

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

January 17, 2016



Discussion Guide

Food Nation

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 state they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- Would you describe yourself as a foodie? Could 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.)

- Use the notes to explain the background of the Ten Commandments.
- Read Exodus 20.1-6 aloud. Pause. Read the text, slowly, once more.
- What kind of relationship does God desire with his people? Seek to find as many aspects of this relationship as possible in the text.
- What might it look like to embody the aspects of this relationship; that is, what would it look like to demonstrate these in our bodies?
- Do you think the average believer ponders how to live his relationship with God in such a bodily, physical manner? What might lead you to this conclusion?
- One of the deepest struggles we have in the embodying of our relationship with God takes the form of our relationship with food. In what ways, if any, might this be true?
- In what ways, if any, do you experience this in your own life? What effects does it have upon you?
- What might it look like to reorient our bodies

in such a way that the entirety of our person wholly related to God?

- What might it look like to encourage one another to engage in such a reorientation?
- Consider closing in prayer and with a discussion of how you might take steps to encourage one another on this journey.

Context and Background

Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments were spoken by God to the Israelite community as they gathered at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20.1-19) and are repeated in the book of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 5.6-21). Formally, the Ten Commandments are not commandments but ten “words” spoken by God (Exodus 20.1). It is only later in Scripture that they are referred to as “commandments” (Exodus 34.28; Deuteronomy 4.13; 10.4). The understanding of these as “words” or sayings from the Lord rather than commandments is important if we are to comprehend their significance.

The ten words of God stand at the beginning of what unfolds as the Law, given by God to the Israelites. Having lived as slaves for over 400 years, the Israelites had no understanding of what it was to live in relationship with God. Therefore, after rescuing them from the Egyptians, God led them to Mount Sinai, where he gave them the Law through Moses as a covenantal guide governing the human-divine relationship. These words which begin this Law function somewhat differently than the rest of the Law and are important for several reasons. These words are spoken by God directly to the Israelites as a means of illustrating the character of the God who had rescued them; that is to say, in these words, God issues statements based upon his own character (Exodus 20.2). At the same time, the guidelines he provides function in such a way that they sum up all of the Law which follows. According to Jesus, the Law could be summarized into two parts, the love of God and the love of one’s neighbor (Matthew 22.34-40; Deuteronomy 6.5; Leviticus 19.18). Interestingly, the first four words focus on the nature of one’s relationship with God while the final six focus upon one’s relationship with her fellow person. In a modern context, these ten words function something like our Constitution. The Constitution is Law in the most basic and general sense, summing up the general boundaries for all other laws. At the same time, the Constitution reveals the nature of the fabric of the nation it outlines. Because these words reveal and guide, they hold a preeminent place in the Law and for the life of Christ followers today. In his mountaintop sermon, Jesus regularly turns back to these ten words as foundation stones revealing the nature of God, the life his people

are to live, and the outline of the human-divine relationship (Matthew 5-7). Those who meditate and apply these words will find much benefit for their journey of faith.

The Text

Exodus 20.1-6: *Who's your God?*

God spoke the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel as they gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exodus 20.1, 18-19). These statements which will reveal his character and outline the nature of the human-divine relationship in the broadest of strokes stand as an introduction to a larger body of Law which was meant to teach the Israelites how to live as God's people. These words begin with an assertion of the relationship between God and the Israelites. God claims to be the Lord God of the Israelites, noting that he has this position because of his rescue of the Israelites from slavery. This statement outlines the responsibilities of God to the Israelites. He has absolute power and authority over the Israelites, but in his relationship with them uses his power to care for them. This care has been freely given, but God asks for a response, a life lived on his terms.

The terms of the life God outlines begin with the Israelites relating to God exclusively as their God. There has been much debate over the language of this first commandment/word. Some have argued that the language denies other gods while others argue God is simply saying he is above other gods. It may be the language is deliberately unclear. The Israelites have just come out of an environment which believed in a plurality of gods. At the same time, God will later note that these other gods are false (Isaiah 44). However, the experience of the Israelites has not prepared them to accept that there is but one God. Therefore, the language may function as something of a bridge. We might amplify the meaning in the following way: "You are used to many gods, but I want you to be a people who have only one God, me." This kind of statement leads to an exclusive human-divine relationship and builds a foundation for deeper teaching. However, the point is clear. God desires exclusive loyalty.

The second commandment outlines a prohibition of idolatry. It is easy to understand the importance of this command in light of the centuries of Egyptian captivity, a land whose religion utilized many idols. The simple prohibition was not to create an image of God which could be worshiped. In some ways, the prohibition teaches something about the nature of God. He is transcendent, not to be confused with the created order, a strong temptation with which humanity has always struggled. In other ways, this commandment builds upon the first commandment urging an exclusive

human-divine relationship. It is important to note the length of this commandment. It is the second longest of the commandments, thus highly emphasized. This may be because of the strong pull to deny the transcendence of God by worshipping the created order, an action which may have its roots in a desire to control God. Because this commandment is so important, it contains a warning. Those who confuse God with the created order will find that this choice will have lasting ramifications upon their family. In modern language, a cycle of destructive behavior will be created. Conversely, if one honors and responds appropriately to this transcendent God, it will create positive cycles of behavior which will carry forward for generations.

Matthew 6.24-26; 33: *Just one God*

In his mountaintop sermon, Jesus regularly echoes the ten words of God from Exodus 20. In verses 24-34, he refers back to the first two commandments. Jesus notes that it is impossible to serve two masters. This is a clear reference to the first commandment concerning the exclusivity of the human-divine relationship. However, the reasoning behind this commandment is revealed by Jesus. Those who have more than one master find themselves trying to satisfy competing requirements and demands which is impossible. The only way to resolve these competing demands is to honor one (love) and to disobey (hate) the other. The bottom line was one could not serve God and mammon, a reference to worldly goods which make up one's wealth.

It is easy for the modern reader to interpret mammon as money because modern wealth is often calculated in financial terms. However, this was not the case in the ancient world. In the ancient world, wealth consisted of all the worldly goods which sustained life: money, land, clothing, food, cattle, etc. The struggle not to devote oneself to these items upon which their life depended was strong. Therefore, Jesus outlined the nature of this struggle and how to overcome it.

According to Jesus, the pull to serve things physical works itself out in the form of anxiety. The modern interpreter might take this to be worry or an overexcited emotional investment or concern with something. However, anxiety is much deeper than worry. Anxiety is an all-consuming emotion which focuses one's attention upon a single thing, at times to the point of obsession. With anxiety, all other realities are shut out so that one's life is completely engrossed with a myopic vision of something. While we might not equate this with worship or service because of the negative connotations, the outcomes of anxiety and worship are the same though the experience of such might differ. Worship includes a single focus upon God. Jesus may be outlining the disastrous outcomes of confusing the true object of worship, substituting the created order for God, the second commandment.

The confusion experienced with the true object of worship is exacerbated by the very real physical need of the worshiper. He needs food, clothing, shelter, and the like. He cannot live without it. Therefore, he begins to focus upon it, pursue it, allowing it to guide his actions and thoughts which results in anxiety because these items cannot provide the life he desires. Life is more than these items. Avoiding such confusion requires a reorientation of one's understanding of life. First, one must understand his own worth and value in God's sight and his willingness to provide. This is nothing short of an echo of God's words in Exodus 20.2. God is the one who takes responsibility for his people and will use his power and authority to care for them. With this in mind, the believer is then to seek first the kingdom of God; that is, the absolute reign of God over their physical lives. This is an echo of the first commandment, a recognition of the exclusive human-divine relationship. When this is honored then all things are cared for and provided. Thus, the physical things which are needed are gained but they retain their proper place within the created order.

Real life with Blake:

On the journey of faith, our bodies matter. When we respond to the gospel, God lays claim to our bodies and not just our souls. This means our bodies must demonstrate his reign, an exclusive, honoring relationship between our bodies and God. However, our bodies often demonstrate a less-than-exclusive relationship. This can take a number of forms, but the one with which I struggle the most is my relationship with food. I need food. I like food. Food is a wonderful and glorious part of the created order, but it easily becomes much more to me. More often than I care to admit, I confuse the physical with the eternal and food becomes my God. That sounds like a strong statement, but I know it is true. I know it is true because of the relationship I have with food, a relationship which resembles how I am to be relating to God. God is the one who provides and cares for me, the one who rescues me. However, my "go-to" rescue at the end of a really hard day is something sweet, not God. God is the one who is to set the agenda for my life, guiding my actions. However, much of my life is built around food. For instance, a large reason why I run and run and run is so that I might eat and eat and eat. Take food away, no, take my nightly dessert away and my body freaks out and I march around the house like a caged animal able to think about nothing but my precious dessert. These are all the marks of a god called Food. What I find so difficult is the reality of my need for food, but somehow my need has become my God. I am in the midst of sorting this out which is nothing short of

reasserting God's kingdom reign in my body. On this journey, I am finding that simply denying myself of food, becoming a modern ascetic, is not the answer. Food is a glorious gift of God meant to be enjoyed, just not worshipped. What is the answer is acknowledging that I need God more than I need food. For me, this takes the form of talking to my cravings, particularly my dessert cravings. I say to them, "God is my portion and my cup." I say it over and over and over again, speaking truth to the temptation within me. In time, it passes to pick a more opportune time, like the next meal. But, I have moved, moved one step further into the kingdom, allowing God to reign over my body.

Real life with you:

On the journey of faith, our bodies matter. God desires to reign over us, all of us. That includes our bodies. Very often, things of the physical world have a stronger claim to our bodies than God. The most common and overlooked god in our American culture is food. Simply put, we worship food. We create temples for food. We call them restaurants. We create worship liturgies for food. We call them culinary shows. We grow anxious should we feel the slightest hunger pain and rush to our savior, food! In the end, the effects are disastrous. Our bodies are riddled with disease, our minds with shame, and the effect on our souls is slow turning away from God to the physical object of our desire in ways that can carry on for generations. But, it does not have to be this way. It was not meant to be this way. We don't have to worship food. To do this, we must remember that we have a God who loves us and promises to provide for us, even our food. When our false god, food, calls to us, we must speak truth to it, a truth which turns us back to our true God. This process begins by noticing. This week, spend some time noticing how important food is to you and what happens if you don't get the food or amount of food you want. Should these cause anxiety in you or if you notice you are turning to food as a rescue you have the markings of a food god. Combat that god by speaking truth, truth like Psalm 16.5. Speak this truth over and over again, until you believe it, until you can embody it. Then and only then can we truly enjoy the great wonderful gift that is food.



SENIOR
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SHIPP