

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

March 13, 2016



THE STORY OF GOD'S GLORY

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Discussion Guide

Christ

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

- How might you define a “blessed” life? Could you explain?

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.)

- Using the notes, explain the New Testament concept of adoption.
- Read Ephesians 1.3-14 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more allowing the words to be God’s words to you.
- Paul claims that we have received every blessing possible in the person of Jesus. As you consider the text, in what ways are we blessed? Seek to find as many ways as possible in the text.
- What is the purpose of these blessings?
- In what ways, if any, does Paul’s description of the nature and purpose of God’s blessing differ from your own understanding? Could you explain?
- In your understanding, how might God’s intentions to bless us make the gospel a message of good news?
- What kind of response, if any, does this good news call for? What, if anything, keeps you from making this response?
- Consider closing by discussing what it might look like to respond to God’s

blessing and how to encourage one another in making this response.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

ADOPTION

In the ancient world, the purpose of adoption was not unlike the modern purpose with differences existing only in the legal process. With respect to Scripture, one might identify three types of adoption: Jewish, Greek, and Roman. Strictly speaking, the Jews did not have a legal process for adoption. The closest legal process for moving a person from one family to another was that of levirate marriage. In this process, a man married the wife of a brother who had died childless. The purpose was to raise up a son in the name of his deceased brother (Deuteronomy 25.5-6; Ruth 4.5). In this practice, the brother raises the “child” of the deceased, but it is not legally his child, thus the full extent of adoption is not present.

The Greeks had a more formal process of adoption. In this practice, a male citizen could adopt another male citizen as his son. The purpose of this adoption was to pass on the legal and religious privileges possessed by the adoptee. The reasons for such an adoption were typically rooted in the absence of a suitable male heir to which to hand down these privileges.

The Romans had what might be considered the fullest practice of adoption. According to Roman law, the father of a family was the *patria potesta* or absolute possessor and ruler of his family. This role was to be passed to the eldest son at the death of the father. However, in the absence of a male heir, the father could adopt a son. This process involved two steps. First, the natural father of the adoptee sold his son as a slave to the adoptive father three times. This was possible because the adoptive father purchased the son and then released him the first two times back to his natural father as his son and not a slave. With the third purchase the adoptee ceased to be the son of his natural father and the father lost all parental rights. The adopter was now the sole possessor (*patria potesta*) of the adoptee. As one with absolute power, he then declared the adoptee to be his full son thus granting him full rights and privileges, along with the responsibilities, of a naturally born son.

The New Testament authors, particularly Paul,

make regular use of adoption imagery (Hebrews 12.7; 1 John 3.1). More than likely the imagery intended is based upon the Roman process as the Jews didn't have an actual legal process and the Greeks had been conquered by Rome over a century before. Thus, the New Testament concept of adoption by God involves the transfer of people from one household to another, from one absolute ruler (Satan, Ephesians 2.2) to another absolute ruler (God, Ephesians 1.3) under the condition of a price paid (Ephesians 1.7). This price is the life of Christ (Ephesians 1.5, 7). With this purchase price paid, we become full sons and daughters of God (Romans 8.14-16). We belong fully to him and are marked as such (Ephesians 1.13), but we also stand in line to receive the familial inheritance (Ephesians 1.14; Romans 8.17; Hebrews 12.10).

THE TEXT

EPHESIANS 1.3-14: *BLESSED, NOT CURSED*

Paul's letter to the Church in Ephesus is his most general letter, a letter outlining the redemptive work of God in Christ and the implications of that work for those who have chosen to follow Christ in faith. One might say that Ephesians is Paul's clearest statement of the gospel which was central to his ministry (Romans 1.16). According to Paul, the gospel is about God, and this is good news. The gospel begins with a call to praise God. He is the central focus. However, God at the center is good news because this God at the center has blessed people in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in the person of Jesus. The mention of blessing speaks to the goodness God intends for people, a goodness which is not measured in material means but in God-sphere terms; that is, people when centered around God experience a blessed existence. This blessed existence involves God giving himself to people fully in the person of Jesus thereby giving people everything which is real and matters. This single statement becomes the theme for the entire letter, the crux of the gospel. The gospel is about God at the center, people around him worshiping, experiencing every blessing because God shares himself fully with them in an intimate and personal way. This is the essential nature of life, life as God has

meant it to be lived. People are blessed.

This blessing is experienced in real ways. God's blessing was first extended to people when he decided before creation itself to have people experience his life of holiness. The wonder of this statement is hard to overstate, for it involves insight into the mind of God before the creation of time and space. According to Paul, God intended to create people and intended to share himself with them thus intending them to experience a life of absolute goodness and blessing.

The absence of the experience of this blessed life needs no statement. Therefore, Paul moves to a second action of God to extend blessing to people. In order to understand what Paul says, one must assume people's rebellion and the experience of divine wrath (Romans 1.18-32). In light of this, God responds in love or devotion. This is possible because God is love (1 John 4) and not wrath. He remains devoted to his creation and decides to orient people around himself once more through the person of Jesus. Paul uses adoption language here to address the bringing back of people into an intimate relationship with God and to allude to the necessity of a price to be paid for this return to transpire. While this action pleases God, it does so because the result is that people will be back once more, centered around him in worship, giving praise to his essential character of glory demonstrated in his gracious power given through Jesus.

People can be oriented around God once more because a ransom price has been paid for them in Christ's blood. Paul alludes to the cross but does so in terms of financial transaction. In this, Paul carries forward the adoption imagery. For people to become God's once more, a price must be paid. The price paid is the life of Christ because this is the price owed by people, the consequence of their rebellion (Romans 6.23). In choosing to orient their lives around themselves, people bound themselves to Sin, the status of being out of place which hurtled them to the experience of death. God "paid" Sin to have people back by giving Jesus to die in the place of people. This substitutionary payment in-kind is a demonstration of the powerful favor (grace) of God given freely to people, enabling them to once more orient their lives around God.

According to Paul, God's purpose in paying this price to bring people back was only just being understood, a mystery being revealed. More than likely, Paul intends here to refer to Jesus as the revelation of God and his purposes. This purpose was to bring all of creation back to himself under the reign of Christ. Here Paul refers to the creative intentions of God, all of creation relating to him through the person of Jesus, experiencing him and his blessing (Ephesians 1.3). This purpose involves people and the physical creation, returning to worship God's glory. This is the message of truth, the gospel as revealed through the person of Jesus. However, this is the not full extent of the gospel. The gospel also reveals that God has given himself, in the present, to people with the giving of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this giving is two-fold: to mark people as his own (seal) and to give a partial, promissory taste of the blessed life in the present, a life oriented around God worshipping, praising his glory.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

What is wrong with the world? I am. I am out of place. My fundamental nature is to live a self-determined life apart from God and this life puts me and the world around me out of sorts. But, there is hope. God wants us back. God has always intended that we live a blessed life, a life experiencing everything that matters and is real. While this blessed life might seem so far away, it isn't. God so intends that we live a blessed life that in Jesus he has made it possible to come back, to orient our lives around him once more in worship. In Jesus he has freed us from the consequences of our rebellion and made it possible to experience him in his fullness, in the present, and not just the future. The question isn't whether the blessed life is possible but whether I will choose it. Will I turn and allow myself once more to be oriented around God (Mark 1.14-15)? It is possible, but will I allow it? I want to shout a resounding "Yes" but I am not sure I would mean it, not fully that is. But, every time I surrender, every time I say, "Not my will but yours," every time I put off my way and put on God's way I whisper "Yes." The more I surrender the easier it is to surrender more. Slowly and surely, an ever-

increasing part of me is orienting around God, worshiping him. As this happens, I am learning more and more that life, real life, the blessed life is not in what I have or what people think of me. It isn't in my circumstances or the presence of pleasure and ease. Real life, all that is real and matters is found in God.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

What is wrong with the world? We are. We have gone rogue, refusing our place as worshipers of God, and it is killing us. Life is cursed, full of pain and sorrow, brokenness and strife. It was never meant to be this way. We were meant to live blessed lives, experiencing what matters and is real. The good news of the gospel is that this blessed life is still available. We can be and still are blessed. We may have gone rogue, but God wants us back. He has made a way through Jesus. The question is not whether a blessed life is possible but whether we will choose it because this life involves a life centered around God and not ourselves (Mark 1.14-15). Will we choose this life? This week, consider pondering saying "Yes" to God, saying "Yes" to a life oriented around him. Consider meditating upon Mark 1.14-15 allowing Jesus to speak this good news to you. Consider what feelings Jesus' words evoke in you. Hold these before God and respond to him. Allow him to invite you back to himself.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

 twitter.com/blake_shipp

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