



the FORGOTTEN GOD

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

April 17, 2016

Discussion Guide

We Endure (by the Spirit)

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

- Does it bother you that sometimes bad things happen to good people? 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.)

- Using the notes, discuss the background and context of suffering.

- Read Romans 8.14-17 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more, allowing God to speak these words to you.
- In the text, Paul affirms that those who seek to live the life of Christ by the Spirit share in all aspects of the life of Christ. What are these aspects? Do any of these surprise you? Could you explain?
- Read Romans 8.18-31 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more, allowing God to address you personally through these words.
- Taking up the life of Christ involves the experience of suffering. According to Paul, what makes the experience of suffering so difficult for followers of Christ, and what hope do we have in this experience?
- Why is the experience of suffering so difficult for people? Is this experience different from that of the suffering of God's people? Could you elaborate?
- How do you typically respond to the experience of suffering? Why might you respond in this way?
- In light of the hope we have in suffering as God's people, how might you respond

differently? What might it take to respond in this way?

- Consider closing by taking time to share areas of suffering. Listen silently, resisting the urge to “fix” people or situations. Consider lifting up each of these areas in prayer, affirming the presence of the Holy Spirit and God’s unwavering desire to transform you into the likeness of Christ.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

SUFFERING / PAIN

Throughout Scripture suffering (the experience of pain) is described as the physical manifestation of ill-being or emotional distress brought about by the experiences of the one who is suffering. The authors of Scripture use a number of terms to describe this state, the meaning of each term overlapping the meaning of the other terms. Therefore, any understanding of suffering / pain comes not through the words used but through the circumstances which give rise to the use of these words.

The experiences which can bring about suffering are numerous. Suffering can be the experience of God’s judgment of sin (Job 4.7-9), though this judgment is corrective rather than punitive. The purpose is to turn the individual (Jonah) or nation back to God (Zechariah 12). This type of suffering for wrong-doing can also be brought about through human instruments and institutions, though, in this capacity the ones addressing wrong-doing are serving as agents of God (Romans 13.3-4; 1 Peter 4.15). This type of suffering fits well with humanity’s innate sense of justice and fair play. However, there is another form of suffering which perplexes people, the suffering of the righteous.

That the righteous might suffer or experience pain grates against any sense of fairness. However, Scripture reveals that this form of suffering has purpose within the sovereignty of God. Righteous people may suffer as those chastised by God (Psalm 94.12-13; Hebrews 12.6), a form of parental discipline which leads the righteous into a deeper righteousness. God might use suffering as an instrument to humble

his people (2 Corinthians 12.7) or to provide an opportunity to minister to others who are suffering (2 Corinthians 1.3-4). While God can and does allow the righteous to suffer for these reasons, the New Testament consistently indicates that the primary purpose of the suffering of God’s people involves their sanctification. The experience of suffering can refine one’s faith (1 Peter 1.6-7), teach perseverance (James 1.3-4; Romans 5.3-4), and lead one to understand the depth of God’s sovereignty (Job 42.2-4). Perhaps the greatest sanctifying purpose of suffering is to invite the believer into the imitation of the life of Christ (1 Peter 4.1-2). Christ himself suffered as a path to exaltation (Philippians 2.5-11). It is this same path of suffering to exaltation which Jesus’ followers are called to travel (1 Peter 3.17-22; Romans 6.4; 8.17; Philippians 3.10-11). That Jesus experienced suffering implies that his followers too must suffer if they are to be like him. While one cannot fully understand the depth of God’s reasoning behind this path to glory, one can be assured that within the experience of suffering, God is for them, working out his plan, so that in all things his people might look more and more like Christ (Romans 8.28-31).

THE TEXT

ROMANS 8.14-31: *SUFFERING AS THE PATH TO GLORY*

In Romans 8.1-13, Paul outlines how one might live a God-pleasing life apart from the Law of Moses. A follower of Christ might live a God-pleasing life by taking up the life of Christ by the Holy Spirit. In the following verses, Paul outlines how the Spirit is involved in sustaining the believer through the experience of suffering which is a necessary aspect of any life which resembles the life of Christ.

Paul begins this discussion by affirming that those who live their lives empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit are God’s children. To live by the Spirit frees one from the fear of a master-slave relationship and moves one to the intimate relationship of Father and child. This relationship of parent and child is of the same substance as Jesus’ relationship with the Father. As Jesus cried out “Abba, Father,” so too, might his followers cry

out to God (Mark 14.36). In other words, to take up the life of Jesus by the Spirit leads one to into the same relationship Jesus has with the Father. The Spirit not only moves one into this relationship of family with God, but he affirms the reality of this relationship by making it possible for the believer to recognize they are intimately connected with God. Because one is family with God, they are by default an heir, one who stands to receive a portion of what belongs to the family. Because those who take up the life of Christ have the same relationship with God as Jesus, they are on equal footing with him as heirs. This means that the glory given to Christ by the Father stands to be given to those who are his co-heirs. However, to be a co-heir with Christ involves taking up the life of Christ and this life of Christ involves suffering. Here Paul turns to an oft-overlooked aspect of the imitation of the life of Christ. Certainly, the trajectory of living Christ's life leads one to the experience of God's glory which is the life for which people were created. However, this trajectory of Christ's life tracks straight through the passion and suffering of Christ. In other words, to be like Christ involves suffering and not just glory because Christ experienced them both. The New Testament is clear and consistent in this teaching. To imitate the life of Jesus involves the experience of suffering. Jesus himself made this point (Matthew 10.21-25, 38-39; 1 Peter 3.17-22; Philippians 3.10-11; Acts 5.41).

However, the experience of suffering is difficult for those who follow Christ, particularly in light of their understanding of the gospel which is moving things to the experience of God's glory. Followers of Christ find themselves in a position of tension in which they experience suffering like Christ but know that one day they will experience glory like Christ. This knowledge grates against experience creating frustration. Therefore, Paul encourages the Romans to compare their present experience of suffering with the future experience of glory as a means of finding strength to wait for the future experience of glory. He notes that all of creation is waiting,

not just those who follow Christ. Creation itself is waiting for God's children to come into the life they were meant to live. Until that point, creation itself is subjected to frustration, not experiencing what it was meant to experience, a life which can only be experienced when God's people are in their rightful place. Until that point, creation groans and suffers like a writhing animal, waiting for what will come.

In the same way, followers of Christ wait, and such waiting is difficult. Those who follow Christ have tasted what is to come because they have been given the Spirit, but in countless ways their lives overlap the broken world Christ came to redeem. They experience both in their bodies which creates a longing for what is not yet possessed. Paul refers to this longing as hope and claims this is the essence of one's response to the gospel. People respond to the gospel because it provides hope that God will move things to glory. However, Paul provides a pertinent corrective. Hope is something that is not yet realized. Therefore to respond to a message of hope leads one into a position of waiting for what they do not yet have, glory. But, one can wait patiently knowing that as Christ suffered, God moved him to glory and that the Father would do the same with them.

Yet, the experience of suffering is often too much for the believer. Therefore, the Holy Spirit helps in the experience of suffering. In the midst of suffering, the believer is often helpless, not even knowing how to pray. In these moments, the Spirit prays to the Father for the believer. It is highly likely that the echo of "groans" indicates that our groaning (verse 23) is actually the Spirit praying (verse 26), or that the Spirit turns out groans into prayers. These prayers are understood by God because the Spirit desires for us the same thing as the Father. The Father only desires the good of his people. This good is not "good" as we might define it: comfort, ease, and safety. The good desired by the Father is the formation of the life of Christ in his people (which includes suffering!) so he might have many children who look like Christ. He has decided that this is what he wishes to do and has moved to bring this about from beginning to end: calling, justifying,

glorifying. Each of these are in the past tense indicating God has decided to accomplish them, and each are actions which involve the Holy Spirit. Thus, the believer can endure suffering because they know God is ultimately for them, even in the experience of suffering because even in this the Father is moving to make them like Christ.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

Why does life hurt? This question is regularly on my mind. It plagues me because I don't always seem to have a good answer. I understand why life hurts when I make a mistake. My own sense of justice can navigate the reality that my actions have somehow brought about a consequence which I find less than pleasant. I may not like it, but I can understand it. What I can't understand is why life hurts when I have done nothing wrong. Why did that person slander me? I have only loved them. Why did that happen to me? I was minding my own business. Why did she say that to me? I just asked a question. Every day, in one way or another, life hurts and often for no reason other than it just happened. Inside I say that it isn't fair. I pout and long for a vindication which I know will probably not come, and I wonder why. Why can't life be fair? Why can't life be easy? Why can't Jesus do something about it? I follow him. Doesn't he care?

I ask these questions and more on a regular basis but I am coming to understand that they are all based on a false understanding of the world. Every one of these questions is rooted in a view that the world should be fair, at least for me as a follower of Jesus. Well. . .it isn't. The world is broken, even for me, a follower of Jesus. Because the world isn't fair, bad things happen when I have done nothing to deserve them. That this happens indicates that God is not finished with his work of redemption, and that they happen to me indicates that I am taking up the life of Christ. I know. The first one makes sense. The last one. . .not so much. The reality is Jesus suffered. People hurt him for nothing he did. The world crushed him and he didn't deserve it. But, this was not the end. God rewarded Jesus' faithfulness in the face of suffering and exalted him. Sounds great for

Jesus, but the same is true for me. If I am going to be like Jesus, I must suffer. I am not above his experience. He navigated this world and it beat him up. Why should I expect different for me? Why also, should I expect different of God? As I remain faithful, like Christ, God will exalt me, like Christ. Sounds great, except right now all there is in my life is a whole lot of suffering and not a lot of exaltation. I want to give up. Sometimes I want to throw up. Sometimes I can't decide. In these and every moment the Spirit is working, making it possible for me to put one foot in front of the other. He supports me, strengthens me, and prays for and through me when I cannot, and all with one end in mind, that I look like Christ.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

The point of the Christian life is to take up the life of Christ. This involves suffering. Christ suffered. We suffer. I know. Sounds yucky, but suffering is a crucible which forms our faith, yet it is a crucible which is difficult to endure. The good news is we do not endure it alone. The Holy Spirit helps us in all seasons of life, including seasons of suffering. He strengthens us, supports us, and prays for and through us when we cannot. He makes it possible to move through suffering so we do more than endure. He helps us move through suffering so God's greater purpose of forming us into the likeness of Christ is accomplished. Sounds wonderful, until you have to live it. Then, we only want to be done with the suffering. This week, consider approaching your experiences of suffering by turning to the Spirit. In your suffering, resist the urge to respond or flee immediately. Instead, consider pausing and growing still. Be present to the Holy Spirit and affirm his presence and strength. Affirm he is for you and that even this experience is being used by him to make you like Christ. Thank him for his work and ask for his guidance in how to respond.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

 twitter.com/blake_shipp

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