



RHYTHM OF LIFE

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

October 23, 2016

Discussion Guide

The Abundant Life

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 describe a life which is abundant? 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 nature and focus of Wisdom Literature.
- Read Ecclesiastes 3.1-8 aloud. Pause and read the text once more.
- The author of Ecclesiastes states that God has created a natural order or rhythm for life. What are the aspects of this rhythm? Seek to find as many as possible.
- In what ways, if any, do people seek to acknowledge the realities of rhythm in life? In what ways, if any, do they seek to defy them? Which approach do you feel is more prevalent? Why might this be?
- When you consider your own life, would you say you are more prone to acknowledge or defy a natural rhythm for life? Could you elaborate?
- What effect, if any, does this manner of living have upon you?
- What might it look like to seek to live a life which acknowledges rhythm?
- What, if anything, keeps us from moving toward this way of life?

- Consider closing in prayer, asking God to open your heart and mind to the beauty of a life lived according to rhythm.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

WISDOM LITERATURE AND ECCLESIASTES

By definition, wisdom is the ability to make sound judgments regarding life and conduct based upon what one knows. In Scripture, three books (Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes) have been classified as Wisdom Literature. In these books, the authors are seeking to discover the proper human response to every dimension of life in this world. However, these books approach this subject through a very different lens than other books of Scripture. The authors of these books seek to discover the proper way to live life by observing the world and the way it functions naturally. These authors believed that God and his intentions for life might be observed through nature, often by observing the cause and effect of actions. In noticing these, they believed that one had glimpsed aspects of God's intentions for life which they then recorded leaving their readers with the freedom to choose or reject a life in keeping with the way God had organized the world.

Wisdom literature reads very differently from other genres such as prophecy or narrative. These works often consist of metaphor, pithy sayings, or proverbial formulations, though the book of Job does include narrative. These sayings and proverbs can take an either-or dynamic making them appear to represent solid truths. However, we must remember that these formulations are only understood to be generally true because they have been gleaned through observation, and exceptions always exist.

As a genre, Wisdom Literature, has its own distinctive traits which include:

- An emphasis on the cause and effect order of the universe
- A willingness to explore the painful mysteries of life
- A belief that God's intentions and plans are inscrutable
- An emphasis on the education of the young and the development of leaders
- A focus on devoting oneself to a prudent life

The book of Ecclesiastes includes many of these traits. Who wrote Ecclesiastes is something of a matter of debate. Traditionally, Solomon has been understood to be the author, but his name is found nowhere in the work. Rather, the author is called "Qoheleth" or the "one who assembles" (Ecclesiastes 1.1-2; 7.27; 12.8-10). Some have argued that this is a nickname for Solomon while others have argued that this name is more literal; that is, this is the pen name for the one who assembled these words which may or may not be those of Solomon. It is difficult to say with certainty who wrote this book. Certain aspects fit one who had a royal position (Ecclesiastes 1.1), but not all aspects of his life fit what we know about Solomon. It is probably best to maintain tradition with a footnote that the author's true identity is not of the greatest importance as this book has long been accepted within the Scriptural canon and found to be of spiritual descent (from God) and importance.

THE TEXT

ECCLESIASTES 3.1-8: *RHYTHMS OF LIFE*

The book of Ecclesiastes is a work devoted to the pursuit of purpose and meaning in life, a pursuit so thorough that it makes many uncomfortable because it deals truthfully with reality while many of us prefer to live with illusions. While the author touches upon this pursuit through various means, his favorite targets are knowledge and wealth through which (along with other means) people attempt to break the limits which have been set for them by God. However, death is the one constant reminder that we as humans cannot reach to godlikeness and must learn to be content with living within the limits which have been set for us.

In chapter 3, the author includes a poem which he uses to discuss the limits set upon people by God. Whether the author penned the poem is inconsequential. What matters is that in this poem, the general observation is that God is in control of the way life is meant to be lived, and that this control extends to the appointment of times or seasons for every type of activity. The nature of this statement involves several assumptions the first of which is that God in his sovereignty has ordered life. This ordering of life includes specific activities at specific times in which God intends people engage and at other times to put down. One might imagine the author to be describing life like the pendulum of a clock. In this image, life swings from one activity to another activity but as it moves to one it moves away from the other.

The author lists a number of these activities which are not meant to stand for all that God intends for people. Rather, the movement of the poem through these activities is meant

to drive home the point that God has designed life so that in specific seasons people pick up specific activities and in other seasons they put them down. As these come from the mind of God, they are not up to people to determine but those who wish to live a good life freely choose to live their life by this God-ordained rhythm.

The first set of activities involve the actions of birth and death. Neither are under the control of people but both exist in the life of every person. The activities of planting and uprooting as well as the gathering and scattering of stones bring to mind the seasonal activities of a farmer, though the scattering of stones may involve the work of retaliating against one's enemy. The activities of building and tearing down bring to mind the activities of a builder or carpenter. The activities of killing and healing, weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing reflect emotional states which are appropriate at different times in one's life, each resting upon the present experience of the one expressing them. The activities of searching and giving up, keeping and throwing away are general and may reflect everyday activities, but the final four sets all involve relationships.

It might be easy to read these sets and grow uncomfortable, especially when one reads that God has set a time for war and killing. However, we must remember that the author is not making the assertion that God intends we kill or fight. Instead, he is observing life and noticing that the natural order of life is rhythmical in nature and he deduces that this rhythm must have its origin in God. Therefore, in his pursuit of purpose and meaning within God's limits, he must acknowledge and live within these rhythms.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

They world functions in a rhythm. There is light and there is dark. There is Summer and Fall and Winter and then Spring. There is birth and there is death. It is hard to miss the natural ebb and flow of life. Even the casual observer can conclude that life is meant to have a rhythm, unless you are observing my life. If you were to watch me for very long, you would see that I do everything I can to live without rhythm, to overcome the hold these natural rhythms have on me. I use caffeine to overcome the hold of the rhythm of waking and sleeping. I use my phone and computer, both tethered to the Internet to overcome the hold of the rhythm of work and family. I use multitasking to overcome the hold of the rhythms of physical limits or work and rest. I use my radio and television to overcome the rhythm of noise and silence. In almost every aspect of my life I can notice both a natural rhythm and my attempt to overcome it. Why do I live in this way? Simple. I want a full and meaningful life, and in my mind, the only way to find that life is to go beyond the limits, the limits which the natural rhythms of life place upon me. Somehow I have come to believe that it is in working longer and harder that I will be happy. It is in sleeping less that I will experience more. It is in the constant noise that I will sense I am not alone. There is just one problem. It isn't working for me, and I am pretty sure it isn't working for anyone else either. I am tired, stressed out, overextended, and lonely, and that is just the start. So what is the answer? Up until now, it has been to try to do it all better, to try to move beyond the natural rhythms of life, but that isn't working all that well for me. So I am taking a different approach. Slowly and surely I am noticing the rhythms of life, not as limits to be exceeded but as God-intended boundaries, sign posts which say, "Don't pass beyond this point!" As I notice and adjust my life to be in keeping with these rhythms, I find myself happier, more full of joy and peace, or in other words, I find in an ever-increasing way, a full and meaningful life.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

How do we find a full and meaningful life? Jesus promised us that if we followed him he would give us an abundant life (John 10.10). Anybody feel like they have that yet? I know I don't. Most of the time, I find that I am breathless, stressed out, overextended, and tired. That doesn't sound very much like an abundant life. So what is wrong? I think that what is wrong is that we try to pursue a full and meaningful life by trying to do as much as possible all at once. We try to go beyond our physical limits and to break free from the natural rhythms of life and it isn't working all that well. However, when we look to the life of Jesus we see that he is full of much life and joy. He brims with the abundant life we so desire, and we also can notice that he makes an intentional effort not to go beyond the limits of life. He does this by living a life of intentional rhythm. Jesus did certain things at certain times in certain ways. He seemed to know that God had designed the world to ebb and flow with a rhythm and he chose to live his life in that ebb and flow which led him to a life many of us only dream about. This week, consider the way you are living your life. Is there an ebb and flow or is there just flow? Is there a discernible rhythm to your life or are you always trying to stretch further and do more? Ponder what the author of Ecclesiastes notices about the way God has placed rhythm into creation and our lives (Ecclesiastes 3.1-8) and consider what it might look like to notice and adjust your life to match this rhythm



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

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