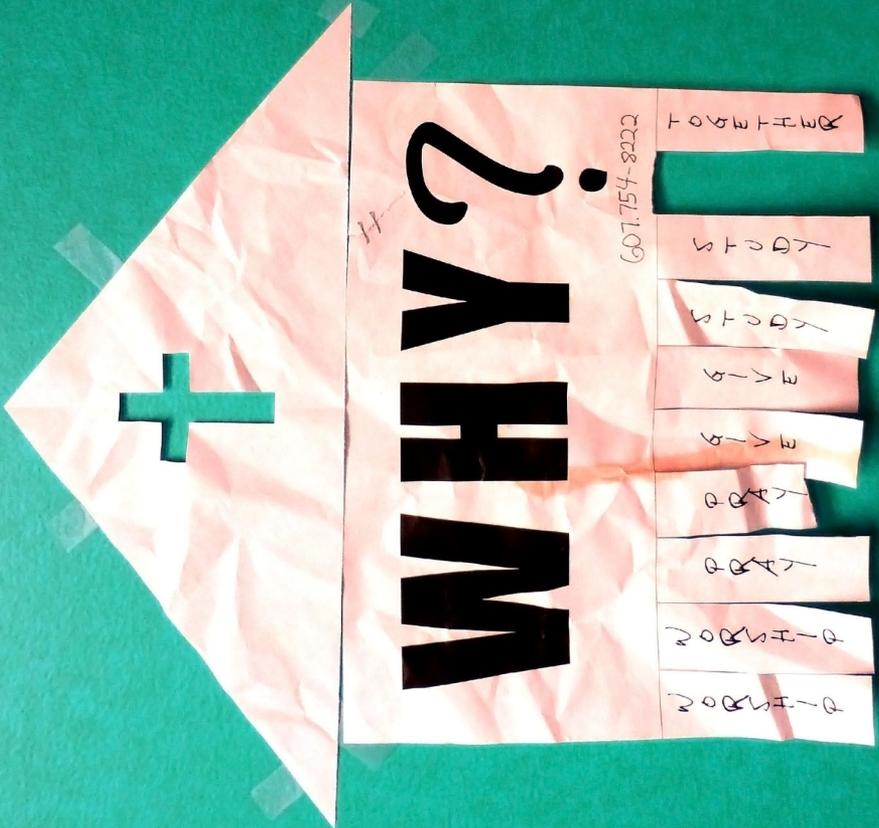


GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

May 17, 2015



Discussion Guide

Why Study?

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

- Is the regular study of Scripture something you find easy or difficult to maintain as a life rhythm? 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 2 Timothy 3.16-17.
- According to Paul, in what ways is Scripture useful? What might these look like in real life?
- Do people today believe that Scripture is useful? Could you explain?
- According to Paul, Scripture is useful because in Scripture we hear the voice of God (God-breathed). In what ways, if ever, have you heard God's voice in Scripture? What effect, if any, did this have upon you?
- Read Hebrews 4.12-13.
- The author of Hebrews states that in Scripture, we not only encounter God's voice but we encounter God himself. To what does he point as support for this statement?
- In what ways, if any, have you experienced God directly through Scripture?

- If one might hear God's voice and experience God himself in Scripture, what implications, if any, might there be for a regular rhythm of Scripture study?
- What, if anything, keeps you from taking up this rhythm?
- What steps might you consider taking to make Scripture study a regular part of your life?

Context and Background

Inspiration

The concept of inspiration is the idea that oral and written discourse can be prompted by the Holy Spirit. While followers of Jesus were the first to strongly teach this concept, probably because of their experience with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.16-18), the concept was not foreign to the Jewish people. For instance, the Old Testament prophets regularly claimed that they spoke for God and in instances throughout the Old Testament God's Spirit plainly spoke through a person (Numbers 24.2-3; Jeremiah 32.1; 48.1; Ezekiel 6.1; Joel 1.1; Amos 2.1). Both the Jews and early followers of Jesus believed that God's Spirit could speak through people. However, early Christians also believed that God had already spoken clearly through Scripture, prompting his people not just to speak but to write his words down (2 Peter 1.19-21; 2 Timothy 3.16-17). Accordingly, if Scripture came from God, it was trustworthy (2 Peter 1.19-20) and useful (2 Timothy 3.16-17) something fresh and relevant to all people across centuries (Hebrews 4.12-13).

The question concerning inspiration with which all Christians have struggled is the question concerning how God inspired Scripture. More fundamentalist approaches maintain a plenary verbal approach which states that God dictated all Scripture, the authors serving as human instruments for God's words. Less fundamental approaches have argued for a more dynamic approach, stating that God's inspiration prompted the authors to write and then guided them to avoid making mistakes, thus what is written is what God desired through a human's own thoughts and vocabulary. In reality, we find evidence for both throughout the canon of Scripture. The Old Testament prophets regularly claimed that what they said was the "word of

the Lord.” Thus they often began their prophecies with “Thus says the Lord” (Obadiah 1.1; Zephaniah 1.1; Haggai 1.1-2; Malachi 1.1). We may see something of a similar idea with Moses (Exodus 7.1-2). However, we also find a clear dynamic between the human and divine in the Psalms and New Testament epistles, providing wonderful expressions of how God prompted people to write, but guided rather than dictated. In this vein, in one passage, Paul goes so far as to say, this is me, not dictation from God, and this is God not me (1 Corinthians 7.10-12). However, what he claims is from God is a quotation from Scripture (Malachi 2.14-16), indicating that Paul believed Scripture declared God’s words.

The Text

2 Timothy 3.16-17: *Hearing the voice of God*

The letter of 2 Timothy is one of a series of letters, written by Paul which we refer to as the Pastoral Epistles. These letters—1 and 2 Timothy and Titus—are words of encouragement and guidance to younger pastors whom Paul shepherded. In 2 Timothy, Paul is writing to encourage Timothy who appears to be scared and timid in the carrying out of his pastoral duties, most likely because of real or perceived persecution (1.6-8). Paul seeks to assure Timothy by painting a picture of the world that demonstrates that following Christ is not easy nor is the message of the gospel always well received (2 Timothy 1.15-3.9). Paul notes that even he has been persecuted and that everyone who follows Christ can be assured they will experience persecution (2 Timothy 3.10-13).

Since persecution cannot be avoided, Paul encourages Timothy to be bold and continue to live out his faith, a faith which he learned from two sources: other Christ followers and Scripture. More than likely, Paul is referring to himself and Timothy’s mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1.5). Paul’s reference to Scripture must refer to the Old Testament because the New Testament had not yet been written. However, Paul’s point is plain. Scripture points people to the person of Jesus; thus, Scripture is part of God’s redemptive movement. This is possible because all Scripture has been breathed into existence by God. Here Paul uses a word that appears nowhere else in Scripture. It has been translated as inspired but the word literally means “God breathing out.” Therefore, the idea of speaking is probably closer to the meaning.

Paul makes a bold claim. In Scripture, one can hear the very voice of God. If this is the case, then all Scripture is useful. It is not outdated or outmoded.

Rather, in Scripture one can hear God. While Paul might be implying that in some way people encounter God himself through Scripture, at the very least it means that Scripture teaches people about life and God because they hear what God has to say. Scripture can remind one of sin and error and then turn that person to the God-intended path of life (righteousness) so that they might understand and live in all things and ways as God desires.

Hebrews 4.12-13:

Encountering the presence of God

The book of Hebrews is a sermon penned for a Jewish-Christian congregation struggling with persecution. In their experience of this persecution, it seems that some, if not many, in the congregation are tempted to abandon their faith in Christ in order to return to the safety of the Jewish synagogue (Hebrews 3.12-14; 5.11-6.12; 10.39; 12.1-13; 13.14). Therefore, the author of Hebrews encourages them to remain strong in their faith, preaching a message based on Psalm 95 urging this congregation not to be like the people of Israel who turned away from the voice of God at Meribah.

In chapter 4, the author encourages the congregation to remember God’s words of promise in Genesis 2 and Psalm 95. He moves to conclude this portion of his sermon by stating that in the recorded promises of God, one finds not just encouragement but the God who spoke these words. He states that the recorded words of promise are not just words but are themselves living and active. On the surface, the point made is one that notes the relevance and applicability of the ancient words of God to a modern audience. However, a deeper meaning is implied that the words recorded are more than words. Somehow they are personified and therefore an encounter with something more is implied.

The personification of God’s word is not a common concept in Scripture. More often, God’s word is referred to as something which has effective power. When God speaks, things happen. God speaks and things are created (Genesis 1.3; Psalm 33.9; Isaiah 55.1). God speaks and people are judged (Amos 1.2; Psalm 51.6; Jeremiah 7.13). However, there is a thread of thought in John which links the spoken word of God with God himself (John 1.1-14). Thus, God’s word is effective because his word cannot be separated from his person. God’s word is an extension of his person. The author of Hebrews may be referring to this Johannine stream of thought here with his personification of the word of God.

Because the word—think Scripture!—is an extension of God himself, it can do what God does.

It can see what no one else can see, peering into spaces which seem indivisible. In the context, the author is noting that the very word of God can see what lies in the hearts of the congregants, but there is modern application here. When one reads the written word of God, he is reading something that is relevant and fresh, even though it may have been written millennia before. This is possible because somehow in the reading of Scripture, he is encountering God himself, who can see into the heart of the reader and speak concerning what is found there.

Real life with Blake:

Why do we read Scripture? It was written thousands of years ago to people who lived in a time nothing like our own. It was written without an eye to modern understandings of science or psychology. What could we possibly gain from reading such a thing? What use is Scripture? I have to admit that at times even I have asked these questions and am tempted to turn aside to something other than Scripture. But when I pick it up and begin to read, I find something new and fresh, something which speaks to me, to my situation and my condition. How is this possible? How is it possible that such an old collection of books and letters (66 in all) could have such an effect on me? Honestly, it isn't what I read. It is the one I find in the words of the books and letters making up what we call the Bible. You see, when I read Scripture I am hearing the very words of God, the words he desired to be spoken, to be written and recorded, but there is more. Somehow God and his word cannot be separated. For God to speak is for God to give of himself. So, when I pick up my Bible and begin to read I am opening myself to experiencing God himself, a God who made me and knows me, a God who knows who I am and where I am, a God who can speak what I need to hear.

Real life with you:

Why do we study Scripture? Why do we, Sunday after Sunday, open our Bibles and study them together? Why do we encourage you to use things like The Journey to read your Bibles throughout the week? Simply put, we study and we encourage you to study because we were meant to experience God. When we open the pages of Scripture we do just that. You see, in the pages of our Bibles we discover the very words of God, the words God desired to be spoken and recorded, but God is not separate from his word. For God to speak is for God to give of himself. That means when you and I open our Bibles we are opening our lives to experiencing not just what God spoke but God himself. As we open our lives we discover that his words speak to us, to our condition, to our questions, to our doubts and fears. We discover that God knows us and meets with us and we were made for this very thing, to experience God. This week, we encourage you to consider making regular Bible reading a part of your life rhythm. We strongly encourage you to use The Journey found on the back of your bulletin, opening your life to God to hear what he has to say about a single theme or topic that continues the topic covered on Sunday. However, you may use any guide which best suits you. The free app YouVersion has a number of reading plans which cover topics and guide you through the entirety of the Bible at varying speeds. Whatever plan you choose, choosing to read will open you to experiencing the God who made you and longs to be with you.



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