

# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

August 10, 2014

**BE GOOD.**



# Discussion Guide

## Faith

Genesis 12.1-9; 15.1-6

### 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

- What comes to mind when you hear the statement, "Have faith!?" Would 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.)

- Use the Going Deeper notes and comments to explain the context of Abram's response to God.
- Read Genesis 12.1-9, out loud. Read Genesis 12.1-9 out loud, once more, encouraging group members to seek to experience the text as if they were Abram.

- In these verses, we find a preeminent example of what responding in faith looks like (Hebrews 11.8-9). Considering these verses, what elements make up a response of faith? Seek to find as many as possible.
- If you were Abram, what feelings might God's call and promises elicit in you? How might you be tempted to respond? Would you elaborate?
- What would make it possible for you to obey God's call?
- Considering the description of faith in Genesis 12, how might you define faith?
- How do people define faith today? Do you feel this definition is similar or dissimilar to how faith is portrayed in Genesis 12? Why might this be the case?
- Use the Going Deeper notes and comments to elaborate upon the struggle Abram had with his own faith response.
- Read Genesis 15.1-6, out loud. Read Genesis 15.1-6 out loud, once more, encouraging group members to seek to experience the text as if they were Abram.
- What were the outcomes of Abram's faith struggle? Seek to discover as many as possible.
- What struggles, if any, do you have with responding in faith? What are some of the outcomes of these struggles? Could you explain?
- It has been said that real faith is made up of thousands of small decisions to trust ourselves to the care of God in the face of circumstances which are beyond our control. Do you agree or disagree? Could you elaborate?
- How might we, as a group, encourage one another to respond to God in faith?

## Context and Background

### *Faith*

To express faith is to entrust oneself to the loving care of another. In religious terms, to have faith is to hand oneself over to the care of an invisible God in the midst of a visible world. Therefore, faith includes both cognitive and performative elements. Faith requires a firm belief that God exists and that he is loving and true to his promises. Faith also requires one to act upon this knowledge by giving oneself to the call and care of this God through obedience, trusting that this God will care for those who obey.

In the Old Testament, faith was the basis by which the people of God lived. Relating to God required faith as those who were in a covenantal relationship with him were called to entrust their lives to him by choosing to obey his commandments in a hostile and contradictory environment, trusting that God would care for them by keeping his promises. The quintessential example of faith in the Old Testament is Abram (Genesis 12-15). Abram received the call and promise of God and chose to entrust his life to this God even though such obedience made little sense socially, physically, or economically. Abram trusted that God would care for him in his own state of need and powerlessness (Hebrews 11.8-9). What is important to note is that Abram's faith was not blind enthusiasm in the unfettered care of God, but was rooted firmly in an actual call and promise. It is also important to note that Abram's response of faith is connected with a receipt of righteousness (Genesis 15.6; See also Habakkuk 2.4.).

In the New Testament, the concept of faith as entrusting oneself to God continues with the object of faith more firmly defined as Jesus. Those who willingly entrusted themselves to Jesus—chose to obey his call to follow and to trust in his power to deliver—found their lives made whole; that is, they experienced a move to a righteous life in its physical and spiritual dimensions (Matthew 8.10; Mark 2.5; 5.34; 10.52). However, those who refused to express faith experienced an absence of God's power and a lack of movement toward the life God intended (Mark 6.5-6).

Jesus seems to indicate that those who are willing to express faith in him have before them unlimited possibilities, and they will see the literal transformation of the world and their lives within it (Mark 11.23; Luke 17.6). This call to faith is not a call to believe all things are possible but a call to entrust oneself fully to the one who can do all things. Jesus also seems to acknowledge that faith is something that can be grown (Luke 17.5) as well as something that can coexist with doubt (Mark 9.24). What is necessary for a growing faith is an increasing willingness to obey Jesus, one step at a time, trusting that he will care for his followers even in their moments of weakness and powerlessness.

## The Text

### **Genesis 12.1-9: *Real Faith***

The New Testament points to the life of Abraham as one of the preeminent examples of a life grounded in a faith response to God (Hebrews 11.8-19). Abraham began his faith journey as Abram, the son of Terah in the country of Ur, modern day Iraq (Genesis 11.27-32). For some reason, Abram's father chose to leave Ur for the land of Canaan, but he died in Haran before completing his journey. Sometime after the death of Terah, God came to Abram and instructed him to finish the journey to Canaan. This journey would involve an abandonment of all that made Abram feel safe and secure: national and ethnic identity as well as any family support system. Simply put, God called Abram to intentionally step outside of his comfort zone and enter into a rootless and powerless existence.

This call of God was matched with God's own promises to care and provide for Abram as he left his comfort zone and entered into a rootless and powerless state. God promised to replace all that Abram was leaving (Genesis 12.2), to protect Abram (Genesis 12.3), as well as to elevate Abram to a status in which he had an influential role in the world (Genesis 12.3). God's call to Abram, matched with his promise to care for Abram when Abram could not care for himself is the call to faith. God's faith call was for Abram to trust in the care of God in the face of circumstances beyond his control.

Surprisingly, Abram chose to respond in faith by leaving and journeying to the land of Canaan, and this at an age in which many of the promises of God seemed impossible.

### **Genesis 15.1-6: Faith, Doubt, and Life**

It is easy to assume that Abram's faith response was gigantic, something average people are less than capable of making. While we need not underestimate the greatness of Abram's response, we also need not elevate Abram as someone greater than ourselves. Abram's great faith was matched with great doubt. Even as Abram followed, he struggled with the tendency to trust in his own self-care rather than the care of God (Genesis 12.10-20; 16.1-16; 20.1-18). Abram also wrestled with fear and doubt as he waited for God to fulfill what he promised (Genesis 15.1). Even as Abram trusted God to care for him, he could not ignore the nagging reality that God's promises did not make sense in his daily reality (Genesis 15.2-3). Rather than chastising Abram for this mixture of faith and doubt, God approached Abram in a moment of great intimacy and assurance. Abram was reminded once more of God's promise and once more he chose to entrust himself to God's care in the face of circumstances beyond his control. Abram's response indicates that his faith response was not a once-and-for-all decision but was a series of decisions, a series of moments in which Abram made small choices to trust and obey God. It is in this series of small choices to trust and obey God in which Abram found life, the real life God intended for him (Genesis 15.6; Galatians 3.6).

## **Application:**

What is faith? In our modern context faith is often defined as either: (1) knowing a great deal about God, or (2) trusting God to do a great deal. Often, the latter is associated with something referred to as "blind faith" or taking a "leap of faith." Since the latter is inherently dangerous, we often settle, at least in practical life-application, to the practice of faith as the former. While faith does inherently involve a knowledge about the character and being of God, real faith begins with the call of God upon our lives. Faith is not blind but rests upon the very real urging of God to obey him. Often, answering God's call will lead us to a place in which we can no longer care for ourselves, for to respond would lead us to an experience of rootlessness and powerlessness. However, God's call is matched with a promise to care for us when we cannot care for ourselves. We respond in faith when we trust ourselves to the care of God and intentionally obey his call. However, we quickly discover that faith is not something that we immediately possess in fullness, nor is faith a single decision. Our faith response is often matched by an equal (sometimes greater) feeling of doubt and fear. This mixture of faith and doubt indicates that our faith can grow, something that happens as we make everyday, small decisions to keep obeying and entrusting our lives to the care of God in the face of circumstances beyond our control.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at [BlakeShipp.blogspot.com](http://BlakeShipp.blogspot.com)



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