



underthefigtree

WILD PLACES GOSHEN

A Discussion Guide for Individuals and Groups

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There are few who haven't been touched by the music of the great Johnny Cash. Cash's journey to fame didn't begin with a wealthy ancestry or connections with the Nashville elite. Truth is Johnny Cash grew up during the extreme poverty of the Great Depression of the 1930s, and like many, his family struggled just to make ends meet. It is also true that it is hard to stand out of the crowd when you are the fourth of seven children, but young Johnny did just that through his gift of music. This is the soil out of which grew this great talent. But there was one more important ingredient. Young Cash's music began with gospel music where he sang such songs as "Near My God to Thee". By his own admission Johnny credited the one person over all others who had the greatest influence on his music: his mother. It was for her that he recorded "My Mother's Hymn Book" which he considered to be, of all his albums, his favorite – which is saying something.

Unfortunately, as with so many, fame and fortune proved to be overwhelming and it wasn't long before Johnny Cash grew anything but closer to his God. With the great success came infidelity, deep drug addiction, clashes with the law, all of which ultimately resulted in divorce and the loss of his family. This immensely talented performer hit his "rock bottom" in 1968; Johnny Cash was completely alone...or so he thought. It was then that Johnny Cash remembered the love of God which he sang of as a boy and he returned. Although Cash continued to struggle in his earthly journey, from that rock bottom point in 1968 forward, he endeavored to draw near to the God who had never left or forsook him.

“SEE WITH YOUR EYES, HEAR WITH YOUR EARS, AND SET YOUR HEARTS ON EVERYTHING I AM GOING TO SHOW YOU, FOR THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE. THEN TELL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL EVERYTHING YOU SEE.” EZEKIEL 40:4

THE TEXT

Before you watch this session take a moment and read the following passages:

Genesis 12: 1-3;

Genesis 45:8-10

Genesis 46:28-29

Ezekiel 20: 6-8

Job 1: 9-12, 20-22

Habakkuk 3:17-19

THE TEACHING

Watch the video, “Goshen.” Review the background details below before continuing with the talking points.



THE BACKGROUND

For most in this age of online shopping and mega malls few think about trade routes and their importance to our economy and our comfort. Yet their significance cannot be overstated. As trade routes are at the crux of our economy today, so too were they at in the ancient period. They were the link through which survival, stability and great influence flowed.

Arguably among the most important of land trade routes of the Biblical period was the Via Maris (the Way of the Sea) which ran right through the land of Canaan connecting ancient Egypt with the rest of the ancient world. Not surprising then that God would place his people along what some have described as, “the cross roads of the world”. People from around the ancient world travelled this key road and it would be along that road that God placed the Hebrews. In Goshen they would have the opportunity to carry out God’s promise to Abraham; “all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:3).

Another word about Egypt; vital to survival is air, water, and food, in that order. It is the last of these three essentials that are important to our lesson. In the ancient period, to be able to produce sufficient food so that you, your spouse, your children might survive and prosper was one thing, but then to have enough left over to sell was a sign of remarkable blessing! It’s important to know that Ancient Egypt’s source of power & wealth was simply their ability to produce food, and to do so at such a rate and volume that much exceeded their needs.

Egypt’s ability to produce food was because of the Nile and its yearly flooding. Over the millennia rich silt was deposited by the Nile and it was out of this amazing soil that crops grew with incredible yields. The ancient Egyptians were able to produce such volumes of food that Egypt was known as the “bread basket” of the ancient world. Food was the source of Egypt’s wealth, the source of Egypt’s power. Trade routes made it possible for Egypt to provide this most essential of commodities to surrounding peoples. According to the Text the most fertile places in of all Egypt was Goshen. Power. Fertility. Influence. Life. Goshen was at the heart of it.



THE TALKING POINTS



- 1 George suggests that Goshen's location was as important as its fertility and it was there that the Hebrews could engage the different cultures of the world for God. God placed us "in the world" as His light, but He calls us "not to be of the world" (see Jesus' prayer in John 17:11, 13). What does it mean to be in the world but not of it? What are the challenges of being "in the world"? List some ways we can preserve our distinctiveness as God's people "in the world"?
- 2 The ancient Egyptians understood that life and wealth came from food, and food from fertility of the land, and that bountiful soil came from the Nile. They connected the gift of the Nile as a gift from the gods. Re-read Ezekiel 20:6-8. Why do you suppose it was so difficult for the people of Israel to resist and forsake the Egyptian gods and keep their eyes on the one true God? Discuss where our culture views the source of life and power and how does that affect our culture's priorities, decisions, and actions? How hard is it for us to resist the draw of our cultural values and priorities? Consider James 4:7-8. How important is it to draw near to God in order to resist the current of our culture? What are ways I can draw near to God while being "in the world"?
- 3 What did you think when George shared the meaning of Goshen? What are some of the blessings God has granted you? In what ways have you drawn near to your blessings rather than acknowledging and drawing near to the God who blesses? How can you tell if you have drawn too close to the blessings? Re-read Genesis 12:2-3. This passage reminds us that, like Abraham, we are "blessed to be a blessing." In what ways can we share our blessings? How do we share our blessings with our own culture and spheres of influence? How do we use our blessings to bless all nations, just like God through Abraham?
- 4 Read Habakkuk 3:17-19. George makes a bold declaration: "When you draw closer to the blessing than the one who blesses, it's at that point where the blessings become curses." What do you think of that comment? What are some of your greatest fears and why? Read Job 1:21. If all your blessings were taken away, or all your greatest fears became realities, would you be able to respond like Job, or have you drawn too close to your blessings resulting in fear?

THE TASK

God provided the children of Israel the most fertile of all places called “Goshen/Draw Near” to be their home. And they did draw near, but not to God. Next time its movie night rent the biographical movie of Johnny Cash’s life: “Walk the Line” either on your own or with the group. In what way did Cash draw near to the blessing, not the one who blesses? Note how drawing nearer the blessing turned out for him. How unique is his story? In what ways can you relate to Cash’s life story? How does Cash’s time apart from the One who blesses inspire you to draw near to your God?

God does bless us as a means to an end – we are blessed to be a blessing. Be deliberate this week and choose one of the many blessings God has given you and make a concerted effort to use that to bless others this week. Perhaps God will place a cause on your heart that he would like you to bless financially. Maybe your blessing of family, friends and resources can be used to serve and bless someone. Or maybe your blessing of time or talents can be used to bless an organization desperately in need of volunteers. You never know where God may be using you to answer prayers and bless those around you.