



LIFE GROUP MATERIAL

Week of June 4, 2017

Q Series: Week 7

Q SERIES NOTE:

During this series, we'll take an honest look at some difficult topics. These questions are designed for Life Groups, and to spur on discussion about the content of the sermon with people you're doing life with.

GETTING STARTED:

Do you feel that, in general, you are more optimistic or pessimistic in your outlook on life?

NOTE: This weekend's message is about hope, and therefore we thought it would be fun to talk about whether people are naturally positive or negative in their outlook on life.

DIVING IN:

This weekend, we listened to Steve Clifford talk about the topic of suffering. What most stood out to you in this teaching?

What questions or thoughts did the message stir up in you?

QUESTION 1:

In the message, Steve defined hope this way: "Hope is a confident expectation that God has better days ahead." What do you think about this definition?

NOTE: This is a pretty good definition. But it's sometimes very difficult - in the face of trial and struggle - to remember this. And that's largely where discouragement comes from - from believing that "things will always be this bad" or that "God has forgotten about me, or is unwilling to help me."

QUESTION 2:

More than 53 times in the New Testament, a writer links the word "hope" to the word "faith" or "trust" in God. What is the relationship between these words?

NOTE: The writers of the NT are confident in their hope because they are confident (and continually remind their audience) in the OBJECT of their hope – mainly that Jesus is worthy of their confidence because He proved He is the Messiah by conquering Death. Tim Keller once wrote, about faith, "Imagine your falling off a cliff, and sticking out of the cliff is a branch that is strong enough to hold you, but you don't know how strong it is. As you fall, you have just enough time to grab that branch. How much faith do you have to have in the branch for it to save you? Must you be totally sure that it can save you? No, of course not. You only have to have enough faith to grab the branch. That's because it's not the quality of your faith that saves you; it's the object of your faith. It doesn't matter how you feel about the branch; all that matters is the branch. And Jesus is the branch."

QUESTION 3:

Steve said, "Trust is not a passive state of the mind. It is a vigorous act of the will." In your own life, when things are tough, what things have helped you keep hope alive?

NOTE: In his book *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis wrote about faith, "The first step is to recognize the fact that your moods change. The next is to make sure that, if you have once accepted Christianity, then some of its main doctrines shall be deliberately held before your mind for some time every day. That is why daily prayers and religious readings and church-going are necessary parts of the Christian life. We have to be continually reminded of what is true and what we believe. Neither this belief nor any other will automatically remain alive in our mind. It must be fed."

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QUESTION 4:

Read **Romans 5:1-5** as a group. What is this verse saying?

In this verse, Paul writes that suffering leads to perseverance which leads to character, which leads to hope. Do you think this is possible? Have you ever seen this in your own life?

NOTE: The idea here is a difficult one, and one that is deeply uncomfortable. It's the idea that suffering can serve to make us more like God. It can cause us to run to God to sustain us. It can cause us to fight our way through the struggles and awfulness learning that, far from abandoning us, God is right beside us (and inside us). And if we let it, that can lead to us - through the terrible practice of making it day by day through suffering - to becoming more like Jesus. Because in the end, God is concerned most is not exactly our actions, but rather what kind of creatures we are becoming - the kind of creatures he intended for us to be. That we are becoming more and more like "sons" or "daughters" of His. And that toward that, in suffering, we learn crucial lessons. Lessons that joy simply cannot teach.

Put another way, think about a new father of a baby girl, who was handed, by an angel, the entire "script" of his new daughter life. What if he were given a pen, and allowed a few hours to edit her life's script. Would he remove the difficult times? What if, by doing so, he also removed a certain strength and resilience in his daughter? Or her compassion for others? Would he remove all tragedy? What if, by doing so, he would be accidentally removing her deep joy later on? This is the dilemma of suffering.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

Have you ever experienced a time in your life when your hopes were dashed? How did you get through that time?

NOTE: The goal of this is to allow group members to talk about times when they were faced with deep disappointment.

FINAL ACTIVITY:

What is your hope index like right now? Do you generally feel hopeful about tomorrow? Do you have a confidence expectation that God has better days ahead?

NOTE: This question is designed to allow people a space to say, "This thing is going really poorly, and I don't believe that God will do something good." It's important to leave space for people to verbalize this, so that God can rush in and "encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word (2 Thess. 2:17)." Please try to remind people that God is a God of Seasons, but that even in Winter, God is up to something and new life is bursting right below the surface. This can be difficult to remember, especially in tough times, but that's why we remind each other.

How can the group help "remind" you of the truth of God?

Read **2 Thessalonians 2:16** as a group. Pray.

NOTE: If someone in your group has a question about something in the Bible, take time to email that question to questions@westgatechurch.org. Our pastoral staff will review them, and your question might get addressed at the end of the "Q" series during our Q&A panel.

NOTE: Just a reminder to have your folks send in their questions. We look at all of them!