

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE

GREAT EXPECTATIONS



February 9, 2014

Discussion Guide

Tug of War

1 Peter 5. 1-10

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 answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- If you were stranded on a desert island but could ask for anything you needed to live, for what would you ask?

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.)

- Use the notes to explain the context and background of 1 Peter 5 and the idea of humility.
- Read 1 Peter 5.1-5 aloud slowly. Pause and read 1 Peter 5.1-5 aloud once more.

- Peter states that living the submissive life takes humility. According to Peter, what forms does humility take in relationships?
- In what ways, if any, might humility be necessary in order to live submissively with others?
- Does humility seem easy or difficult for you? Could you elaborate?
- React to the following statement: "The submissive life gives rise to an honest question, 'If it is all about you, what happens to me?'" What additional questions, if any, does the submissive life raise for you? Would you explain?
- Read 1 Peter 5.6-10 aloud slowly. Pause and read 1 Peter 5.6-10 aloud once more.
- In what ways does Peter address the question of one's personal needs with regard to the submissive life?
- How might a person seek to have their personal needs met? How might these approaches be similar or dissimilar to what Peter describes? Could you elaborate?
- Peter describes the experience of spiritual attack resulting in suffering as one reason people might point to as a reason for not living submissively. Why might this be the case?
- Can you think of other experiences that might turn someone away from the submissive life? If you were Peter, how might you address these issues?
- What, if anything, turns you away from the submissive life in your relationships? What steps might you have to take to live submissively with others? What, if anything, keeps you from taking these steps?

Context and Background

Humility

The term “humility” often evokes negative feelings in our modern culture. Many of these feelings are rooted in the idea that humility, in some way, degrades the intrinsic worth of a person. We might be surprised to discover that such feelings about humility are not new but actually arose in antiquity. The Greeks developed the concept of humility to describe the characteristic of being low or unassuming. In their anthropocentric world-view, to possess such a characteristic was highly unfavorable, for it took a person out of the spot-light. However, humility is viewed much more favorably in the Old and New Testaments. Humility is actually something to be pursued (Proverbs 3.34). The reason for this shift in viewpoint lies in a fundamental shift in world-view. While the Greeks, and the modern Western world, emphasize an anthropocentric (human-centered) world view, the Jews and early Christians held to a theocentric (God-centered) world view. In other words, what matters most for the Jews and early Christians is that God take center stage and that all of life revolves around him. In this vein, humility is simply the recognition of one’s proper relationship to the God who takes center stage. He is first. People are second. Humility as a way of life receives added emphasis with the life of Jesus. Jesus himself models humility (Matthew 11.28-30; Philippians 2.6-11) and calls his disciple to pursue a life of humility (John 13.1-17). This humble life is the recognition of a person’s rightful relationship with God and others as well as the means of maintaining proper relationships (Matthew 18.1-5). Humility is not something placed upon another but rather it is a willful choice (1 Peter 5.5), the intentional decision not to approach another with force, arrogance, or pride.

The Text

1 Peter 5.1-5: *The submissive life*

The letter of 1 Peter is a letter written by the Apostle Peter to churches scattered throughout five Roman provinces in what is now modern Turkey. He writes to these churches to encourage and instruct them during a time of local persecution and suffering. More than likely, this suffering is not official but local responses of neighbors to those who have chosen to live outwardly as followers of Christ. Peter provides insight and exhortation in how to pursue Jesus while maintaining proper relationships with one’s neighbors and fellow believers during this period of trial.

As Peter concludes his letter, he reminds the churches of the necessity of maintaining proper relationships within the church, probably as a means of support during their suffering. Peter first addresses the elders of the congregation. These may be those who are more advanced in the faith, but more likely they are those who lead the local congregations. Peter’s exhortation to these leaders is that they lead with proper motives by shepherding those within the congregation. They lead because this is God’s desire for them and their leadership consists of a desire to serve the congregation rather than to be served by the congregation. The position of authority is not to be used to maintain a chain of power but rather to influence others by demonstrating a proper example of a faithful life. Here Peter describes a leadership model in which power and authority are used to serve. In many ways, the proper attitude of leaders is to be a desire to seek what is best for the congregation. This pleases God who stands as the example of head shepherd and results in his reward.

Next, Peter turns to the congregation and states that in the same way that the leaders seek the best of the congregation, so too is the congregation to seek what is best for the leaders. Peter describes this attitude as one of submission. It is obvious that Peter is describing what Paul labels as mutual submission (Ephesians 5.21) as the proper mode of operating within the church. Like Paul, Peter uses more words to address those who find themselves with greater power in his culture. This mutual submission requires the intentional choice to be humble with one another; that is, each believer is to approach the other with lowliness and a lack of pretense. (See Humility.) This manner of life is contrary to the Greek-influenced world of Asia Minor. Therefore, Peter quotes from the Proverbs to remind these churches that humility is a characteristic to be pursued by the people of God (Proverbs 3.34).

1 Peter 5.6-10: *The rest of life*

While the willing choice to live submissively with one another might lead to unity within a congregation, the issue of trouble in life remains. Life is hard and this hard life leads to the presence of real needs among the congregation. Peter is not uncaring about the presence of these needs nor is he unaware that the approach of mutual submission might leave one questioning how one's own needs might be met. He reminds his readers that submission not only marks one's relationship with others but it is also to mark one's relationship with God. When a person approaches God with humility, putting him first, they approach one who has true power, and they will discover that God will use this power to care for them. This care is experienced as followers of Christ repeatedly lay their needs (anxieties) before God, recognizing that he cares for them (Philippians 4.19; Matthew 6.25-33).

When the followers of Christ live in this manner, they are taking up the life of Christ, a life of submission with respect to people and God. Peter reminds his readers that this life is resisted by Satan himself and calls the churches to be wary of this. He urges the believers to resist the Devil as he buffets them in their pursuit of the submissive life

standing firm in their faith; that is, spiritual warfare in this case involves a reaffirmation of one's trust in God. Suffering is not to be used as a sign that God does not care. Rather, suffering is a part of life, actually a part of sharing in the life of Christ (1 Peter 4.13-19). Believers are to keep pursuing God who will care for them after the experience of suffering.

Application:

Living the submissive life is difficult. Such a life is difficult because of what it requires of us: an attitude in which we willingly assent to the reality that we are not the center of the universe. Instead, when we choose to live submissively, we intentionally place others in central positions, seeking what is best for them rather than what is best for ourselves. However, living in this manner gives rise to a second difficulty, the very real question of the meeting of our own needs. We each have needs, but if we seek others first, how will our own needs be met? The honest question in the submissive life is, "If it is all about you, what happens to me?" We are tempted to break from our submissive life to meet our own needs, needs that are real and God-given. However, the answer to meeting our individual needs is not to break from the submissive life but to pursue it with greater vigor in our pursuit of God himself. It is in the intentional choosing to state that we are not the center but rather that God is that we discover God's unending care for us and his willingness to meet our needs.

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