

Growing and Going: A Look at the Heart of God

A Six-week Small Group Bible Study

by Claire Partlow

From the Missional Bible Studies series of the Center for U.S. Missions

Week One - A Work Begun - Philippians 1:1-11

INTRO - getting to know one another

- 1) Break into groups of 4-5 and tell us who most influenced your beliefs when you were a child.
- 2) Going around again, tell us about the person most influential in your faith journey as an adult.

RETRO - discovering from the past

Read Acts 16:1-15. Look at maps of Paul's journeys.

What indications do you see of Paul's obvious strategic outlook to his missionary journeying?

How does Barclay's theory (at right) fit with what you know about the Apostle Paul?

What do we learn about Paul's attitude towards adversity?

Read Philippians 1:1-11

For what and for whom is Paul thankful?

Of what is he confident?

How does His confidence align with or differ from yours?

For what does He pray?

That night Paul had a dream: A Macedonian stood on the far shore and called across the sea, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" The dream gave Paul his map. We went to work at once getting things ready to cross over to Macedonia. All the pieces had come together. We knew now for sure that God had called us to preach the good news to the Europeans.

Acts 16:9-10 THE MESSAGE

Only a theory: "Who was this man Paul saw in a vision? ... But there is a most attractive theory. There was one man who had succeeded in conquering the world. That was Alexander the Great. . . . The district was permeated with memories of Alexander; and Alexander was the man who had said that his aim was 'to marry the east to the west' and so make one world. It may well be that there came to Paul the vision of Alexander, the man who had conquered the world, and that this vision gave Paul a new impulse towards making one world for Christ." (Barclay, 122)

continued

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Compare this Philippians prayer with the one for believers in Ephesians 1:17-23.
What makes Paul so confident?

Reflect on Paul's situation and this introductory section of his letter to these old friends.
Any insights into Paul's personality?

Or into his theology?

Or into his thoughts regarding the future?

How does this idea of "the work begun" (Phil. 1: 6) fit into the story of our
congregation . . . or your own life?

What does this tell us about the character of God—*who* He is and *what* He is like?

THEO - going to God in prayer and song

ACTION ITEM - Read Psalm 16 and reflect on both the "saints" God has placed in your life
and the "places" to which He has sent you

Next Week - "Chained or Unchained?" - Philippians 1:12-30

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Week Two - Chained or Unchained? - Philippians 1:12-30

INTRO - getting to know one another

Share with the group about a time when you felt discomfort being a Christian.

RETRO - discovering from the past

Read Philippians 1:12-30 in many versions, including the portions from *The Message*.

Philippians 1:12-14

How would you evaluate Paul's situation?

How do his "chains" fit in to the story? (vv. 7, 14)

See verses 15-18.

Paul seems to have a cavalier attitude toward his rivals. What do you think of his lack of concern?

See verses 19-26.

What is Paul's standard for deciding what is *good* and *bad* in life?

What does God owe Paul? Or me . . . or you?

If we're facing a tough situation, danger, or struggle, what would Paul counsel us to pray for?

Paul doesn't tell us that we can be happy, or how to be happy. He simply and unmistakably *is* happy.... Circumstances are incidental compared to the life of Jesus, the Messiah, that Paul experiences from the inside.... Christ is, among much else, the revelation that God cannot be contained or hoarded. (Peterson, 2135)

To face the truth that all our efforts to build security are illusions could lead us to brutal despair if we do not also study the character of God to see how he promises to be our security. (Dawn, 31)

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. (2 Corinthians 4:8-11 NIV)

continued

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Growing and Going Week 2: Chained or Unchained? - page 2

See verses 27- 30. What part does suffering play in a Christian life?

Read: James 1:2-4

2 Thessalonians 1:3-5

1 Peter 4:14-16

Acts 5:41-42

Matthew 5:11-12

Why don't we need to fear suffering or insult?

How does God's character—*who* He really is and *what* He's really like—help us in such situations?

To what current struggles—either in our congregation-at-large or in your own personal life—might these insights be useful?

THEO - going to God in prayer and song

ACTION ITEM - Read Ephesians 6:1-20. Think about Paul's situation (in prison while writing both Ephesians and Philippians) and think about these verses in light of our discussion tonight.

Next Week - "Completed Joy" - Philippians 2:1-11

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Week Three - Completed Joy - Philippians 2:1-11

INTRO - getting to know one another

What mantra, creed, or rule did you have to live by growing up?
(examples: "It's your dog; you feed it!" "Don't leave an empty tank.")

How were these mantras instrumental in shaping who you are today?

RETRO - discovering from the past

Read Philippians 2:5-11 in *The Message*. Any comments?

Read Philippians 2:1-2.

What "encouragement" do you get from being united with Christ?

What "comfort" from His love?

How do you sense "fellowship with the Spirit?"

How has God's "tenderness and compassion" played out in your life?

How does *who He is* and *what He's like* affect how you can view your life?

Why does Paul seem to view these as pivotal to his joy being made "complete?"

If you were playing *Pictionary*, what would you draw to convey the ideas gleaned from these two verses?

Read Philippians 2:3-4.

Next Paul starts writing about motivators.

What motivates you personally? What motivates us as a congregation?

continued

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Read Philippians 2:5-11.
Just what is it that Christ has done?

Who is He really?

What did He leave behind?

To go be *what*?

Read Isaiah 45:23.
Note its context within several declarations of “I am the Lord” especially in Isaiah 42:8 and 44:24-28. How can we know if we are following this model?

Whom might we be trying to reach?

Read I Corinthians 6:9-11.
To whom had the church been reaching out in Corinth?

What might make *us* uncomfortable in our ministry to this neighborhood or city where God has placed our congregation?

Quite remarkably, you never read where Paul said to his Roman guard, “I need you to do me a favor. Next time you happen to be near one of the Emperor’s assistants, urge him to get me out of this dump” . . . Paul’s attitude of unselfish humility prevented him from keeping meticulous records of the wrongs done to him in Rome . . . He asked no favors. He held no grudges. He had no expectations. He was there by divine appointment. He willingly submitted to his situation.

(Swindoll, 309)

How do we know if we’re here “by divine appointment?” (see sidebar)

THEO - going to God in prayer and song

ACTION ITEM - Read Psalm 103. How has “he does not treat us as our sins deserve” (v. 10) been played out in your life?

Next Week - Shining Like Stars

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Week Three: Optional Handout

From Lark News: March 1, 2004. Disclaimer: LarkNews® is a satirical newspaper

In Face of Declining U.S. Morality, Christians Emigrate to Muslim Countries

QATAR — In a small but significant trend, Christian employees of corporations and universities are volunteering to work in far-flung countries with strong Muslim majorities. Their goal: To enjoy the comparatively clean moral environment those countries offer.

"We pretty much lost the culture war in America," says Angelina Hayes, mother of three and recent immigrant to Qatar. Her husband was offered a job here by his company, Honeywell. "There is no culture war in Qatar. It's morally safe."

For some evangelical Christians, the recent string of pro-gay court rulings and increasingly permissive pop culture have served as a shot across the bow that has sent them packing to countries whose values more closely match their own.

"You can see where the U.S. is going — toward gay marriage and government-sponsored abortion," said Bruce Darling of IBM who volunteered to move his family to IBM's middle east operations base in Kuwait. "I don't want to be around for that."

Kuwait, Qatar and a few other Arab countries have worked hard to capture a western flavor. There are fast food outlets, malls and even branches of American universities. But their political culture is so conservative that leaders won't even say the words "homosexual" or "abortion" for fear of popular backlash.

In Qatar, on the southern tip of the Arabian peninsula, a lively American suburb has sprung up, populated by more than 860 expatriate families. Most work for U.S. companies, universities or the U.S. military. A few writers and graphic designers do freelance work using e-mail to keep in touch with clients who don't know they reside half-way around the world. The neighborhood they live in looks eerily like any suburb you'd find in the U.S., with wide streets, basketball hoops in the driveway and Mediterranean-style homes.

Gathering in the cul-de-sac one evening as the sun sets red over the nearby desert, the residents say their experience is everything they wanted and more.

"It's a great family atmosphere," says one man.

"Except for the sandstorms," says another man. The others laugh.

"Taxes are low here, so that's a plus," offers one mother whose children ride bikes up and down the street. But the morality question is the main reason these and other Americans relocated to the Middle East.

"We feel a kinship with our Muslim neighbors," says the mother. "There's an innocence. Yes, we disagree on spiritual things, but there's no blatant sexuality on TV, no condoning perverse behavior. This is like America in the 1950s, and that's the environment we want to raise our children in."

Some say they've occasionally been harassed by ardent Muslims, but as one man put it, "I'd rather be razzed by Muslims once a year than forced to share the mainstream culture with godless sickos."

"Amen," says another. A lively discussion about election-year politics ensues (most here will vote absentee for President Bush), and as night falls and the temperature drops, they head indoors for dinner around their family tables, passing plates of pot roast, mashed potatoes and other American staples.

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Week Four - Shining Like Stars - Philippians 2:12-18

INTRO - getting to know one another

What has it been like for you to be in this small group? Any thoughts? Feelings? Comments?

RETRO - discovering from the past

Read Philippians 2:12-18 in *The Message*.

Any first impressions of this passage?

How does the context of 2:1-11 (read last week) inform our reading of these next verses in 12-18?

Read Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV). If we're "saved by grace," what part could "work out your salvation" play? Isn't this a gross contradiction?

Now read Ephesians 2:4-10. How can we justify this with the Philippians verses above?

The *NIV Study Bible* footnote says that salvation "expresses itself in an ongoing process in which the believer is strenuously involved." What does that mean in your own walk of faith?

How do we "work out" our salvation—both as individuals and *corporately* as the Body of Christ?

Read Philippians 2:14-18 (NIV).

Paul seems to divide the world into two categories here—the children of God (us) and the rest of the world (them). List his descriptors of each group.

What does he say the "stars" will be doing?

How do we "hold out the word of life" both individually and corporately?

What if all this is not [about] new and more stringent rules for us to observe but rather a picture of the way God is? Of course, we are forever getting confused into thinking that scripture is mainly about what we are supposed to do rather than a picture of who God is.

(Resident Aliens, 87)

continued

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VIDEO CLIP* – *Sister Act*

How would you describe what took place in that convent?
In that church? In the community?

Which *specific verses* from Philipians 1-2 apply to this story?

If this tale took place here in our town, how might the storyline go?

What does the character of God--*who* He is and *what* He's like—have to do with both the screen story and *our* story?

THEO - going to God in prayer and song

ACTION ITEM - Read John 17, Jesus' prayer for his disciples.
Pray about what it means for Jesus to *send us into the world*. (John 17:18)

Next Week - Extra-terrestrial Living

*Note: It is illegal to show a clip from a movie in a public gathering without licensing. [Christian Video Licensing International](http://www.cvli.org/cvli/index.cfm) at <http://www.cvli.org/cvli/index.cfm>, a partner firm with CCLI, the worship song licensing company familiar to many churches, provides such licensing.

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Week Five - Extra-terrestrial Living - Philippians 3

INTRO - getting to know one another

What do you know, either from your own or a friend's experience, about expatriate living?

What's easy about it? What's tough?

RETRO - discovering from the past

Read Philippians 3:12-21 in *The Message*. Any initial reactions?

Now read Philippians 3:1-11 in other versions, including the *NIV*.

We can easily see how Jews of Paul's day regarded human religious regulations.

How do we sometimes put our confidence in man-made regulations rather than in the character of God—*who* He is and *what* He's like?

In what ways are we Lutherans sometimes like those "good" Jews?

Are there traditions that we've clung to that may take our eyes off of relationship with Christ?

Read Philippians 3:8. "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things..." (*NIV*)

What does Paul seem to understand about the character of God—*who* He is and *what* He's like?

Read Philippians 3:12-16

What did Paul mean by "press on toward the goal?" (*NIV*, v. 14)

How does that translate to our lives?

What does pressing on look like?

For what purpose did Christ "take hold" of Paul (v. 12)?

See Acts 9:10-16.

How might this story apply to us here in our congregation as we think about reaching people who don't know Christ?

continued

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Read Philippians 3:17-21

What does it mean to have our “citizenship in heaven?”

How would focusing on our “citizenship in heaven” affect how we live as individuals? As families? As the Body of Christ here in our town?

How does *pressing on* and *taking hold* fit in with such extra-terrestrial living?

“The church is a colony, an island of one culture in the middle of another. In baptism our citizenship is transferred from one dominion to another, and we become, in whatever culture we find ourselves, resident aliens....The message that sustains the colony is not for itself but for the whole world—the colony having significance only as God’s means for saving the whole world. The colony is God’s means of a major offensive against the world, for the world.”

(*Resident Aliens*, 12, 51)

THEO - going to God in prayer and song

ACTION ITEM

Think about Jesus’ directive that we are to be salt, light, a city on a hill. (Matthew 5:13-16)
How do those Sermon on the Mount images align with Philippians 3?

Next Week - Actually Going

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Week Six - Actually Going - Philippians 4

INTRO - getting to know one another.

Have you ever experienced a situation in which the Gospel was shared in a personal—maybe even one-on-one—manner? What was that like?

RETRO - discovering from the past

Read Philippians 4:4-9 from *The Message*.

Any initial reactions? Now read the whole chapter in another version.

See Philippians 4:1 in NIV. Note the “therefore” of v. 1.

To what previous concept/s—throughout the whole book—may Paul be referring?

Philippians 4:2-9 lists the ways in which Paul wants to make sure the Philippians continue to “stay on track.” What are they?

Where do you hear the gospel in these words? Recall the “mission” to which God had called Paul — Acts 9:15-16.

See Acts 20:22-25, 36-38. What did such resolution to “complete the task” cost Paul?

How did he balance the rewards and the cost?

What might it take for us in our church to take the Gospel outside our doors and into the community surrounding us?

What are the impediments?

How might understanding God’s character—*who* He is and *what* He’s like—transform the way we live our lives both individually and corporately? (See Romans 12:1-2.)

THEO - going to God in prayer and song

What’s Next?

In grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments, the mission of the LCMS is vigorously to make known the love of Christ.

Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Mission Statement

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