

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
November 23, 2014



HOOKEE

Discussion Guide

Trapped

Exodus 5. 1-21; 6.8

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

- When have you ever tried to break a habit (addiction)? What was this experience like for you?

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 Exodus 4-5.
- Read Exodus 4.29-5.21 aloud, slowly. Pause. Re-read Exodus 4.29-5.21 aloud, seeking to imagine the scene in your mind.
- In what ways are the Israelites trapped? Seek to find as many instances in the text as possible.
- Imagine you are an Israelite experiencing the events described. What might your response be at this point? Would you explain?
- When the Israelites heard about the hope of freedom, they discovered the depth of their bondage. They could not set themselves free. In what ways, if any, do you think this experience might mirror the experience of people who try to break free from addictions?

- In what ways do people typically respond to the experience of the depth of their bondage? What might these reactions say about the possibility of experiencing real freedom?
- In what ways, if any, have you made similar responses in your own attempts to find freedom? Could you elaborate?
- Read Exodus 6.6-8 aloud, slowly. Re-read Exodus 6.6-8, seeking to imagine the scene in your mind.
- What hope does God extend to the Israelites who are trapped?
- In your mind, imagine an area in which you have a bondage (addiction) which traps you. As you hold this in your mind, have a member of your group read Exodus 6.6-8 aloud, and imagine God is speaking this directly to you. Sit with these words for a few moments and then read them again, once more hearing them as God speaking directly to you.
- What, if anything, do you hear God saying to you right now? Would you share as you feel comfortable?
- Conclude in a time of prayer, thanking God for his promise to deliver, and offering your lives to his care.

Context and Background

Quitting our addictions

Addiction is the experience of the controlling influence of a person, activity, or substance. We can be addicted to many things, including anger, approval, calendars, technology, eating, exercise, gossip, sex, tobacco, reading, money, power, and much more. When we come to recognize that we are addicted, we also discover that quitting our addictions is not easily done. We discover that we lack the power to eradicate our addiction through willpower alone because of the way addiction works.

Addiction works to extend its control by subverting the physical, social, and spiritual spheres of life. Every addiction seizes control of our physical bodies through something called the dopamine response. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter which has been called the body's "gotta-have-it" chemical. Basically, dopamine is the gas that fuels our body's desire engine. The more pleasurable our experiences, the more dopamine our body releases. Our addictions play on this natural, God-intended response by subverting it so that our

body actually becomes dependent upon higher and higher levels of dopamine release (this is called tolerance). When we try to quit our addiction, our body responds by going into something called “withdrawal” which can include violent bodily reactions, often forcing us back into our addiction in order to find relief.

Addictions also seize control of our social sphere. Most addictions are supported by collusion in our relationships (codependency). As we pursue that which we desire, we create interweaving webs of deception with those closest to us as a way of dealing with our addictive behavior. For instance, the wife of an alcoholic will “help” her spouse with his addiction by buying him alcohol or by covering up for his behavior. In some ways, this “helping” becomes its own addiction of being needed. When the alcoholic seeks to quit his addiction, the relationship reacts in such a way that mimics the body’s response of withdrawal. Anger, rage, and passive-aggressive responses make it apparent that the alcoholic did not have permission to quit, thereby forcing him to continue drinking in order to stabilize the relationship.

Finally, addictions seize control of our spiritual sphere. Addiction works to subvert our spirits by dividing them, separating the existence of desire from the ability to act. Basically, one part of the person desires to be free while another part of our self desires to continue the addictive behavior. Because we exist as people of two minds at this point, we are limited in our ability to act and claim the freedom we desire. Jesus speaks of this state when he refers to our inability to serve both God and money (Matthew 6.24). Typically, we simply follow the path of least resistance which is often the path down which our addiction leads us.

When addiction has done its work, we find that we are incapable of releasing ourselves from its grasp. Willpower and white-knuckling it are not sufficient to lead us to freedom (Romans 7.14-24). Rather, we discover that in our addiction we are in need of grace, a power outside ourselves to empower us to step toward freedom (Romans 7.25).

The Text

Exodus 4.29-31: *The hope of freedom*

Hearing God’s plan to rescue the Israelites from slavery, including the plan to use him as the chief instrument of deliverance, Moses is reluctant to assent, feeling himself incapable (Exodus 3.11-22). God responds to Moses’ trepidation by

providing him with signs to verify that he really is sent by God, and his brother Aaron is a mouthpiece to speak on Moses’ behalf (Exodus 4.1-18). Armed with God’s calling and the signs to verify God’s redemptive movement, Moses and Aaron gather the leaders of the Israelites and tell them all that God planned to do (Exodus 4.29-30). The leaders are amazed and choose to believe that God really is moving on their behalf to rescue them, and they respond by giving their lives to God in worship (Exodus 4.31).

Exodus 5.1-21: *The reality of bondage*

Any hope of freedom which Moses, Aaron, and the rest of the Israelites might have had quickly dissipates when Moses and Aaron speak to Pharaoh. Moses and Aaron meet with Pharaoh and speak in a prophetic manner (“Thus says the Lord”), proclaiming the freedom of the Israelites and God’s desire to take them on a journey into the wilderness (Exodus 5.1). However, Pharaoh is not impressed, nor is he moved. He will not recognize the Lord, nor will he let Israel go (Exodus 5.2).

Moses and Aaron respond with pleas for mercy but the king of Egypt retorts that all he is concerned about is the work stoppage Moses and Aaron are creating. Clearly, Pharaoh has no concern for the well-being of the Israelites, but only for what they produce for him (Exodus 5.4-5). Because the hope of freedom has led the Israelites to slack from their appointed duties, Pharaoh responds in such a way to draw them back into their existence of servitude. He refuses to give straw or access to straw which was needed to make bricks, but he also refuses to reduce the number of bricks required (Exodus 5.6-8). In this, Pharaoh increases the burden on the people of Israel in such a way that they no longer will have time to engage in chatter about freedom. Further, Pharaoh heaps insults upon the Israelites by mocking them, calling them lazy. He simply wants them to work harder (Exodus 5.8-9). When the Israelites fail to produce the required quota, Pharaoh resorts to acts of violence which would further demoralize the Israelites and then mocks them again saying that it is their own fault that they are being beaten (Exodus 5.10-18).

At this point, the Israelites realize their true state. They are trapped in their slavery. They do not have the power to rescue themselves, nor does it seem that God has the power to rescue them.

It appears that Pharaoh has all the power. The Israelites are demoralized and divided. Pharaoh's actions have the (intended?) effect of dividing the Israelites so that they reject Moses and Aaron, and in so doing reject the very freedom they represent (Exodus 5:19-21).

Exodus 6.6-8: *The promise of rescue*

It seems that the recognition of their inability to find release is somehow intended by God, for now he speaks and promises that deliverance will come, but only by his own hand. God speaks to Moses, noting first that he is God (not Pharaoh!). He then states seven times what he alone will do, using the phrase "I will." God's promised actions are progressive. First, he will free the Israelites from their bonds of slavery, though this will not be all at once but will require a series of judgments (Exodus 6.6). Next, God will begin a process in which the Israelites will become his people and he will be their God (Exodus 6.7). Finally, God promises to bring the people of Israel to a land of promises which they will receive as their possession (Exodus 6.8). When this is finished, they will realize that he is the Lord and that he alone has done this. The simple point seems to be that while the Israelites cannot deliver themselves, God can and will.

Real life with Blake:

"Hello, my name is Blake and I am a workaholic, and I struggle with the need for approval." This is how I speak about myself when I am most honest, and honestly, I don't want to be this person anymore. The trouble is I can't figure out how to quit. Everytime I try, stuff happens. I vow that I will just stop working so hard, working for a sense of worth and value. But then, my mind starts to race about all the things I have to do. My body starts to get restless. I begin to feel like I am wasting time and people's money by not working harder, faster, longer. I literally sweat on my palms and I feel like I am going to lose my mind. The only thing that helps is diving back into the project I just said I was going to put down. Suddenly, I start to feel better. Shame and guilt come flooding in as I realize, I am not free to leave. I am not permitted to be free. I am hooked and there is not a lot I can do about it.

What I am beginning to realize about my own personal areas of bondage (addiction) is that on my own, I can do nothing about them. These areas have wrested complete control from me. They control my body, my mind, even my very soul in ways that I cannot fully understand. A if to mock me, they leave me only one thing: desire. I desire to be free but that is all I am permitted, to desire.

I can dream of something I know I cannot possess. It is demoralizing for someone like me, someone who has always been able to work my way out of anything with a little bit of elbow grease, but not this one. I am coming to realize that I am trapped. I am also coming to realize that my entrapment can be broken, just not by me. If I am willing to allow God to work in my life and to do so in his way and timing, I can be free. . . if i am willing to let him do it.

Real life with you:

Our addictions (areas of compulsive, habitual behaviors) have a way of getting control of us, of all of us. We don't recognize the depth of their control until we try to break them. When we try to quit we experience violent reactions in our bodies, our relationships, in the depth of our souls that cause us pain that can only be relieved by returning to our addiction. This pain can be so great that in some cases we experience trauma to our very selves. There is no white-knuckling through the pain. Our addiction has trapped us. If we are going to be free, we need outside help. This outside help is available in the person of Jesus. He understands our state and promises to do for us what we cannot. However, his course of action is not swift and sudden but takes time because it involves more than simply freeing us from our addiction, but it involves a complete reorientation of our person. We need this reorientation because our addiction has already disoriented our person in its attempt to assert its control over us. We have to relearn how to live, but all this is possible under the guidance of Jesus. This week, take some time to consider the times you have tried to quit your own addictions. Reflect upon how you have succeeded or failed. Consider taking some time and asking God which one of these he might want to address at this season in your life. Pause and wait for God to bring it to mind. (This may take a few moments and it may take a few days of reflecting.) When God has brought it to mind, consider surrendering yourself to God's work on his terms in this area. You might write a brief prayer that you can say to continue offering yourself to God's work in this area and wait on God to move.



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