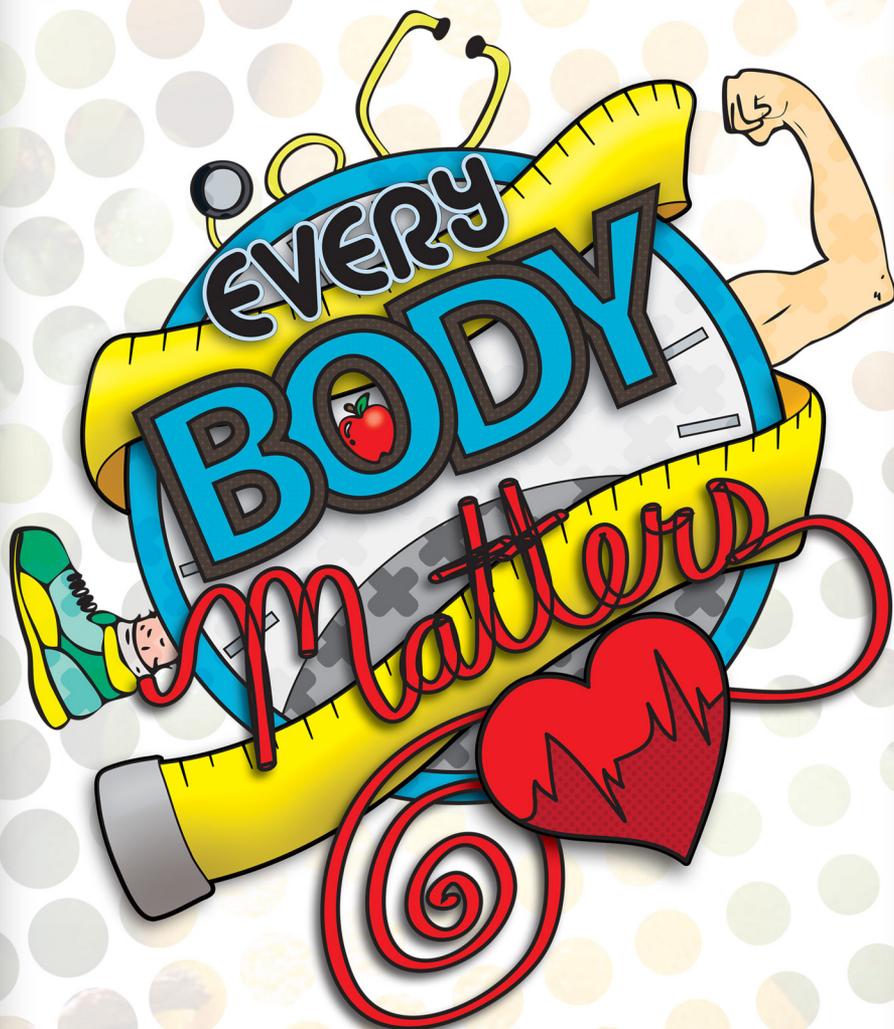


GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

January 31, 2016



Discussion Guide

My dear friend Morty

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

- Is it easy for you to change? Can 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 discipleship.
- Read Ephesians 4.17-5.2 aloud. Read the text once more seeking to hear it as loving instruction given to people seeking to respond authentically to the gospel.
- According to Paul, responding to the gospel leads to a process of change. What is involved in this process? Seek to discover as many elements in the text as possible.
- Consider for a moment how people typically seek to change. What might be some of the important aspects of their approach? In what ways are these aspects similar or dissimilar to the process Paul describes?
- Consider taking time as a group to ponder what “one thing” God might be extending an invitation to address in your individual lives. You might take 15 minutes to do this alone and then come back together. Share what this one thing is and why it might be important.

- What might it look like to address this one thing in the manner Paul describes?
- Would you be willing to begin to practice putting off old ways and putting on the life of Christ? If so, what role might this group play in that process?
- What might it look like to make this journey of change part of your regular time together as a group?
- Consider closing with prayer, offering yourselves completely to God, asking for the grace to change.

Context and Background

Disciple

The process of discipleship was central to life in the ancient world, the primary means by which someone might be educated within the fields of medicine, philosophy, and the trades. To be a disciple was to become an apprentice, to bind oneself to another in order to learn practical and theoretical knowledge. This process of binding required both a teacher and an interested pupil. Most often, disciples/apprentices were chosen by a teacher from a number of interested persons, a choosing typically based on potential within the pupil. Once chosen, a disciple would literally follow his teacher, observing and learning so that he might become like his teacher in every respect.

Jesus' invitation to discipleship differed little from the ancient understanding of discipleship. Jesus selected people to follow him so that they might become like him (Mark 1.16-20; 2.13; 3.13-19), though, he did not necessarily select men who displayed great potential (Acts 4.13). Jesus clearly took on the role of teacher and master in this apprenticing relationship (Matthew 10.24-25; Mark 12.18-40; 9.5; 11.21; Luke 12.13-14; 14.26-27; John 1.38; 4.31; 11.16), and he expected that his disciples to take up his life (John 14.15) including his experience of suffering (Matthew 5.11-12; Luke 9.23-27). However, Jesus promised that those who were willing to apprentice themselves to him would be rewarded (Luke 14.12-14; 18.29-30).

Today, Jesus still invites people to apprentice themselves to him, extending his invitation through the Holy Spirit (John 6.44; 15.19; Ephesians 1.11; 4.1) and the preaching of the gospel (Ephesians 4.20-21). Those who accept his invitation are expected to listen to the words of Jesus and watch how he lives so that they might become like him (John 14.15-21,

25-26; 15.26-27; 16.12-15; 1 John 2.6). Those who act in this way are known to be disciples of Jesus and will receive an eternal reward (Luke 9.23-27; Matthew 25.31-46).

The Text

Luke 9.23-27: *The call of discipleship*

The present text comes within a context of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5,000 (Luke 9.10-17) and Peter's identification of Jesus as the messiah (Luke 9.18-20). Having witnessed Jesus' power and acknowledging his identity demands something of a response from the men who are following Jesus. Jesus notes that the response he desires is one of discipleship, and he outlines what this response entails.

First, those who respond must do so willingly. They must want to be a disciple. Any first-century person would have understood the gravity of this decision. To choose to be a disciple was to bind oneself, literally, to another person for the purpose of taking up their way of life. Simply put, to choose to become a disciple was to choose to undergo a radical change in one's manner of thinking and living. In many ways, the decision to become a disciple involves the act of repentance (Mark 1.14-15), the conscious decision to change the direction of one's life.

Changing the trajectory of one's life is not a simple matter. Jesus states that such a response requires much of a person. It requires the willingness to deny oneself; that is, to deny the right to self-direction. To deny oneself is to say to Jesus, "You must direct me; I will not and cannot direct myself."

As one undergoes the direction of Jesus, it becomes readily apparent that patterns and behaviors exist which do not align with Jesus' guidance. Therefore, one must make a daily response of picking up a cross. The modern reader often interprets this as a burden to be carried, but the ancient reader would have only heard this statement in terms of death. Criminals condemned to die carried crosses. Thus, Jesus speaks metaphorically of a willingness to intentionally "kill" old ways of being which do not align with Jesus' guidance, something which required constant and daily vigilance.

Having killed old ways of being does not yet make one a disciple of Jesus. Turning from one way of being must be met with the turning to a new way of being. Jesus refers to this as following him. This is the ancient language of discipleship, and it entails the binding of oneself to Jesus as an apprentice for the

sole purpose of observing his life in order to become like him in every respect.

According to Jesus, this response of discipleship is the only appropriate response he desires of those who recognize him. However, it is not an easy response, for it cuts against our bent to self-direction and earthly gain. However, Jesus notes that it is only in the surrender of these that one can truly find life. Further, he states that only those who make this all-encompassing response of discipleship will be acknowledged and rewarded by him at his return.

Ephesians 4.20-5.1: *The experience of discipleship*

Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus is a wonderful explanation of the scope of God's redemptive work in the person of Jesus and its practical outworkings for the recipients of this work. According to Paul, those who respond to the gospel experience a radical transformation, their lives adjusting to the nature and scope of God's redemptive calling (Ephesians 4.1). This transformation works out in how God's people live together (Ephesians 4.2-16) and how they live individually in the world (Ephesians 4.17-6.18). The essence of the transformation experienced on the individual level involves a turning away from a life based upon the standards of culture and turning to a life based upon the person of Jesus (Ephesians 4.17-21).

Paul's language here is reminiscent of Jesus' invitation to repentance and discipleship, a turning away from one life and a turning to another. However, Paul displays his pastoral heart for the Ephesians by elaborating on the practical steps involved in such a response. Paul notes that those who respond to the gospel first make an effort to put off old ways of being because they understand these do not lead to life. This is an external action which is taken by the disciple. Second, the disciple puts on new ways of being based upon the person of God, probably inferring the likeness of God seen in Jesus. Once again, this is an external action taken by the disciple. However, Paul also notes that these external actions rely upon an internal action of the Holy Spirit, the renewing of one's mind or inner person. Thus, the external actions taken by the disciple are a partnering with the internal working of God (Philippians 2.12-13). While the disciple who makes this response experiences a bodily exchange of one behavior for another Christ-centered behavior: lies for truth, stealing for work, unwholesome speech for uplifting speech, anger for compassion and forgiveness), this exchange is empowered and driven by the indwelling Spirit of God.

Real life with Blake:

On the journey of faith, our bodies matter, our On the journey of faith, our bodies matter. God gave me my body and he has plans for it, Kingdom plans. If I am truly responding to the gospel, I am actively seeking to align myself bodily with those plans. Sounds weird. It certainly wasn't what I was taught growing up in the Church. Yet, it is hard to miss that Jesus' description to discipleship clearly involves this kind of response (Luke 9.23-27). However, when I set out to align myself, I discover that it isn't as easy as it sounds. Many of my bodily responses are deeply rooted and firmly entrenched. Simply put, they don't want to come out, and the responses with which I am seeking to replace them feel anything but natural. What I am learning is that this response to the gospel requires ongoing effort on my part in the form of spiritual disciplines. The disciplines are little more than means of putting off old ways and picking up new ways of being. Disciplines which involve putting off are called disciplines of abstinence or mortification. Disciplines which involve putting on are called disciplines of engagement. Both are necessary if we are to experience real change. In my life, this can take different forms, but let's talk about food since we have already broached that subject. I readily admit that I struggle with Christ-like approach to food. In order to address this, I don't sit down to a large meal and try to "get it right." That is like trying to win the Super Bowl without ever practicing. No one would ever dream of trying to win the "big game" without first practicing. The same is true for the spiritual life.

In order to win (experience lasting transformation), I practice a daily/weekly rhythm of mortification and engagement which prepares me to sit down at that big meal and respond like Jesus. I intentionally say "No" to some things, like nightly dessert, and "Yes" to other things, like eating a healthy and delicious meal. The more I practice this the more and more I become accustomed to living in a way that represents Jesus rather than self. Sound easy? It isn't. I despise not having my way. Left to myself, I won't do it. I won't even try. But, I am not by myself. The work I do on the outside is simply a mirror of the work God is doing on the inside. Inside he is renewing me, transforming me. This work is the very reason I even recognize my issue with food and it is the very source of strength by which I attack it bodily, my reservoir of grace! By this grace, I daily and weekly take up new rhythms as I put down old ones as directed by God and slowly and surely I look more and more like the person I was meant to be.

Real life with you:

On the journey of faith, our bodies matter, our response to the gospel involving the response of aligning our bodies with the Kingdom reign and intentions of God. However, aligning our bodies is not a simple, one-and-done event. The aligning of our bodies involves daily, active engagement to submit to Jesus' leading by putting off old ways of being and taking up new ways modeled on his life. This is more difficult that it sounds, but we are freed to live in new ways by the grace of the cross and empowered to change by the grace of God's indwelling Spirit. Even with this, change comes with daily practice. This practice takes the form of something called spiritual discipline, the intentional practice of self-control! Aligning our bodies requires the disciplines of abstinence (setting down) and engagement (taking up). If we wish to control our tongue, we might practice a daily discipline of silence (putting off words) and blessing (using our words positively). We don't wait until a big fight with our spouse to try this. We pursue these practices in the easy moments of our every day lives so that when the fight comes, we are ready because we have already taken up the life of Christ with respect to our tongues. We can't work on everything in our lives that needs change all at once. That is too much for us, though much of what needs to be changed comes from a small set of fundamental behaviors which can be identified and addressed over time. This week, we encourage you to begin your own process of change by asking God to reveal one thing which needs to be addressed in your life. It could be the way you speak, the way you eat, the way you recreate, or anything else. Don't worry about it seeming small. Nothing is small in the Kingdom. God may be touching on the tip of something much larger which he will eventually reveal. Once God has led you to that one thing, consider simple practices of abstinence and engagement which daily lead you to move to a Christ-centered life with regard to this one thing. Involve community as a means of grace and encouragement and pray a simple prayer of acceptance to God's leading every day. Over time, you will notice that you have changed. You look more like Christ!



SENIOR
PASTOR
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