

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
December 28, 2014

Hope lives



Discussion Guide

Hope for shattered lives

Isaiah 42.1-9

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

- Has anyone ever let you in on a secret about something good that was going to happen, but had not yet transpired? What effect, if any, did this have on 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.)

- Explain the context for Isaiah 42 using the notes.
- Read Isaiah 42.1-9 aloud, slowly. Reread Isaiah 42.1-9 once more, seeking to hear it as if God was speaking directly to you.
- In this text, God lets people in on something that has not yet transpired (verse 9). He lets them know that he is going to reorder their lives. In what ways does God promise to move to accomplish this reordering?

- In what ways, if any, might hearing what God plans to do before he does it provide hope? Could you explain?
- Which of the ways God promises to move to bring order to lives might provide hope? Would you elaborate?
- Where might you see God accomplishing what is promised through Isaiah?
- Do you see God accomplishing his promises to bring order in your life? Where might you see this movement? Where might you still need to see God move?
- What is your reaction when you consider where God is moving and where he still needs to move?
- Read Isaiah 42.2-4 aloud, slowly, allowing these words to be God's words to you. Pause for a few moments. Read them aloud once more and in response hold your reaction to how he is working in you before him. Pause for a few moments of stillness in God's presence. Read these verses once more and respond privately to God.
- Spend a few moments sharing your experiences and responses as a group.
- Conclude by reading Isaiah 42.9 aloud and responding in prayers of thanksgiving for what God has done and what he promises to do.

Context and Background

Servant of the Lord

The expression, "servant of the Lord," is an Old Testament expression primarily used to refer to those who are devoted worshippers of God or those who by divine initiative carry out God's purposes (Psalm 105.6; Jeremiah 25.9). However, in Isaiah, the expression takes on an entirely new meaning not found elsewhere in the Old Testament.

Starting in Isaiah 40, the book of Isaiah takes on an entirely different feel. Somehow the tone has shifted and is more exultant and hopeful. Some have argued that this indicates that a different person wrote this portion of Isaiah. However, one need not come to this conclusion.

The change in tone is more likely due to the shifting nature of focus, a shifting to a message of hope and future redemption. Within this context, the expression “servant of the Lord” appears some twenty times (Isaiah 40-53). In these chapters, two servants are contrasted: the servant Israel and the servant of the Lord. The servant Israel is blind, sinful, and deaf (Isaiah 41.8; 42.19). However, the servant of the Lord is what Israel was meant to be but cannot be due to her rejection of God.

The Text

Isaiah 42.1-4: *The God who cares*

In Isaiah 42, the tone of Isaiah shifts sharply to one of hope and promise. In chapter 41 (verses 22-29), God speaks against the foolishness of idolatry, and in chapter 42 offers an alternative source of hope for people to put their trust, the servant of the Lord. Unlike idols, this servant is sent by God, as one he has chosen and one in whom he delights. It is hard not to miss the parallel language with the baptism of Jesus at this point (Matthew 3.13-17). Unlike idols, this servant has power and authority because he possesses the Spirit of God.

The task of the servant is to bring justice to the nations (people groups). The idea of justice here is bigger than the modern forensic (judicial) understanding, but includes the idea of rightly ordering life itself for the peoples in view. One could imagine God seeking to rightly order life with great might and fury, but this servant is marked by gentleness as he refuses to raise his voice. Rather, he acts in a way that will not further oppress or distress those who find themselves crushed, on the verge of collapse. One might hear here the previous promises in Isaiah that God would move and end oppression (Isaiah 9.4). The ministry of this servant would be marked with faithfulness and a willingness to persevere so that his task might be completed. Because of this, the furthest reaches of the world (islands) would be able to place their hope in him.

Isaiah 42.5-9: *The God who frees*

The description of the ministry of this servant of the Lord is hope-filled. With these words still resounding in the ears of his people, God turns to address the servant whom he is sending. God instructs as the one who has all power as the creator and sustainer of life. God reminds the servant that his calling comes from God’s own upright character (righteousness), and that God himself will sustain and guide the servant as he completes his God-given duties (hold by the hand). The purpose of God’s sending of the servant was to create a new way of being (covenant) for all people, Jew and Gentile alike. This would be accomplished as the servant brought healing and freedom to those who found themselves crushed by the darkness of life apart from God (Isaiah 8.16-22).

God himself promises to do this in order to demonstrate that he alone, not any idols, is God. He announces it to the people of Israel before it happens. (Isaiah prophesied 8 centuries before the birth of Jesus!) His announcement of what will be and his declaration that he will bring it about forms a promise of hope for the people of Israel. In the present, life was about to be crushed under the encroaching armies of the Assyrians. However, life would not always be this way. God would send one who would lift up and restore life which had been broken.

Real life with Blake:

The world is broken, and so am I. It is easy to point the finger to all that exists around me and say that nothing is as it should be. However, what I see around me is also inside me. I am full of fear and anxiety. My own relationships are broken and fractured, often by my own doing. I struggle with depression, my own addictions, and a healthy dose of self-loathing on the best of days. Nothing like growing up in a strict, performance-driven home to make you feel lower than dirt if you don't impress . . . constantly. My life is out of sorts, but the hope I have is that in Christ, God can and will put me back in order once more. What I fear is how.

Most of the time, I imagine God coming with might and power to straighten me out. Usually this involves some form of begrudging movement on my behalf in which God scowls and says, "You better straighten up" and then he zaps me. The only problem is that, in my mind, the zapping actually destroys me because I can't be straightened up. I am permanently bent. I know. It sounds pretty hopeless, and it is. I don't know where I got this image but it exists in my mind. I am coming to learn that it is false.

God does come to me in Christ, but he comes with gentleness and grace. He knows I am bent and he refuses to bend me further. Somehow I should have grasped this. Jesus came as a helpless babe, not a crushing conqueror. As he comes, he knows I am somewhat resistant to change, but he refuses to give up on me. He is not discouraged when I don't respond. He does not give up when I throw in the towel. He keeps working, keeps moving and will continue to do so until I am put to sorts because this pleases God. It pleases God to come to me in Christ and he promises that he will finish what he has started. He is so excited and full of joy at what he is going to do in me that he cannot wait for me to experience it in its fullness. He has to tell me what will be before it is even finished!

Real life with you:

The world is broken and so are we. Each of us is deeply and significantly bent. Our lives, our relationships, our agendas and attitudes are disordered in ways we cannot understand or rectify. What we cannot do, God promises to do for us through one he is sending, Jesus. God promises to come to us, to right what is wrong, but he comes in ways we can receive him. He will not further damage us, but he will work with us until he finishes what he started. Even when we can't see the end, he can't contain himself but lets us in on what he plans on doing. He whispers to us, "It will be finished."

This week, consider taking some time to turn your attention to God in the same way as you did last week. Considering turning to him as the one who is the hope for you, the one who is reordering you in the person of Jesus. You might consider memorizing and meditating on Psalm 16. This is a wonderful psalm to make part of your daily rhythms, for it turns our attention to God as the source of life. Spend the week memorizing this psalm and then seek to pray through the psalm several times a day as a means of turning your face to God, the source of our hope.



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