

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE

GREAT EXPECTATIONS



February 16, 2014

Discussion Guide

My way ... or the highway

Philippians 2:1-11

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 answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- What is an act of service (small or large) that someone did for you that made you feel valuable?

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.)

- Use the notes to explain the context and background of Philippians 2:1-11 and the ideas of service and good for your spouse.
- Read Philippians 2:1-11 aloud slowly. Pause and read Philippians 2:1-11 aloud once more.

- Paul starts out by exhorting the Philippians towards unity. What things often divide a couple in a relationship?
- In what ways, might a trust in God alone for the provision of our needs be necessary in order to live this humble life of a servant with others?
- How easy or difficult does this seem to be for you in this season of life?
- React to the following statement: I think that I need to get everything that I want out of my marriage.
- Read Philippians 2:1-11 aloud slowly. Pause and read Philippians 2:1-11 aloud once more.
- In what ways does Philippians 2:1-11 give context for the submissive life?
- How might a person seek to conform to the servant attitude of Jesus? How might these approaches be done with God? What would be different if someone tried to do these on their own, without God?
- Paul speaks of the pain that Jesus persevered. What discomfort or pain might cause you to hesitate when trying to serve your spouse?
- As you think about the movements in this passage, what expressions seems to resonate most with where you are right now?
- What expression seems most distant or difficult to picture?
- What small act of service might be appropriate for you to engage in right now? How do you think this might affect you living submissively with others? What, if anything, keeps you from taking this step?

Context and Background

Service and good for your spouse

We often, if not always, enter marriage with the expectation that our spouse will change or improve to meet our desires from “for” them. We have this expectation because we expect to be fulfilled by the love of our spouse, and before marriage we normally have an inkling that they will need some “improvement” to fully meet that expectation. This is built on the assumption that we are supposed to get everything we want out of marriage. Another way to describe this assumption is that we act as if the world revolves around us and our desires. We expect that our spouse will join the correct planetary orbit around us soon after marriage. We often work out this mentality and desire through manipulation and phrases like, “If you loved me, you would _____.”

As we have spoken of earlier in our series, God invites us to own our expectations, acknowledge the needs motivating those expectations, and then present those needs to Him for fulfillment. This is the life of submission before God and others. This is a life that is being lived for the good of others, and in dependence on the God who is always present and pursuing our good. For this reason we are instructed in I Peter to cast our anxieties to Him and allow Him to provide for us.

Jesus was the perfect image of God, and in him we see this submission, humility, and dependence at work. Jesus came and did not use the fact that he was deity for any selfish gains. He came to serve humanity, whose thoughts are not his thoughts, who were far from him, and even beyond that, were enemies of him. Yet, he came submitting to His Father, and in dependence on His Father and the Holy Spirit, while he humbly served others.

As he did this he saw others as being so valuable that he persevered in light of judgment, rejection, hunger, no salary, no home, great physical wounding, and even death. Yes, he lived for the good of others, serving them in loving and appropriate ways.

We are to conform to the humility and service of Jesus if we are to engage in our marriages and relationships in ways that are worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 10:24; 13:5). This conforming is only possible as we also depend on the person who indwells us, is attentive to our needs, and is empowering us to walk in obedience (Phil. 4:13).

The Text

Philippians 2:1-11

This passage is set within a letter from the apostle Paul to the church in Philippi. This church was the first church started by Paul in what is modern day Europe. Paul and Timothy had a relationship with the church at Philippi that motivated them to provide financially for him several times, even though there were hardships within the church. This letter to them was initiated by a generous provision by them while Paul was imprisoned in Rome. This provision came at a time when the church was experiencing divisions and trouble. For this reason, they had requested that Paul send Timothy back to them for help in this time of difficulty, but because Paul was unable to do that he wrote this letter of joy, thankfulness, and exhortation to help address their divisions and self-serving attitudes until he or Timothy could come.

At the beginning of the passage Paul exhorts the Philippians to live a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ by living in unity. At the end of chapter one Paul had addressed the enemies outside of the congregation, and here at the beginning of chapter two he addresses the enemies of unity which come

from within the congregation. This exhortation to live in unity is not just an exhortation to just live a moral life. Paul exhorts the Philippians to live in unity based on their experiences with Christ, his love, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Paul is basing this exhortation on the truth that they have the indwelling presence and resources needed to accomplish the request.

In verses 6-11 we find a hymn that focuses on the humility and exaltation of Jesus Christ. This hymn, which was likely in use in the Church before Paul included it in his letter, encouraged the believers to look to the humble example of Christ and conform to the attitude of his humble servant hood, persevering through difficulty and looking forward to the glorification that Jesus had made possible for them who follow him. We are to conform to Christ's example, not imitate, for he lives within us and is at work to bring us into conformity with him, who is at work within us

Application:

Often, when we see something that needs to change in our lives we want to grab the bull by the horns and wrangle the whole beast down. This leads us to the all-too-familiar experience of those New Year's resolutions that were so well intended, but not well thought-out, and which begin to overwhelm us within the first few days of January. As you are seeing the deficit in your life for how you have not been conforming to the dependence, humility, and service of Jesus in relation to your spouse, friends, or relatives, notice your response before taking action. Often guilt or shame will spur us on to attempt to make-up for the past, or to give up before even trying. If you are noticing either tendency as you experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit, first present this to Jesus, whose life, death, and resurrection has provided you relational peace with God. Receive that forgiveness and then ask God what small act of service might be an appropriate first step in serving your spouse, friend, or relative. After pausing and listening, and you have this small act of service in mind, go to it with the mentality that God is with you and will provide you the strength that you need to accomplish this good for your spouse.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Bill's blog at billsprouse.blogspot.com



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