

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
October 5, 2014



Life was not meant to be lived alone-

Discussion Guide

We Connect

John 17.20-23

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 would you say are some of people's deepest desires?

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 background and context of Jesus' prayer in John 17.
- Read John 17 out loud slowly. Pause. Read John 17.20-23 out loud. Pause. Read John 17.20-23 trying to imagine Jesus praying this for you and your group personally.
- One of people's deepest desires is to connect, to experience true community. One of people's greatest frustrations is that they do not realize this deep desire. In what ways does Jesus pray about the experience of community? What are his specific requests?
- Which of these requests, if any, stand out to you? Could you elaborate?
- In what ways do you see people trying to connect (experience community)?
- What, if anything, in your mind keeps people from experiencing true community? Would you explain further?

- Do you feel that Jesus' prayer addresses the issues that keep people from experiencing true community? Would you elaborate?
- Do you feel that followers of Jesus experience the reality of Jesus' prayer today? Why might this be the case?
- What might a follower of Jesus do to experience the reality of Jesus' prayer in his own life?
- What might it look like to take these steps (or ones similar) in this group? Would we be willing to take them?
- Conclude your time together in prayer for the Church, your group and for one another. You might consider modeling your time of prayer on the prayer of Jesus.

Context and Background

Community

In the biblical sense, community exists when a group of people with a common calling and identity choose to live together within a larger society. For such a community to exist, it must be marked with such things as love, patience, a willingness to express mutual concern, and a humility of spirit in the pursuit of a common cause. The existence of such a community is rooted in the nature of God which he placed in people in creation (Genesis 1.26-27). God himself exists in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1.26; Matthew 28.19; John 14.1-11; 2 Corinthians 13.14) and placed the capacity for this sort of community within people. The capacity for community is so essential to what it is to be human that to experience life apart from the experience of community is to be deprived of humanity itself (Genesis 2.18). The existence of deep longings within each person to connect and belong to others is a sign of this capacity for community which sets us off as those who bear the image of God.

While the desire and capacity for community exists within each person, the experience of true community is often lacking in the daily routine of individuals. This dearth of the community experience may be witnessed in the presence of a great cosmic loneliness which pervades our incredibly wired/connected culture. However, throughout history, God has sought to provide the experience of community to people. In part, God has provided community through the relationship of marriage (Genesis 2.18-25), but his primary

provision has come through the creation of a called-together people who form something called "the community of God." We see this movement of God as early as the calling of Abram. Implicit in the calling of Abram is the creation of a new people group, a community of people with a single calling who would live together within the larger society (Genesis 12.1-3). The Church continues this movement of God to create community within larger society and then to invite the world to experience the very thing for which they were made by becoming part of the Church. Such an experience is possible because God himself is present within these God-formed communities (Exodus 33.15-17; John 17.20-23).

While true community is possible within these God-ordained people groups, it is not always easy. Community is not natural or easy for people who are used to living apart from one another and for no one other than themselves. The experience of community must be fostered within these larger God-ordained people groups by their members (Ephesians 4.1-6). Apart from these practices, the experience of community can and does elude even those who are part of the larger gathering of the people of God.

The Text

Genesis 1.26-27: *Created to connect*

Genesis 1-2 detail God's creative work. Genesis 1 is something of a hymn, celebrating God's creative activity while Genesis 2 appears to be more of an outline of God's creative movement. Within these two chapters, God's actions to create people are outlined. In Genesis 1, people are the pinnacle of God's creative efforts. Unlike the rest of creation, people are set off as special as they alone bear God's image (Genesis 1.26).

While much debate has been had over what it means to bear God's image, two aspects are readily apparent within the text. First, to bear God's image implies an inherent ability to exercise creative authority over the earth (Genesis 1.26). In creating people, God imbued them with his own creative authority and gave them the charge to exercise this authority under his own authority. Second, to bear God's image implies an inherent need to live in community, because God himself lives in community (Genesis 1.26). (See Community.) The need for community is so deep that it shapes the very physical form God gives to people as they are given forms (male and female) which are inherently designed to connect in intimate ways (Genesis 1.27). While some have claimed that our

need for community is little more than a desire, the biblical account testifies against this noting that living apart from community is not good (Genesis 2.18); that is, to live apart from community is to live in a way that is not in keeping with what God designed life to be like as a human being.

John 17.20-23: *Enabled to connect*

John 17 contains one of the final earthly prayers of Jesus. It is a wonderful example of the richness of Jesus' prayer life, revealing a very intimate and unpretentious relationship with God the Father. In this prayer, Jesus holds his disciples up to the Father and asks that in light of the upcoming events surrounding the cross, God would protect them (John 17.6-19). Jesus' prayer does not stop with his present disciples but extends to those who would be his disciples in the future (John 17.20-26).

The primary focus of Jesus' prayer for his future disciples is that of unity (John 17.20-23), a union which will eventually result in eternal union with God (John 17.24-26). Jesus assumes that his present disciples will go forth with his gospel message, inviting people to follow Jesus, and that people will accept this message (John 17.20). He asks that these future followers would be one (unified). If Jesus had stopped at this point, the oneness which Jesus requests could mean many things, but Jesus qualifies his request. Jesus asks for a oneness that is found in the very nature of the Godhead (John 17.21) and extends this request to involve not just a union among people but a union between God and people. Jesus' prayer is simple and yet audaciously big, for he is asking for nothing less than a return to the creative state of relationships (Genesis 1-2). He is asking for the full experience of the image of God as it pertains to community. In Jesus' mind, this transformation among his followers will clarify any misunderstanding of what the Father meant to accomplish through Jesus (John 17.21).

While this seems to be a huge request (and it is!), Jesus notes that it is entirely possible because of the work he has accomplished. True community (union) is possible because Jesus has given his glory to his followers. It is important to note that Jesus is speaking of his present actions in reference to his future (and present) followers at this point. Basically, Jesus is claiming that his actions of handing off his glory have an ongoing effect that makes community possible. The real question is to what is Jesus referring with the mention of glory?

It is actually a bit unclear as to what Jesus is referring. Throughout Scripture, glory is used as an expression for the manifestation of God's presence and person. Therefore, in the most general terms Jesus seems to be saying that he has handed off his presence and person to his disciples. If one has read the rest of the New Testament, one cannot help but hear echoes of Pentecost (Acts 2), but John has not just future events in mind but the physical person of Jesus. Is Jesus referring to the Holy Spirit or his physical person? More than likely, he has both in mind. The incarnation of Jesus is in itself a gift of God's glory to people in physical form. Likewise, the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a gift of God's glory among people. These are not mutually exclusive happenings but part of God's larger movement to draw near and redeem mankind. In a similar vein, Jesus concludes this portion of his prayer by noting that the unity experienced (due to the gift of his glory) will show the world that God had sent Jesus and that the followers of Jesus are loved.

Real life with Blake:

I have two incredibly deep intertwined feelings: a desire to connect and immense loneliness. On the one hand, I want to be known. I want to know others. I want friends, real friends, people who are with you through thick and thin, even when I am thick and thin. I want to have people celebrate with me, to weep with me. I want people who care about who I am and not just what I do (for them). I reach out. I try to connect. I go to parties. I post on Facebook. I Tweet. I go way outside my comfort zone and walk across the room and introduce myself and invite people to coffee. I am doing everything I know how to do to have a friend, to be a friend. At the end of the day, I only feel alone. Sure I know a lot of people but I don't really feel known. It always seems to matter more how I am doing (for others) rather than who I am. My posts get "liked" but I am not sure that I am really liked. I feel isolated and alone, even in a crowd. I don't think I am alone in this. The reality is that most of us feel pretty alone. We just are afraid we are the only ones who feel that way. We all desire to connect. There is this incredible hunger in us to reach out and touch someone, to be touched. The problem is that our desires don't always match up with reality.

I am encouraged that Jesus understands my desire. He took the time to pray for me—yes for me—and he prayed for the fulfillment of my desire, that I would recognize it was possible, within my reach. Actually, that I would realize it had already been given to me. I think Jesus' gift of community is mind-boggling. It is hard to comprehend how it is possible and yet, somehow I know that it is, but only in his person. This is where I think my desire to connect has to be tweaked. I find what I desire the most by first journeying to Jesus.

Real life with you:

One of our deepest desires is to connect with others. One of our greatest fears is that this will not be possible. Our fears are not unfounded. Most of us spend our lives in relative isolation. No one really knows us and we don't really know others. We find true connection (community in the biblical sense) to be difficult at best. The result is that we spend most of our lives longing for something we do not believe is possible. However, Jesus prayed for what we desire the most (connection), and he gave what was needed to make it possible (his presence). We can experience true connection with others, but in order to do so we must recognize that this experience comes through the work of Jesus himself. If we desire to connect, we must first connect with Jesus and recognize his work as sufficient for the establishment of community. This week, take some time to ponder Jesus' prayer in John 17, focusing on verses 20-23. Imagine Jesus praying this for you and over you. Take some time to consider receiving what he has done for you. Turn to him and offer your own prayer, revealing your own deep desire for community.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at BlakeShipp.blogspot.com



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