

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
December 14, 2014

Hope lives

A small, rustic wooden cabin with a thatched roof is positioned at the bottom center of the image. A bright, vertical beam of light descends from the top center of the frame, illuminating the cabin and creating a strong contrast with the dark background. The cabin appears to be made of weathered wood and has a simple, functional design.

Discussion Guide

Hope Lives

Genesis 3

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

- Do you feel that life is inherently difficult? 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.)

- Read Genesis 3.1-19 aloud. Reread Genesis 3.1-19 seeking to imagine the scene as it unfolds.
- In what ways does God's creation break? For what reasons?
- In what ways, if any, do you see the continuation this brokenness today?
- In what ways do people typically respond to the brokenness of life? What might lie behind each of these responses?
- Read Genesis 3.14-15 once more.
- What does God promise to do in response to the brokenness which has come to his creation?
- In what ways, if any, does the promise of God change the way people might respond to the brokenness of life?

- In what ways are you responding to the presence of brokenness in life? What would it take to respond in light of God's promise to address this brokenness?
- What would it look like for a Church to respond to life as it is in light of God's promise?
- What, if anything, keeps you (or churches) from responding in this way?
- Conclude with a time of prayer, asking God to grant you and your group the grace to grasp the hope which is found in the promise of God to address this world's brokenness.

Context and Background

Hope

To have hope is to have the expectation of the fulfillment of a desire in the future. Central to the concept of hope is the very real potential for what is desired. We hope when we yearn for what we know is possible but not present, but we hope against hope when we long for what is not possible. Because hope is a deep yearning for something that is possible, the presence of hope is a sustaining and stabilizing force which gets a person through life. He knows that in spite of what he now experiences, he will one day possess that which makes him happy.

Where people differ on the definition of hope is in the identification of what will make a person happy; that is, people differ on the object of hope. For the people of God, the object of hope is God himself (Jeremiah 14.8), for God is the object of our happiness and fulfillment (Psalm 16.1; 28.7; 37.4). God is, by definition, the only possible source of true fulfillment, for people are made in his image and are intended for him (Genesis 1.27). Hope in God is possible because God has revealed and given himself to us in such a way that hope in him becomes something that can be tangibly grasped in the person of Jesus (1 Timothy 1.1).

When the people of God place their hope in God they discover a foundational component of a righteous life (Proverbs 23.18; 24.14) and they possess one of the essential components of life itself (1 Corinthians 13.13). Those who place their hope in God discover that he cares for them (Isaiah 7.4) and that their lives are marked with joy, confidence, and stability (Romans 12.12; 15.13; Hebrews 3.6; 6.18-19). Paul encourages the Roman congregation to live in light of the hope they have; that is, to live as if that for which they

hoped was already realized (Romans 5.2-3). He noted that one might grow in their hope by leaning into the experience of suffering since suffering confirms the presence of God, the object of the believer's hope.

The Text

Genesis 3.1-6: *Doubt*

In Genesis 1-2, God creates the world and fills it with life, a life whose quality is marked by goodness (Genesis 1.31). However, the goodness God intended is soon marred as doubt concerning God's true intentions enters through a discussion between the woman and a serpent. The serpent asks if God has forbidden the man and woman to eat from the trees of the garden. Clearly this is false (Genesis 2.16-17), but the question raises the issue of God's true nature and intentions with respect to people. The woman replies that God has permitted them to eat from any of the trees save one in the middle of the garden, which is true, but she adds something that is not true. She adds that God forbade the man and woman from touching the fruit of the tree or they would die. The serpent counters that this is not true. The man and woman would not die when they touched the fruit. Rather, if they would eat it their eyes would be opened and they would be like God. At this point doubt is inserted into the mind of the woman (and the man!) as to the character of God. Did he simply forbid them from eating from the tree in order to protect his role as God? Could they become like him? Could they become gods?

Seeing that the tree was full of good fruit, the woman decided to take a risk on becoming like God. She took and ate of the fruit, and, then gave some to her husband who was with her and like her, he ate it, perhaps in hopes of becoming like God.

Genesis 3.7-13, 16-19: *Death*

The serpent was right in his statement that the man and woman would not die physically, at least not immediately. However, his words prove to be false and twisted because aspects of death are immediately experienced in the lives of the man and woman. The first experience of death comes in the relationships of the man and woman. The man and woman realize they are naked and become ashamed.

In response, they gather fig leaves to hide their bodies from one another, erasing the intimacy that had formerly existed between them (Genesis 2.25). Next, the man and woman hear God moving about in the garden and they hide from him because they are afraid of him, erasing the trust that had formerly existed between people and God. When God confronts the man about his actions, the man avoids the question and blames his wife, shattering honesty and transparency in his relationship with his wife and God.

Death in relationships is only the beginning. Next, small deaths are experienced in the normal comings and goings of life. God reveals that the woman will now experience pain in childbirth and her marriage relationship will be filled with pain. She will desire to dominate her husband but he will seek to dominate her. (The same verb for domination is used in Genesis 4.7). This is not surprising in light of the death to honesty, transparency, and intimacy their relationship has already endured. God reveals that the man will find that the normal activity of work itself is painful and draining with the ground (life!) resisting his efforts. In the end, the normal comings and goings of life will wear out and wear down the man and the woman so that they die and return to the dust from which they were made, a high price to pay for attempting to be God!

Genesis 3.14-15: *Hope*

The general outcome of the man and woman's attempt at godhood is bleak, but in the midst of dire consequences God provides hope. God reveals that the serpent is not off the hook. God curses the serpent and promises that he will build up hostility (enmity) between the serpent and people. This hostility will eventually take the form of a person who will crush the serpent at great personal cost. While some take this verse to refer to general hostility between people and the source of life as they know it, historically, this passage has been interpreted prophetically. It is typically understood to refer to a single person who would destroy not just the serpent but the very wellspring of the brokenness in life as people know and experience it. Reading the New Testament, one cannot help but understand the text as the earliest allusion to the presence and work of Jesus.

Real life with Blake:

Life is difficult. Sometimes life is hard because I make it hard by my choices. But, in general, life is just hard. Even the most basic things of life are difficult. Small things like traffic jams and grocery store lines make life difficult. Big things like cancer and natural disasters make life difficult. In between the two extremes are a host of things that make life difficult: distrust, pride, terror, greed, stubbornness, divorce, and so much more. Some of this I cause. Some of it is caused by others. The rest of it just happens, and there is nothing I can do about it. The reality is life is difficult. Life has always been difficult and it seems that it will always be so. In fact, it seems like my best efforts (and those of others) usually make matters worse. Sometimes I resign myself to the reality that life is just hard. Other times I rage against life. Sometimes I just withdraw and try to pretend everything is wonderful, but it isn't. In the midst of my vacillating emotions and responses to life hope dawns, a hope that makes it possible for me to put one foot in front of the other in this difficult life. I have hope that life does not have to be this way, a hope that life can be something else. This hope is not a far-off ideal or a distant wish, but this hope is real and tangible, for this hope has come to me in the person of Jesus (1 Timothy 1.1). In Jesus, I find God moving to do what I cannot do, to bring life back to the way it was meant to be. In Jesus, I find God restoring me, my family, my community, and my world. In Jesus, I find hope.

Real life with you:

Life is difficult. This is a painful reality with which each of us must grapple, and grapple we will. Usually, life wins but not before we wear ourselves out in the process. Some of us are just determined enough to wrestle until our dying breath. The rest of us lick our wounds in silent resignation or deceive ourselves as to life's true state by insulating ourselves in enveloping webs of withdrawal from the real world. In all of this, we have hope, hope that life does not have to be this way, hope that life can be something different. This hope is found in the person of Jesus, God's promised agent to undo life as we know it so that life might return to its original state of goodness. This week consider asking God to show you the realities of life all around you. Ask him to show you the gap between what is and what was meant to be. As you see these gaps, pause and recognize that Christ has come and is working to bridge these gaps. You might thank God that he is now working in the person of Jesus to right what you see. You might conclude by asking God to give you the grace to hold on to the hope that he is now working in Jesus.



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