the believer in hope understands that what they are now experiencing does not trap or define them. Rather, in spite of the present, they solidly know they are moving toward a full experience of God's redemptive purposes for them in Jesus (Romans 5.3-5).

### THE TEXT

#### ROMANS 4.25-5.5: *PEOPLE OF HOPE*

Paul's letter to the Church in Rome has often been identified as Paul's systematic explanation of the gospel. While Paul certainly does delve deeply into the redemptive work of God through Christ, this letter is not what we might refer to as systematic theology. Rather, this letter is task theology; that is, Paul is describing the gospel from a specific angle for the purpose of addressing a specific issue within the Roman Church, that of unifying the Roman Church (Romans 14-16). Paul used the gospel to unify the Roman congregation by explaining that the gospel made it plain that no person was above another, but that due to the common problem of Sin and the general need for redemption, all believers were equal and therefore should be unified; that is, the gospel makes it plain that all people have the same predicament for which there is but one solution made available in Christ (Romans 3.21-31). Justification (God's action to make people right) was available through the work of Christ to those who turned to God in faith (Romans 1.16-17). This is God's pattern in extending justification to those who respond to him in faith. There is no other path to having one's life righted.

Paul uses the life of Abraham to underscore this point. For this he turns to the covenant through which God extended the promise of redemption, God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12.1-3; 15.1-6). As God made this covenant with Abraham, he extended justification to Abraham as Abraham turned to God in faith (Genesis 15.6; Romans 4.1-17).

With the example of Abraham before the Roman Church, Paul turns to describe the nature of faith which is so integral to the experience of God's justifying work made available through Jesus. To do this, he continues to point to Abraham. Abraham's

faith was expressed in his hope in the promise of God to give him a son even though his life circumstances dictated that the fulfillment of this promise was impossible (Romans 4.18-19; Genesis 15.1-6). However, Abraham expressed faith in God by waiting expectantly for God to fulfill his promise (hope), even worshiping God in the absence of the fulfillment of the promise, because he trusted that God was powerful enough to do what he had promised (Romans 4.20-21). This living faith expressed as hope was the type of faith desired by God, the faith which led God to right Abraham's life (Romans 4.22; Genesis 15.6). Having defined the practical, everyday expression of faith in terms of hope, Paul turns to the Roman believers in order to describe what such faith looked like in their context. As with Abraham, the practical, everyday expression of faith was nothing other than hope in the promises of God, promises yet to be fulfilled. In this case, the promise involved the justification of God made possible by the atoning work of Jesus. God had made justification (the righting of one's life) possible through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross (Romans 4.25). Therefore, Paul reasoned, those who "faithed" in God were already (past tense) made right; that is, they were already, through the work of Jesus, people whose lives had been righted. This was possible because the atoning work of Jesus had brought them into a fully restored, harmonious relationship with God the Father, made possible by God's grace expressed in Jesus.

One should take note of the verb tenses which Paul uses to describe the experience of the Roman believers. They are all past tense. Paul argues that the Roman believers already experience righted lives as they have been made right by God as they turn to him in faith. The only problem with these statements by Paul is they do not describe the present experience of the Roman believers. Their lives are not now made fully right, a fact made apparent by the presence of division among them. Much righting remains to be done. Paul acknowledges this by returning to the example of Abraham with the use of the term hope. The Roman believers boast (rejoice) in the present with hope that they are moving toward the experience

of God's glory; that is, they look forward with eager expectation that they will one day be fully righted by God even though they do not yet experience this reality. Paul is so certain that this will be the case that he uses the past tense to refer to this redeeming action of God, an action yet to be completed in the lives of the Roman believers. Therefore, the faith which justifies is a faith which trusts that God will complete his promised action of justification. According to Paul, the living expression of faith is nothing other than hope, the eager expectation that God will fulfill his promises.

This hope affects how the Roman believers move through every experience of life, including that of suffering. Hope made rejoicing in difficulty possible because circumstances which ran contrary to God's promises did not undermine the fulfillment of God's promises. Further, these experiences led to a growth in hope, because the experience of difficulty led to a development of perseverance (patience) and perseverance led to character development. This character development gave rise to more hope because in the development of one's character one experienced the growth in God's character, a present fulfillment of God's redeeming actions.

Hope was nothing short of a sustaining, living faith, keeping the believers from being put to shame in every experience and setting. One might hear an allusion to the division in the Church at this point as this was "shameful" behavior. Thus, hope not only kept the believer from the negative reaction of onlookers but from personal shameful behavior. Hope itself was sustained because believers were already experiencing the beginning of God's redeeming work, the restoration of their relationship with God because they now possessed the Holy Spirit, the loving presence of God in their lives in the present.

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

"What are you going to do? It just is." I don't know about you, but I am finding that I say these words more and more. I say them in reaction to what I see going on in a world which seems to have gone mad. I say these words in response to what is going on in my body, a body which has been robbed of its passion for running and is ever so slowly failing

as I lose mobility in my hands and legs due to the inflammatory arthritis brought on by my Still's disease. I say these words every time I encounter circumstances which are beyond my control, circumstances which often do not make sense but are as painful as they are baffling. With these words I am basically admitting that I am trapped. I am resigning myself to what is because I don't see any reason that it will ever be any different.

To be honest, I have mixed feelings every time I utter this phrase. On the one hand, I feel a bit of relief. I am admitting that the world is beyond my control and I am giving up my attempt to establish control. I am admitting that control is an illusion and a losing battle of idolatry, an idolatry of myself, believing I am God. That feels good. On the other hand, these words leave me feeling a bit hollow and more than a little anxious, because with these words I am saying I am stuck. I am stuck where I am, trapped in circumstances which are anything but pleasant. That doesn't feel good at all. Often it makes me wonder why I should go on at all. Why keep pressing forward if all that lies ahead is awful with a side of more awful? When I think this way, my mood darkens and I become grouchy bear Blake. No one likes this version of me, particularly no one in my family. I would like to be the better version of me, the version of Blake full of joy and happiness, but how am I that person when I am stuck? Trapped? I am learning that I can be the happier, more joyful version of me, even when I feel stuck, even when I don't have control over what is going on around me or inside me. How? Faith is the answer, but not just any old faith. Living faith, also known as hope, is the answer. Hope is faith made real in the everyday, faith in the face of circumstances which are anything but pleasant. Hope is faith that says, "This may be bad and I may not be able to do anything about it, but this does not stop what God is doing in my life and what God is doing is wonderful." With this kind of faith, no matter how it feels, I am anything but stuck. I am anything but trapped. I am moving. No. I am being moved, even when I don't realize it being moved to something better and more wonderful, something for which God has always for me to have and experience. I am not there yet. I don't have it yet, but I will. Because this is true, I don't have to be grouchy bear Blake, and for this I am thankful, as is

my family!

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

What is faith? What does faith look like, real faith? These are questions with which many wrestle. What does faith look like in real life? It looks like hope. Living, everyday faith is hope, hope that no matter what we experience God will remain true to his promise, his promise to give us life, real life made possible through the atoning work of Jesus. Real faith looks like holding onto God knowing that what we experience does not change what he is doing or is going to do. Real faith looks like singing at the top of our lungs with joy even though we have just heard the most devastating of news. Real faith looks like throwing a party even though life says we should hold a funeral. Real faith looks like hope, a hope which says we are not trapped by life nor are we stuck with what life gives us. Real faith is what sets off God's people from the rest of the world, the marker of a true community of atonement. This week, we encourage you to consider your own journey of faith. Would you describe your faith as expressed in the everyday as hope? Would you say that you are able to look toward what God is doing or going to do, or do you feel trapped and stuck in what you are experiencing? If this is the case, consider meditating on Romans 4.25-5.2. Allow these truths to soak into your heart paying attention to the promises of God, promises which refer not just to what God is going to do but what God has already done in Jesus. He has already righted us and is moving us to a righted life even though our present lives might make us question. If this is true, if God has already righted us and is righting us, then what we experience does not control or define us, nor does it dictate how we respond. We are free to respond with joy and contentment in every circumstance because we have hope, a faith that says what is will not always be.



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**BLAKE**  
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