



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

August 6, 2017

Discussion Guide

FAITHFUL COMMITMENT

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

- DO YOU BELIEVE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO EXPERIENCE GOD PERSONALLY AND INTIMATELY IN OUR WORLD TODAY? 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 LIVING WITH AND EXPERIENCING GOD.
- READ PSALM 16 OUT LOUD. SEEK TO IMAGINE YOURSELF

AS DAVID, FLEEING SAUL, BUT ENCOUNTERING GOD IN REAL WAYS DURING THIS EXPERIENCE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.

- THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, DAVID ENCOUNTERED GOD IN REAL WAYS. IN PSALM 16, WHAT DOES HE CLAIM TO HAVE LEARNED ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE THROUGH THESE ENCOUNTERS? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY ANSWERS AS POSSIBLE.
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY DO PEOPLE STILL SEEK AFTER THE THINGS DAVID FOUND IN GOD? WHERE DO THEY LOOK TO FIND THEM?
- WOULD YOU SAY THAT LOOKING TO GOD FOR THE ASPECTS OF LIFE DAVID DESCRIBES IS STILL A VIABLE OPTION? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO PURSUE THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE IN ORDER TO DISCOVER THE LIFE DAVID DESCRIBES? WHAT IF ANYTHING MAKES THIS PURSUIT DIFFICULT? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- WHAT MIGHT HAVE TO CHANGE IF YOU WERE TO PURSUE THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE IN YOUR DAILY LIFE? DO YOU FEEL IT IS POSSIBLE TO MAKE THESE CHANGES? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- CONSIDER CLOSING YOUR TIME WITH A TIME OF SILENCE, MAKING YOURSELVES AVAILABLE TO GOD WHO IS CONSTANTLY MAKING HIMSELF AVAILABLE TO YOU. YOU MIGHT THEN MOVE TO CELEBRATE THE LORD'S SUPPER AS A GROUP, EXPERIENCING THE PHYSICAL REMINDER THAT GOD HAS GIVEN HIMSELF AND CONTINUES TO GIVE HIMSELF TO US.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

LIFE WITH GOD

Deep inside every person is a longing to experience the transcendent. We desire to reach beyond ourselves so we might experience something greater than ourselves. Within our Christian context, we often hear these desires expressed in prayers asking for God to be present, to watch over, or even to speak and guide us and others through our daily lives. Clearly, this desire to experience the transcendent is deeply ingrained in our psyche, but it is a desire which is rooted not in religious tradition but in the way we were created to live. From the very beginning, we were created to experience God, on a daily basis, in an intimate and personal way. Simply put, we were made to live with God and we long for this way of life.

That we were made to live with God is grounded in God's choice to make people in his own image, to experience life as he experiences life (Genesis 1.26-28). At his core, God experiences life in community. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit engage in a divine dance of love which unites three in such an intimate way they become one. In this way of being, God is therefore eternally and constantly present for and with himself. This life of experiencing presence is part of his image which God formed within people; God himself noting it is not good for people to live alone (Genesis 2.18). However, this statement implies more than just the intention that people live in community, present with one another. This statement indicates that God's true intention was that people also live in community with him, experiencing his presence in an intimate manner. This can be seen in the aftermath of the Fall as people are separated from God and God begins to move to redeem and restore his creation. It is important to note that the hallmark of God's redemptive action is a movement to restore

personal, intimate connection between people and himself (John 1.1-14), a connection which, when accomplished, indicates the end of God's redemptive activity (Revelation 21.1-5).

Jesus taught that a daily, ongoing relationship with him which included his presence was the essence of life (John 14.18; 15.1-5). Paul taught his congregations to live their lives with Christ as he constantly spoke to them about being "in Christ." Paul even went so far as to echo Triune language to describe the life of a believer, noting that the believer's life was so intimately connected with that of God's that his life was nothing other than God's life (Galatians 2.19-21). The Psalms indicate that those who personally experienced aspects of this life with God discovered how life with God was truly satisfying and good (Psalm 16; 34; 42-43; 139).

The desire to experience the transcendent is deeply ingrained not just in our psyche but in the very fabric of our being. However, the question remains as to whether this desire can be satisfied. While people of faith agree that God is transcendent, there is much debate as to his imminence (God personal closeness) and whether one can experience the presence of God with many siding with the camp that God may be imminent but the experience of his presence is not practically available. The Orthodox and Catholic Church make this point with their heavy emphasis on the mystery or unknowable nature of God and the physical separation between people and God in the structure of their places of worship and worship experiences. Protestants, in particular Evangelicals, likewise argue that God's imminence is not practically available with their heavy emphasis on experiencing God only through Scripture and their downplaying of the role of the Holy Spirit. The result is that the average believer, though longing to experience God does not feel this is possible.

However, contrary to popular thinking among the people of God, the plain teaching of Scripture is that God desires his people to

experience his presence in an ongoing way, and that he has made this possible. Perhaps the clearest teaching of this is the Incarnation, the act of God becoming flesh (John 1.1-14) and the giving of the Holy Spirit (John 14-16; Acts 2). God is transcendent, but he desires to be imminent and has made the experience of his presence in a real way possible in Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

The Text

Psalm 16.1-11: *Life with God*

Psalm 16 is a psalm written by David. The subscript notes that it is a *miktam*, a term which means “covering.” Scholars struggle to understand what this term means and how it relates to this psalm. Most agree that this psalm is an intensely personal psalm, perhaps designed for personal reflection and worship in contrast to the previous psalm which is clearly designed for corporate worship. This idea combined with the reference to refuge in verse 1 may indicate that this *miktam* reflects a personal experience with God as David literally spent years of his life as a refugee from Saul, fleeing first from Saul (1 Samuel 19-22) and then from Judea (1 Samuel 27) to find safety. The psalm is one in which David expresses immense trust in God, perhaps a trust derived from his personal experience of God during his time spent fleeing Saul. The ancient manuscript tradition is difficult to interpret and translate making the determination of the original stanzas somewhat illusive. However, we might break the psalm into two main sections: verses 1-6 which express the trust David has in God which rests on the sufficiency of God, and verses 7-11 which express the guidance and protection of God which is experienced in this life and beyond.

David begins the psalm by noting that he turns to God for his personal safety, literally viewing God as his refuge. If he is fleeing

from Saul, then the threat on his life and need for protection was very real. Regardless of the setting, this opening line reveals a deep and intimate relationship between God and David, one where David turns to God in a personal manner. In this relationship, David asserts that God is all he needs. He asserts that God is the ultimate good, more valuable than anything else David might possess or seek. This leads David to note that he only seeks to delight in things related to God, his people. It is important to note the emphasis David places on relationship. In his mind, relationship with God is of foremost importance followed by relationship with God's people. David stresses that only a relationship with God is satisfying with the pursuit and worship of other gods leading only to suffering. Here David uses references to pagan worship practices which may indicate he has firsthand experience with these practices which would be the case if this psalm was written during or after his time in Philistia (1 Samuel 27).

In verses 5-6, David simply expands upon what he has already stated in the previous verses. He reiterates that in God he finds his sustenance and security, a pleasing inheritance. David holds firmly to God because he understands a relationship with God to be the most valuable and sustaining thing he could possess. Why David believes this is found in the second stanza.

Beginning with verse 7, David asserts that his trust in God is grounded in the way he has experienced God guiding him, even when David has not sought him (sleeping). Therefore, David chooses to always seek after God because he knows that it is with God that he finds security. This secure life which God provides—even when fleeing Saul!—fills David with joy and rest. He knows that God will not allow him to be destroyed in the present or in the future which includes a future beyond the grave. David understands that when he is connected with God, he is led to life where he finds joy and pleasure in the presence of God, both now and for eternity.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

I long to experience God. I don't just want to know about God. I want to know God in a personal way. I want to feel his touch, experience his voice, live in his presence. Sometimes this longing comes out in the way I pray as I ask for God to be with me. Sometimes I express my desire by lifting my hands in worship, reaching out for God. Sometimes I just feel this longing, deep within me, burning and churning, wanting something more than I now have.

It doesn't surprise me that I long for God. I was made to live with him, to have an ongoing, intimate relationship with him, a relationship severed by Sin. However, there is a way back to this experience and I want it. This is where my struggle lies. So often it feels like I do not attain what I so desire. I know God is there and that I am supposed to experience him, and yet, I cannot seem to find him. I cannot seem to hear him. I cannot seem to notice him in the rapid-fire pace of my life. How can this be? Our world is supposed to be a God-saturated world. I am made to experience God, and yet, I can't seem to find or experience him. Is God really there?

I am coming to learn that God really is there. We really do live in a God-saturated world and God is reaching for us, longing for us to reach back. The problem is we don't know what we are looking for. Perhaps we are looking for words in the sky, hands which write on walls, or donkeys which speak. Maybe we are looking for Jesus to go fishing with us. Whatever it is we are looking for, we are not finding it, because we are looking for the wrong thing. I am learning that when I learn where to look and what to look for, God is all around me, and I really can find my longing satisfied. I really can experience God.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

We long to experience God. This longing is hard-wired into us, part of the way God made us. We talk about God being with us. We ask God to be

with us. We worship in an attempt to catch a glimpse, a taste of the experience of God. The problem for many of us is we don't know how to satisfy our longing. We can't seem to experience God. So, is he really there?

God really is there and we really can experience him. This isn't the issue. The real issue is we don't know how to recognize and relate to God even as he saturates our world. If we will take the time to ask what we should look for, we will discover we can find and experience God in each and every moment. One of the first places we should look is in the most obvious of places, the place where God said we can find him. One of these is communion. In the celebration of communion we repeat Jesus' words that the bread is his body. Often we run right past these words, but have we paused to consider what Jesus is saying? When we consider carefully, Jesus is saying that somehow he is present, physically present in the act of communion. Perhaps this is why we call it communion, a word which refers to relating to God. When you celebrate communion, see if you can meditate upon the words of Jesus, words which speak of his presence with and for you. Ask for God to reveal to you his presence and agree with God that he is there even though you might not be able to sense his presence. Do this each time you celebrate communion, allowing it to be a celebration and experience of God's presence rather than just an exercise which you do out of habit. In time, you will begin to recognize and sense God in very real ways. You might consider journaling these experiences.



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