



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

September 25, 2016

Discussion Guide

Myth of Performing

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

- What does it look like to experience an abundant life in the Kingdom of God? Do you feel you are experiencing this life? 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 concept of grace and how it is for all of life.
- Read Matthew 19.16-20 aloud. Pause and read the text once more seeking to put yourself in this man's shoes.
- What is this man seeking from Jesus?
- As you experience his life in the text, what might this man be feeling?
- In what ways, if any, do you resonate with this man? Could you elaborate?
- Jesus responds to this man, not by giving him something else to do but by calling him to radically depend upon God's grace. Read Matthew 20.1-16 aloud seeking to hear this story as one of Jesus' audience.
- In Jesus' story, the point is made that eternal life is not earned but freely given to those who say "Yes" to God's invitation, but it also addresses the manner in which God's abundant life (John 10.10) is given and discovered. It is given freely, by grace. Is this how people (churches?) typically seek after

God's abundant life? Could you elaborate?

- In what ways, if any, does the way we seek after abundant life leave us feeling like the man who approaches Jesus (Matthew 19.20)?
- Considering Jesus' story and the point that God gives life freely to those who say "Yes" rather than to those who earn it, what might it look like to live a life in keeping with this reality? What might the rhythms of a church look like? Why might this be?
- Consider closing in prayer. You might consider confessing the ways in which you have sought to "earn" an abundant life and opening yourself to God's free gift of this life.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

GRACE

Grace lies at the heart of the gospel, and is typically defined as undeserved blessing freely bestowed upon people by God. Within this range of meaning, several types of grace might be defined, but the two most important forms are common grace and special grace.

Common grace is much like it sounds, grace that is common to all people. This grace is the blessing of God experienced by all people through the beauty and bounty of God's creation (Hebrews 1.2-3; Matthew 5.45). This grace is freely given to all people regardless of their faith or absence of faith. Special grace is the grace by which God redeems, sanctifies, and glorifies his people. This grace is made available through the work of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5.18) and it shapes the entirety of the life of those who follow Jesus (1 Corinthians 15.10). This grace is made available freely to all people apart from any deserving aspect of their character or behavior (Ephesians 2.5-10), through Scripture is clear that not all avail themselves of this grace.

While this traditional understanding of grace has a long tradition within Evangelical circles, this definition lends itself to a more punctiliar understanding of grace within our culture; that is, this understanding of grace limits the experience of grace to a specific moment in time. This is due,

in part, to our cultural understanding of blessing. In our mind, a blessing is something we receive at a specific point in time. When we understand grace in this manner, we come to view it as something which has a beginning and an end. This leads many believers to an understanding that their entry into the Kingdom of God is by grace, dependent upon God, but their everyday lives must be lived on their own strength and power, apart from God. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Scripture does not portray grace as a one-time blessing from God, but as a constant flow from God to the believer enabling him to take up the life of faith. It is this constant flow of grace which enables the people of God to act (1 Peter 4.10), and it is this constant flow of grace which forms and shapes the believer over time (1 Corinthians 15.10). God's grace is constant because it is nothing short of God himself working in us, the mediated life of Christ in us through the presence of the Holy Spirit (Philippians 2.13; 1 Corinthians 12.11; Galatians 2.20-21). In these terms, grace is not something separate from God, his undeserved favor, but grace is more akin to the gift of his abiding presence which in turn empowers the believer to do and become what they could not do and become on their own. Therefore, we might define grace as the empowering presence of God which does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

THE TEXT

MATTHEW 20.1-16: *IT WORKS DIFFERENTLY IN THE KINGDOM*

The context of Jesus' parable about workers in the vineyard is an exchange between Jesus and a man who has asked Jesus a question about what he must do to get eternal life (Matthew 19.16). In this exchange, it becomes apparent that this man is looking for something additional he must do, a work in which he must engage. He has kept the commandments of God but feels something is still missing. Jesus' answer redirects this man's attention inward. Jesus agrees something is lacking, but it is not an additional duty or law to be followed. The man must respond to God inwardly by casting himself upon God in radical dependence. This answer dismays the man as he finds such a response to God difficult (Matthew 19.22). This exchange and

its outcome equally dismays Jesus' disciples, for to them, this man with his external keeping of the Law was the perfect candidate for eternal life. Jesus responds by noting that in the Kingdom of God, things often appear upside down when they are evaluated through cultural terms (Matthew 19.30).

Jesus follows this statement with a story about just how upside down things can appear when one considers the way in which the Kingdom of God works. His story addresses the idea of external works as they apply to the gaining of eternal life, entering the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' story begins with a vineyard owner who needs to hire workers. Most likely, harvest time is in view, thus this man is looking to bring in his crop quickly. In keeping with the custom of the day, this vineyard owner journeys to the town square at dawn to hire day laborers. These day laborers were among the poorest of all people. Most of these men came from families who had lost their land to debt or through other unscrupulous actions. Because they had no land, they could not support themselves. Therefore, they moved to the city in an effort to find work. However, in an agricultural economy like that of Palestine, work was hard to find and no such thing as a career or steady job existed. Therefore, every day, these men would go to the market in a hope that they might be hired for a day job, because apart from this they would not eat.

The vineyard owner hires the men he finds and makes a verbal agreement to pay them a denarius, or the standard wage for a day's labor. This amount of money was enough to feed a family for one day. However, the story continues. This vineyard owner goes out three hours later and hires the men he finds in the marketplace. These men could have had a short-term odd job and then come back to find more work, but most likely, these men are just showing up. The owner hires them and agrees to pay what is fair. The owner goes out three more times, at noon, three, and five, one hour before the end of the day. Each time, he hires the men he can find. With each hiring, he is most likely hiring men who are just arriving; that is, they are lazy,

but he hires them nonetheless.

When the day ends, the owner arranges for each man to be paid and urges his foreman to begin with the one's hired last only working a single hour. These men line up and each receive a denarius, a full day's wage. This excites all the other workers because they believe they will receive more because they have worked longer than an hour. However, to their dismay, each of the workers receives the same amount which angers every worker hired before the final hour. These men challenge the landowner and attempt to curse him with the evil eye (Matthew 20.15). They believe they have been wronged, and culturally they are correct. In their culture, one's work was commensurate with their pay. Therefore, to work for any part of a day should result in prorated pay. The master responds that he is not being unfair nor has he wronged his workers because he is not playing by culture's rules. He has chosen to be generous with people; that is, his desire was to employ as many landless and jobless men as possible in order to give them a day's wage, not to pay for the amount of work accomplished. Jesus then concludes by reminding his disciples that the Kingdom works in a similar upside down way.

In this story, landowner clearly represents God. Those hired first, most likely represent the religious people, like the man whom Jesus addressed. The following laborers probably represent levels of decreasing religious involvement or purity in the eyes of the religious elite. Therefore, Jesus' story makes the point that in the Kingdom of God, things do not work on culture's terms. In this case, the Kingdom is not based on the cultural value of earning. Culturally speaking, you get what you earn, but Jesus states this is not the case in the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God, life is freely given to those who say "Yes" to God's invitation, not to those who earn it with their actions. Jesus' story provides a wonderful insight into the nature of grace and redemption, clarifying how God is more concerned with granting life to as many as possible than to giving it to those who are deserving.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

I am saved by grace. I don't deserve it. I can't earn it. God simply gives it to me and I receive it in utter dependence, but then what? What happens next? What happens after grace? It is here that I struggle.

Most often my response is to say, "I must work really hard." "I must become better." "I must do more." "I must be more active and accomplish great things for the Kingdom." Basically, after grace comes a sense needing to perform. After all, was I not saved to do good works (Ephesians 2.10)? However, in my activity I soon become breathless and weary. Feelings of bitterness and resentment begin to creep up on me. I begin to realize I am bone tired. I feel terrible and it is all because I am performing, seeking to accomplish for the Kingdom. Why do I do this? Why do I feel the need to perform? I am coming to realize that much of my need to perform comes from my understanding of grace. In my mind, I am saved by grace, but then I am on my own to live in the Kingdom. Why? Because grace is about salvation, not life. Grace gets me in the door of the Kingdom, but then I have to figure out how to live in it. More often than not, I seek to live the only way I know how to live, performing. All my life I have heard the message that I need to work harder, do more, accomplish and achieve. So, I bring this into my attempts to live in the Kingdom, but it isn't working all that well, probably because it was never meant to work. You see, grace saves us but it also enables us to live. Grace frees us from performing completely and totally. Grace gives me permission to slow down, to rest, to allow God to do in me and for me what I cannot do on my own. Grace makes it possible to live sanely in the Kingdom, which amazingly accomplishes a great deal.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

The busy church. It seems this is the church we all want to attend, a church full of programs and wall to wall activities. But why? I used to think it was because of our consumer culture. Everybody wants something. Perhaps. I am coming to think it has more to do with our American drive to achieve. Simply put, we think we have to be busy doing something. If we are not doing something, something is wrong. No. We are wrong. We have to do or we are not people of worth and value. Amazingly this attitude has worked its way into a people who claim to rest upon grace. Grace is that power of God which does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. God's grace saves us, but then what? Well... then we start working, hard. We get busy. We put the hammer down, and in the end find ourselves breathless, bitter, and tired. But, we know we can't stop, so we suck it up and head in for another round, all the while sneering at others who don't seem to have the same level dedication to the Kingdom. I am not sure this is really what God intended. We are saved by grace, but we also live by grace. In the end, it is all grace. Simply put, there is no need to perform in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom doesn't work like that. In the Kingdom, we don't have to move fast. We don't have to try to accomplish a great deal. We don't have anything to prove, because there is grace. We have time to think. Time to rest. Time to be with one another, all because there is grace. If you find yourself tired and worn out, beat up and worn down as you serve in the Kingdom of God, we encourage you to remember grace. God's power and presence rests upon you, not just to save you but to lead you through life. His grace makes room so you don't have to rush decisions or fill up your schedule. You have nothing to prove to God. He doesn't work like that or expect it from you. All he asks is that we rest upon his grace.



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