

## Crosswalk Communities Discussion Guides January 15th

### Icebreaker Questions (Pick at the least one question, but use as many as your group feels comfortable)

1. Have you ever had an experience of visiting a different culture? What was that experience like? What was the most difficult part to adjust to?

### Bible Study Questions

1. Pastor Michael talked about the Bible containing occasional documents. In order to understand them, we need to pay attention to the culture that come from. What do you think of that? Does it intimidate you or encourage you?
2. **Case Study: Philippians 1:27-2:18 (Will apply both literary and cultural context)**
  - *What can you find out about the historical background of the book of Philippians? Consult study Bible notes, online resources, etc...*
  - *Read the entire book in one setting. Look for information on these things...*
    - *What do you notice about the recipients themselves (whether Jew or Greek, wealthy or slaves; their problems, attitudes, etc...)*
    - *What do you notice about Paul's attitudes?*
    - *Are there any specific things mentioned as to the specific occasion of the letter?*
    - *What themes do you see in the letter?*
    - *What are the letter's natural logical divisions?*  
(Sometimes chapters and verses align with logical divisions, sometimes they don't)
  - *Once you have gained the big picture of the Epistle, then focus on a smaller part. For this exercise, we will focus on 1:27-2:18. Read through the passage twice. Again, ask the question: What questions is Paul answering?*
    - Now we will begin to look at Paul's answer. *In 1:27-2:18, trace his point. Key to studying Epistles: think paragraphs. What is the point of each paragraph?*

- *In one sentence, summarize each paragraph*
- *(Example: Paragraph 1: Stand firm in the face of suffering. Paragraph 2: Pursue unity. Paragraph 3: Relate to each other like Jesus, who gave up himself for you.*
- *In one sentence, why is Paul saying this at this point in the letter? How does it contribute to the argument that he is making?*
- *Once the argument has been traced, summarize the content.*  
(example: In Philippians 1:28-2:18, the problem is disunity in the church under a time of persecution. The answer is for them to pursue unity and humble submission to each other).
- Now we get to address the application question.
  - **Rule of Thumb:** A text will never mean to us what it didn't mean to the original audience.
  - **2nd Rule of Thumb:** Whenever we share the same situation as the original audience, God's words for them are true for us.
  - Question: *Looking over Philippians 1:27-2:18, where are the points of contact between the original situation and our situation today? How are they similar and how are they different?*
  - *In light of that question, what is Paul saying to Christians today?*

## January 15th: Getting the Most out of the Bible Don't Ignore the Culture

Remember, the goal of good Bible study is to discover what the author intended for his original audience. This is the reoccurring theme in this series. Once we can figure this out, then we can jump ahead to application.

### Discovering the Cultural Context

- **The Bible is made up of occasional documents: they were addressed to a specific group of people in a specific time and culture**
  - Ask questions of each book. Who is writing it? Who is the audience? What is the purpose? These questions should be asked any time that a book of the Bible is studied.
- **Cultures in the Bible**
  - **Ancient Culture: God is addressing the Israelite people teaching them who he is in comparison to the polytheism of the surrounding cultures.** We need to think about the questions that the audience is asking. They want to know about who God is. They want to know if God can be trusted. They weren't asking questions about the exact age of the earth.
  - **Jewish culture: One that highly valued the temple, the land, and the law:** Knowing these values help us understand why Jesus came into conflict with the religious leaders and why he was put to death.
  - **Greek Culture: God is teaching people how to understand Jesus and obey him in a top down culture that prioritized the powerful.**
- **How to discern whether a command is limited to a specific culture:** Some commands apply to everyone and other commands are addressed to a specific cultural situation. There is no absolute way to tell, but these questions help steer us in the right direction.
  - **Is it repeated?** If a command is repeated multiple places and in multiple settings, then it is much more likely that it is meant to be a command for everyone.
  - **Is it contradicted elsewhere in the Bible?** If it is contradicted, then it is more likely to be cultural.
  - **Does it challenge the culture?** There are times in the Bible in which the author tolerates a cultural value in order to not cause a distraction from Jesus. An example is Ephesians 6:5-9 in which Paul seems to affirm slavery. However, he is

not affirming it but tolerating it for a time. However, when a command contradicts the culture, then we should take notice.

- **When the command is cultural, study the principle behind it:** Do not ignore culturally limited commands. Take the time to ask about why that command is there and to learn from the principle behind it.

### Conclusion

Studying the culture isn't easy and it takes work. However, it is an important part of understanding the intention of the author. We live in a special point in history in which we have access to cultural information that people didn't have generations ago. To whom much is given, much is expected. May we steward that well.