



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

September 3, 2017

Discussion Guide

I AM AT HOME WITH YOU

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

- IN YOUR MIND, WHAT MIGHT BE THE MOST INTIMATE WAY POSSIBLE TO KNOW AND EXPERIENCE GOD? 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 CONCEPT OF OBEDIENCE AND ITS RELEVANCE TO DISCIPLESHIP. SEEK TO

WRESTLE WITH THE TENSION OF OBEDIENCE AS FALLING SOMEWHERE BETWEEN LEGALISTIC DUTY AND MENTAL UNDERSTANDING AND AGREEMENT.

- READ JOHN 14.15-24 ALOUD. SEEK TO IMAGINE YOURSELF AS A DISCIPLE OF JESUS LISTENING TO THESE WORDS. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT JESUS IS SAYING TO YOU.
- IN WHAT WAYS DOES JESUS SAY IT IS POSSIBLE FOR HIS DISCIPLES TO RELATIONALLY EXPERIENCE GOD? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY AS POSSIBLE.
- JESUS PROMISES THAT HIS DISCIPLES CAN EXPERIENCE GOD WITHIN THEM AS THEY ARE BROUGHT INTO THE DIVINE DANCE OF THE TRINITY THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT. DO YOU THINK THAT MOST CHRISTIANS UNDERSTAND THAT GOD CAN BE EXPERIENCED IN THIS WAY OR THAT GOD IS OUTSIDE THEM AND CAN ONLY BE EXPERIENCED BY REACHING OUT TO HIM? WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE? CAN YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT, IF ANY, PERCEPTIONS ABOUT LIFE AND GOD MIGHT CHANGE IN LIGHT OF JESUS' STATEMENT ABOUT EXPERIENCING GOD WITHIN?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO RECOGNIZE AND CONNECT WITH GOD AS HE DWELLS WITHIN US? WHAT, IF ANYTHING, KEEPS YOU FROM CONNECTING WITH GOD IN THESE WAYS?
- CONSIDER CONCLUDING BY CREATING SPACE AS A GROUP TO CONNECT WITH GOD RELATIONALLY.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

OBEDIENCE

The basic tenet undergirding the whole of biblical theology is that of call and obedience. In the biblical narrative, the relationship between God and people, while explained in terms of covenant, rests upon God's revelation and the receptive response of humankind to that revelation. Or to put it simply, God speaks and man obeys. The essential nature of Divine call and human response is noted throughout the Torah as an essential component of maintaining the covenantal relationship with God (Exodus 19.5, 8; 24.7; Deuteronomy 28.1). However, the Torah only lays the groundwork for what becomes a biblical thread essential to understanding of the Divine-human relationship. Behind the "Thus says the Lord" of the Old Testament prophets is the understanding of revelation and obedience, and, in his ministry, Jesus repeatedly expressed the need for his audience to hear and respond (Matthew 11.15; 13.9; Mark 4.9; Luke 14.35). Jesus went so far as to note that those who refused to respond could not be identified as his disciples (Luke 6.46-49), nor would they experience fellowship with the Father (John 14.23-24). In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer best summarized this theme when he wrote, "The central call of Jesus and the response of single-minded obedience have an irrevocable significance. It is only to this obedience that the promise of fellowship is given."

While the connection between revelation and obedient response is readily apparent throughout both Old and New Testaments, the exact nature of what is involved in the human response to Divine revelation is often vaguely understood, vacillating between mental perception and legalistic observance. However, both responses reveal misunderstandings of what God desires when he calls people to obedience. In the ministry of Jesus, obeying the calling of God clearly involves action (Luke 6.46-49; Matthew 7.21-27); that is the life to which Jesus calls people involves a "doing" ethic. These

actions involve adherence to the commands and teachings of Jesus (John 8.51; 14.15, 21; 15.10; 17.11; Matthew 28.20; 1 Corinthians 7.19). And the adherence to such leads one to the experience of God's blessing (Luke 11.28; Genesis 22.18). However, the obedience Jesus has in mind is more than the fulfillment of legalistic duty, a point readily apparent in Jesus' constant conflicts with the Pharisees over their own legalistic approach to the Law of Moses (Matthew 23.13-39). It appears that Jesus has in mind a response to God's revelation which does not necessarily focus on the specific fulfillment of the rules so that one might discover the exceptions to the rules, but a way of life which takes Jesus' words as the outline of a life which honors God and people, a life which is the life God created people to live (Matthew 22.34-40; John 14.6). Therefore, obeying the voice of God, particularly the voice of God as heard in the person of Jesus means one takes seriously all of Jesus' teaching about the nature of life, God, and how to live a life which honors God, seeking not to complete a set of actions but to live a life which is firmly grounded in the reality God intended for people.

The Text

John 14.15-24: *Experiencing God Within*

Jesus' discussion with his disciples in John 14 is part of a larger experience and discussion which centers upon the reality that Jesus will soon leave his disciples and how they are to move forward in the world as his followers. One of the main points Jesus seeks to make in this discussion is that while he will be leaving his disciples physically, he is not abandoning them. Rather, he will remain with them in the presence of the Holy Spirit, a necessary reality because to live the life to which Jesus has called his disciples requires an ongoing, intimate relationship with Jesus (John 15.1-5).

In the discussion, Thomas and Philip raise questions about how to move forward remaining intimately connected with God (John 14.1-14). Jesus responds by first noting who are his true disciples and then explaining how his true disciples can remain intimately connected with

Jesus and his Father. Jesus states that those who love him are those who demonstrate their love through their obedience of his commands. Jesus' words echo earlier words spoken to explain the washing of the disciples' feet. Jesus' service of his disciples was an act of love (John 13.1, 34). If the disciples loved Jesus in return, they would demonstrate this love through their obedience. With these words, Jesus outlines the nature of an intimate relationship between he and his disciples, something Jesus describes with the word love. With this word Jesus is not simply referring to emotional connection but stalwart devotion. In a devoted relationship with his disciples, Jesus serves. In response, the disciples obey. The importance of these parameters cannot be understated because Jesus is describing his relationship with his disciples in the terms God used to describe his relationship with the Israelites. God served the Israelites by redeeming them and in response they obeyed him (Exodus 19.5, 8; 24.7). Thus, Jesus describes his relationship with his disciples as nothing short of a relationship between God and mankind.

Those who are truly in relationship with Jesus are served further by Jesus as he asks his Father for another advocate. The phrase Jesus uses speaks of one who comes alongside the disciples to help them in the same way Jesus has helped them. In other words, Jesus will ask for one like himself but different from himself. He promises to ask that this helper be given permanently to his disciples. He calls this new helper the Spirit of Truth which echoes this new helper's similarity to Jesus (John 14.6). Jesus explains that those who are not his followers will not be able to accept the reality or existence of this new helper because he will not be materially present in ways they can understand. However, the disciples would know this helper intimately because he would not only be with them but would in some way join his life with theirs, living inside them. Jesus urges his disciples to recognize that when this helper comes they will in fact be experiencing Jesus' presence with them.

Jesus reminds his disciples that he will soon be leaving and will no longer be physically present but through this helper the disciples would still be able to "see" Jesus and would therefore receive life from Jesus. Jesus promised that on the day the helper was given—most likely a reference to Pentecost—the disciples would realize the deep connection Jesus had with his Father because they would experience a deep relationship with him and therefore through him with the Father. What Jesus offers here is nothing short than an in-grafting of his disciples into the Triune nature of God. However, he once again notes that this is only available to those who are in true relationship with him, a relationship marked by obedience on the part of the disciples.

Judas, whom John explains is not to be identified with Jesus' betrayer, asks why only the disciples would be given this deeply intimate experience of God, the experience of joining with God's own being, experiencing the life of God by becoming one with him while at the same time maintaining one's own identity. Jesus states that this is only for those who demonstrate their love through obedience because this is what the Father has decided, but to these, God will come and dwell intimately

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

Inside each of us is a longing to experience the Divine. We want more than simply knowing about God. We want to know God experientially in our daily lives. Growing up Baptist—someone should write a book with that title—I was taught this was possible but the real word on the street was it didn't really happen. We had to wait until Heaven to experience God. I am coming to believe that nothing could be further from the truth. I am coming to understand that we were created to live with God and that Jesus has made this possible through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was always the dark horse of the Trinity in my understanding. He was there but we didn't talk about him because he belonged to the Charismatics, and they were weird. I am coming to realize that "weird" is truly a matter of

perspective, and actually, the Holy Spirit belongs to every believer, a gift requested by Jesus and given by the Father. Through the Spirit it is possible not simply to see and hear God, but it is possible to enter into the Divine dance of love, becoming one with God while at the same time maintaining my identity. This kind of experience is available to anyone, anyone who would be Jesus' disciple that is, and here is where the rub comes because Jesus is pretty clear about who his disciples are. Jesus notes that discipleship involves a relationship, a loving relationship of devotion between himself and his disciple. In this relationship, Jesus serves to demonstrate his loving devotion. In response, his disciple obeys, taking up the life to which Jesus calls him, not in legalistic duty but in an understanding that in his teaching Jesus has laid forth a life for which we were made. According to Jesus, discipleship has nothing to do with praying a prayer. It has everything to do with taking up the life of Jesus. It is loving my enemy. Giving freely. Forgiving. Living in rhythm. Resting in dependency upon God, and so much more. This is discipleship and disciples get God. They get God in a way we cannot imagine, and they get him today.

There is just that obedience thing. On my worst days, I don't like it. I like to live on my terms, doing things my way, turning to Jesus' way when my way doesn't work out first. On my best days, when I do pursue discipleship on Jesus' terms I get easily distracted and discouraged because I just can't do it. I don't get it. I wonder if being a disciple is really about "getting it." I think discipleship is more of a journey, a journey which has a starting point and then no ending point. It begins with my desire to enter into a relationship with God and a willingness to live in response to that relationship. As long as I am growing in that relationship, open to the new vistas to which it leads me, I am a disciple. If I am a disciple, I get God, all of God, and I get him today!

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

How do we experience the God of the Bible outside the Bible? We long to know God, rather than simply knowing about God. The good news is God

wants to be known, personally and experientially. He has made himself available to all people at all times, but he has kept a good bit of himself back. However, it is possible to get all of God. God has reserved this experience for those who have chosen to enter into a loving relationship with Jesus, a relationship marked by obedience to the teaching of Jesus. To these, God offers an invitation in the Triune dance of love, today. This is the life for which we were made. However, experiencing this life can still seem difficult for those who truly are pursuing the life of discipleship. The reality is that the experience is already there. It is happening. We simply must become aware of it. We don't have to reach for it. We have already joined the Triune dance of love. We just need to learn to hear the song. Perhaps the easiest way to do this is to begin regularly withdrawing for periods of silence and solitude. In these times, we grow still and seek to pay attention to God as he is within us, not simply around us. We grow still so that we can feel his presence and begin to hear his singing (Zephaniah 3.17). Silence and solitude can be difficult, particularly for those of us who are used to noise and movement. The easiest way to start is to set a place and time to be alone for about 10 minutes. Sit comfortably. Lying down can lead you to fall asleep. Grow still and pay attention to God's presence, the presence within you. You don't have to feel anything. Simply be open to God being there. Your mind will probably wander. That is normal. Call your mind back to the presence of God within you. You might use a name of God to call you back to God such as "Jesus" or "Father." Simply use this name once to call yourself back to him when you wander. As you grow in this practice it is not unusual to catch glimpses of God, sometimes felt through great joy or peace, or sometimes simply through the awareness that he is there, closer than you can describe.



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