

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 61 OF 104

Counting the Cost

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Job 20-30
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 70
Gospels	Luke 9:18-62
General New Testament	Philippians 1

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to make the cost explicit, because the readings do. Job holds his integrity when it has already cost him everything and buys nothing back. The psalmist prays five honest verses without a résumé. Jesus follows Peter's confession with a cross, and then hands one to everybody else, daily. And Paul, in chains, calls suffering a gift granted alongside faith. A class that leaves with a clear sense of the price is far better prepared than one that leaves inspired.

Doctrinally, three matters deserve attention. Luke 9:27 is a kingdom text: the kingdom was established on Pentecost, Christ reigns now, and nothing earthly and political remains to be set up. The transfiguration settles authority: the Father says hear Him, and Moses and Elijah withdraw, which is exactly what Hebrews 1:1-2 and Colossians 2:14-17 teach about the Old Covenant. And Philippians 1:6 should be handled together with 2:12 and 3:12-14, so nobody leaves thinking that a Christian cannot fall.

Formationally, the thread is the word first. Two of the three men on the road in Luke 9 want to follow, and both attach a condition beginning with first. Job's friends wanted their theory intact first. Most of us are not refusing Christ; we are deferring Him. Ask your class to finish this sentence out loud, and then to say how long it has already been true: Lord, I will follow You, but first.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Luke 9:18-62. It is the hinge of the Gospel and the richest hour of the week. Spend the first half on the confession, the cross, and the transfiguration, and the second half on the three men at the end of the chapter. Settle the kingdom question in 9:27 as you pass through it.

Second session: Take up Philippians 1. Read verses 12 through 26 aloud and let the class feel that they are hearing a prisoner. Give real time to verse 21 and ask people to finish the sentence for themselves. Close with verses 27 through 30 and the gift of suffering.

The other two readings: Assign Job 20-30 and Psalm 70. Point the class to Job 28 and ask them to read it as a poem rather than an argument, and to mark verse 28. Tell them Psalm 70 is short enough to memorize in ten minutes and challenge them to do it before Sunday.

Where Is Wisdom Found

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The third cycle of speeches is where the friends' argument collapses under its own weight. Zophar gives one last confident description of the short lived prosperity of the wicked, and Job answers him in chapter 21 with something devastatingly simple: go outside and look. The wicked grow old, increase in power, see their children established, spend their days in wealth, and go down to the grave in peace. Job is not celebrating this. He is saying that any theology which cannot account for it is a theology built on wishing.

Eliphaz responds in chapter 22 by doing what desperate arguers always do. Having no evidence, he manufactures some: you have taken pledges from your brother for no reason, stripped the naked of their clothing, withheld bread from the hungry, sent widows away empty. None of it is true, and the reader knows it. Bildad's third speech is six verses long, which is the sound of a man with nothing left to say. Zophar never speaks again at all.

Job's closing speeches in this reading are some of the finest material in the book. Chapter 26 describes a God who hangs the earth on nothing and whose ways are only the fringes of His power. Chapter 27 is an oath of integrity. Chapter 28 is a magnificent poem about human ingenuity in mining the earth for treasure and human helplessness in locating wisdom, ending with the only answer there is: the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. Chapters 29 and 30 are memory and grief laid side by side, the honored elder at the gate and the man now mocked by the sons of fools.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This reading covers the third and final cycle of speeches, which breaks down: Eliphaz speaks (22), Bildad manages only six verses (25), and Zophar never speaks a third time.
- Eliphaz's accusations in 22:5–9 are fabricated. The reader knows from chapters 1 and 2, and from Job's own record in chapter 29, that they are false.
- Job 28 is often treated as the hinge of the book: a self contained wisdom poem that stops arguing and simply asks where wisdom is located.
- Chapter 29 describes the role of a respected elder sitting in the gate, where legal and civic matters were settled. Job's fall is social and legal as well as physical.
- Mining imagery in chapter 28 reflects real ancient practice: shafts cut far from habitation, ropes, fire set against rock, and precious stones recovered from darkness.
- The prosperity of the wicked is a recurring biblical problem, addressed also in Psalm 37, Psalm 73, Jeremiah 12:1–2, and Habakkuk 1.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In chapter 21 Job describes wicked men who prosper, raise families, enjoy music, and die without suffering. How does that plain observation demolish the friends' formula, and how do you handle the same observation when you see it at work today?*

The friends' system requires that the wicked suffer visibly in this life. Job simply reports that they often do not. This is not cynicism; it is honesty, and it is exactly the same honesty that drives Psalm 73, where Asaph nearly loses his footing over it. Any doctrine that must ignore what everyone can see will eventually be abandoned by people who keep their eyes open, which is why Job's realism is a service to faith rather than a threat to it.

The biblical answer is not that the observation is wrong but that the accounting is not finished. Psalm 73 turns at verse 17, when Asaph goes into the sanctuary and considers their end. Second Thessalonians 1:6–10 and Romans 2:5–8 say plainly that the books close later, not now. Ask the class where they have quietly envied someone who prospers without God, and then ask what Psalm 73:25–26 would look like in their week.

Question 2. *Job 23:8–10 says he goes forward and backward and to the left and right and cannot perceive God anywhere, and then says God knows the way that he takes and that he will come forth as gold. How does a person keep walking the right road during a season when God seems completely absent?*

Job describes the absence precisely: he looks in all four directions and God is not there. Notice what he does with it. He does not conclude that God is not real, or that God does not care, or that he may as well quit. He says God knows the way that I take, and he adds in verse 11 that his foot has held fast to God's steps and that he has treasured the words of His mouth more than his necessary food.

That is the answer to the question. When feeling goes, obedience and Scripture are what remain, and they are enough to walk on. Tell the class plainly that most of the Christian life is lived in Job 23, not on a mountaintop. Ask what specific practices would hold them steady in a year when God seems silent, and press them to name ones they are actually doing now, since nobody builds those habits during the drought.

Question 3. *Chapters 29 and 30 set Job's honored past beside his humiliated present in painful detail. When is remembering better days healthy, and when does it become the thing that keeps a person from living in the days he actually has?*

The value is real. Job's memory of chapter 29 is not vanity; it is evidence, and it matters that he can recall a life of genuine mercy. Remembering God's past goodness is commanded throughout Scripture, and the psalmists do it constantly when they are in trouble. A person who cannot remember any good day has nothing to reason from.

The danger is that memory becomes a residence. Ecclesiastes 7:10 warns against asking why the former days were better, and says it is not wise to ask. The line falls where remembering stops fueling hope and starts fueling bitterness, where a man measures today only by a yardstick he can no longer reach. Ask the class whether they know someone living in a previous decade, and what one thing would help them come back.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Job 28 as a single poem. Trace what men will do to find silver, gold, and sapphires, and then note the question in verses 12 and 20 and the answer in verse 28. Compare Proverbs 9:10 and Colossians 2:3.*

The poem describes men sinking shafts, cutting through rock, overturning mountains, and bringing hidden things to light, and it says no bird of prey has seen that path. Then it asks twice where wisdom can be found, and answers that the deep says it is not in me, the sea says it is not with me, and it cannot be bought with gold. Verse 28 lands it: the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding. Proverbs 9:10 says the same, and Colossians 2:3 says all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ.

2. *List the specific things Job says he did in 29:12–17 for the poor, the fatherless, the widow, the blind, the lame, and the stranger. Compare James 1:27. How many of those categories exist within ten miles of your house?*

He delivered the poor who cried out, and the fatherless with no helper; the dying blessed him; he caused the widow's heart to sing; he was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame; he was a father to the poor; he searched out the case he did not know; and he broke the fangs of the wicked. James 1:27 defines pure religion as visiting orphans and widows in their trouble and keeping oneself unspotted. Every category on the list exists within a few miles of nearly every reader.

3. *In 27:2–6 Job swears he will not let go of his integrity or speak wickedness while he lives. Compare Acts 24:16. Is claiming a clear conscience the same thing as claiming to be without sin, and how do you know from the text?*

No, they are not the same. Job claims integrity, not sinlessness; earlier in the book he offers sacrifices and speaks of his own iniquity (7:20–21; 13:26). Paul says in Acts 24:16 that he strives to have a conscience without offense toward God and men, and elsewhere calls himself chief of sinners. A clear conscience means no unrepented, unaddressed sin is being concealed, which is exactly what Job's friends were accusing him of hiding.

4. *Job says in 23:10 that when God has tested him he will come forth as gold. Read Malachi 3:2–3 and 1 Peter 1:6–7. Trace the refining image through all three, paying attention to who does the work and who watches the fire.*

Malachi says the Lord sits as a refiner and purifier of silver, watching the metal. Peter says the trial of faith, more precious than gold that perishes, is tested by fire so it may be found to praise and honor and glory. Job says that

when God has tested him he shall come forth as gold. In all three the fire is not an accident and the refiner never walks away from the furnace.

5. Choose one item from Job's list in chapter 29, the poor, the fatherless, the widow, the blind, or the stranger, and do that one thing this week for a specific person whose name you can write down now.

Answers will vary. Insist on the name written down in the room. Job's list is striking because every item is a specific person in trouble, not a cause or a category, and imitating him means starting with one.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Eliphaz's charges in 22:5–9 are false accusations invented to defend a theory. Use them as a warning about how quickly a confident person will assume the worst about a suffering one.
- Bildad's remark in 25:4–6 that man is a maggot is sometimes quoted to teach inherited depravity. It is Bildad speaking, and even at face value it is about human frailty before a holy God, not inherited guilt (Ezekiel 18:20).
- Job's defense of his own integrity is not a claim of sinless perfection, and it should not be used to teach that a person can live without sin (1 John 1:8–10).
- The prosperity of the wicked needs the whole biblical answer, not a quick one. Take the class to Psalm 73 and to the judgment passages, and resist the temptation to promise that the wicked always fall in this life.

Make Haste to Help Me

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 70 is a small psalm with a large lesson. It is essentially Psalm 40:13–17 lifted out and set apart as its own prayer, which tells you something about how Israel used the Psalter: portions were extracted and reused the way a congregation uses a single stanza of a familiar hymn. Whatever its original setting, the psalm is designed for a moment when a person has no time to compose anything.

The structure is simple. Verse 1 is the request: make haste to deliver me. Verses 2 and 3 ask that the people seeking his life be turned back and confounded. Verse 4 widens out, asking that all who seek God rejoice and be glad and continually say, let God be magnified. Verse 5 returns to the man himself: I am poor and needy, make haste, do not delay. It opens and closes with the same plea, and that repetition is the whole emotional architecture.

What a class should take from it is permission. Not every prayer must be arranged, balanced, and eloquent. Scripture contains prayers of many chapters and prayers of five words, and God evidently accepts both. Notice too that even at his most desperate, the psalmist has room for one verse about other people and about God's honor. Desperation did not make him entirely self absorbed, which is worth pointing out gently.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 70 is attributed to David, addressed to the chief musician, and marked “to bring to remembrance,” a note it shares with Psalm 38.
- It repeats Psalm 40:13–17 with minor variations, most notably using God where Psalm 40 uses Lord in several places.
- It is an individual lament, the most common category in the Psalter, and follows the standard pattern of plea, complaint, and confidence, compressed into five verses.
- The request that enemies be turned back in shame is an appeal to God for justice, characteristic of Old Covenant prayer (compare Romans 12:19 for the Christian's posture).
- Hebrew poetry often repeats a line at the beginning and end to frame a piece. Here the frame is the plea for haste.
- “Poor and needy” is covenant language for the person who has no resource but God, a phrase used often in the Psalms of the righteous under pressure.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Three times in five verses the psalmist tells God to hurry. Is it right to pray that way, and what does the urgency reveal about how well he knows the One he is talking to?*

It is right, and Scripture is full of it. The psalms ask how long more than a dozen times, the widow in Luke 18 wears out a judge, and the martyrs in Revelation 6:10 cry how long, O Lord. Urgency in prayer is not disrespect; it is the sound of someone who actually believes the person he is talking to can do something and can do it now. The people who pray politely about everything usually expect very little.

What the urgency reveals is intimacy. You do not tell a stranger to hurry. Balance it with 2 Peter 3:9, which says the Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some count slackness, and with Habakkuk 2:3, where the vision waits for an appointed time. God is never late, and He has never once told His people they may not say they are afraid.

Question 2. *In verse 4 the psalmist stops praying about himself long enough to ask that everyone who seeks God rejoice and say continually that God is great. What does that look like in practice, praying for the whole congregation while you are the one going under?*

It looks like a man in deep water taking a breath to think about someone else. Practically, it means that intercession does not have to wait until my own crisis is resolved, which is fortunate, because for some people the crisis never fully resolves. Paul prayed constantly for churches from prison. Job prayed for his friends while still sitting in ashes (42:10), and Scripture notes that the Lord turned his captivity when he did.

The practical suggestion for the class is small and effective: keep one other person's name in every prayer, especially during your own hard season. It will not fix the crisis, and it will keep the crisis from becoming the only thing you can see. Ask whether anyone in the room has experienced that, and let them say it in their own words.

Question 3. *The last verse is a plain confession: I am poor and needy. When was the last time you prayed like that, with no accomplishments, no explanations, and no résumé attached to the request?*

Most adults have decades of practice presenting a competent version of themselves, and it bleeds into prayer. We explain, we justify, we list what we have already tried, we make a case. The psalmist says five words: I am poor and needy. The tax collector in Luke 18:13 says seven: God be merciful to me a sinner. Both go home heard.

This is a good place to be quiet and let people think. Then ask what makes that kind of praying so difficult. The honest answer, for most, is that it requires admitting need to Someone we suspect is keeping score. First John 3:20 answers that directly: God is greater than our heart and knows all things.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Set Psalm 70 beside Psalm 40:13–17 and mark every difference, including the name used for God. Why might the same words be lifted out and given their own place in the songbook?*

The differences are minor: Psalm 70 opens with an added plea to make haste, and it substitutes God for Lord in several places, and the closing line asks the Lord not to delay where Psalm 40 says the Lord thinks upon me. The extraction suggests Israel used the Psalter as a living songbook, drawing out a portion that fit a moment, exactly as a congregation might sing one stanza of a longer hymn in a particular service.

2. *Divide the psalm in two columns: what the psalmist asks God to do about his enemies, and what he asks God to do for those who love Him. Which column is longer, and what does the balance suggest about his priorities?*

Two verses concern the enemies and one verse concerns those who seek God, but the psalm ends with God's deliverance rather than the enemies' ruin. The balance shows a man who wants his enemies stopped, but wants God magnified more. That is the difference between a prayer for justice and a prayer for revenge.

3. *Verse 4 says, let God be magnified. Compare Philippians 1:20, where Paul says Christ will be magnified in his body whether by life or by death. What does it mean to magnify something that is already infinitely great?*

To magnify is to make something appear larger to the observer, not to increase it in itself. A telescope does not enlarge a star; it enlarges the star in your sight. Paul means that his body, whether living or dying, would make Christ look as large to the people watching as He actually is. That is a workable definition of a Christian life.

4. *Look up four short prayers: Nehemiah 2:4, Matthew 14:30, Luke 18:13, and Luke 23:42. Write each one out. What do all four have in common besides brevity?*

Nehemiah prays a sentence while standing before a king, Peter prays three words while sinking, the tax collector prays one line while beating his breast, and the thief prays one request while dying. All four are spoken in a moment of urgent need by someone who cannot manage anything longer, all four are directed to God without preamble, and all four are answered. Length is not the measure of a prayer.

5. *Learn Psalm 70 by heart this week. It takes about ten minutes. Then pray it, word for word, the next time you feel panic rising, and write down afterward what happened to the panic.*

Answers will vary. Memorizing is the assignment because panic does not leave time to look things up. Ask the following week whether anyone used it, and what they noticed. Many will report that saying words given by God interrupted the loop of words they were generating themselves.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not let anyone conclude that short prayers are second rate or that long prayers are more spiritual. Jesus warned about praying to be heard for many words (Matthew 6:7).
- The request that enemies be ashamed and turned back is an appeal to God's justice, not a license for personal retaliation (Romans 12:19).
- "Make haste" is the language of human urgency, not a statement that God is slow. Pair it with 2 Peter 3:9 so the class does not come away thinking God must be prodded.

Set Toward Jerusalem

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

This passage is the turning point of Luke's Gospel. Up to now the question has been building: who is this? Luke has asked it through a storm, through Herod, through crowds. Here Jesus asks it Himself, and Peter answers. And the moment the confession is made, Jesus begins to teach what the Christ has come to do: be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day. Then He extends it to everyone. If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

The transfiguration follows about a week later, and it functions as divine confirmation of everything just said. Moses, who represents the Law, and Elijah, who represents the Prophets, appear in glory and speak with Jesus about His decease, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Peter, characteristically, wants to build three tabernacles, as if the three were peers. The cloud interrupts him mid sentence. This is My beloved Son, hear Him. Then Moses and Elijah are gone, and Jesus is found alone.

The rest of the chapter is a study in how slowly it all sank in. The disciples cannot heal a boy. They argue about which of them is the greatest. They try to shut down someone working outside their circle. James and John want to call down fire on a village that would not host them. And when Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem, three men on the road each bring a condition. Luke lays the glory of the mountain and the smallness of the disciples side by side on purpose.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Luke 9:51 is the structural hinge of the Gospel. From here to chapter 19 Jesus is traveling toward Jerusalem, and the shadow of the cross lies over everything.
- The kingdom Jesus says some would live to see (9:27) was established on Pentecost (Daniel 2:44; Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13). Christ reigns now at God's right hand.
- Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets, both of which pointed to Christ and both of which are fulfilled in Him (Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:44).
- The word Luke uses for what Jesus would accomplish at Jerusalem is *exodos*, departure, quietly linking the cross to the deliverance Moses led.
- Samaritans and Jews shared a long hostility, and a village on the pilgrim route might well refuse hospitality to travelers heading for the Jerusalem temple.
- In that culture, "let me first bury my father" may well have meant remaining at home until an aging father died, which could be years. The request is for indefinite delay, not a single funeral.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In 9:23 Jesus says that anyone who follows Him must deny himself and take up his cross daily. A cross was an instrument of execution, not an inconvenience. What does daily cross bearing look like in an ordinary week, and what does it emphatically not mean?*

Every listener knew what a cross was; they had seen men carrying crossbeams to their own executions on Roman roads. To take up a cross is to walk toward death to yourself. The word *daily*, which Luke alone records, keeps it from being a single heroic moment and makes it a Tuesday morning decision. In practice it means the ordinary, repeated surrender of what I want to what Christ says: the hour, the money, the retort, the appetite, the reputation.

Say clearly what it does not mean, because the phrase has been badly worn. A cross is not a chronic illness, a difficult coworker, or a bad back, though all of those are real burdens. Those things happen to us; a cross is taken

up voluntarily. Ask each person to name one thing they choose, deliberately, this week, because they belong to Christ, and that they would not otherwise choose.

Question 2. *On the mountain Moses and Elijah appear and speak with Jesus, and Peter proposes three equal shelters. The voice from the cloud says, This is My beloved Son, hear Him. Why does the Father say hear Him rather than hear them, and what does that settle about the Law and the Prophets?*

The Father corrects Peter's arrangement. Peter wanted three shelters, equal honors for the Lawgiver, the Prophet, and the Son. The voice from the cloud says one name and gives one command, and when it stops, Moses and Elijah are gone and Jesus is found alone. Luke is careful about the sequence: the two who represented the old order withdraw, and the Son remains.

This settles the authority question for the whole Bible. The Law and the Prophets were God speaking, and they pointed here (Luke 24:44). But Hebrews 1:1-2 says God has now spoken to us in His Son, and Colossians 2:14-17 says the Old Covenant has been taken out of the way. We do not go to Moses for our worship, our law, or our practice; we hear Him. Teach it plainly, because a great deal of confusion in congregations comes from reaching back into the Old Covenant for authority Christ never gave.

Question 3. *Three men encounter Jesus on the road in 9:57-62, and two of them have entirely reasonable reasons to wait. Which of the three sounds most like you, and what is the specific thing you are waiting on before you follow all the way?*

The first man volunteers with enthusiasm and is told that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head, which is a warning that the road has no comforts. The second is called and asks first to bury his father, which in that setting likely meant waiting out an aging parent's remaining years. The third wants to say goodbye to his household, the same request Elisha made and was granted in 1 Kings 19:20, and here it is refused. Jesus is not abolishing family duty; He is exposing the word first.

That is the common thread worth pressing: each man is willing, and two of them attach a condition that begins with the word first. Ask the class to finish the sentence honestly: I will follow You, Lord, but first. Then ask what the honest timeline is on that first, and whether it has moved in the last five years.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Luke 9:27 says some standing there would not taste death till they saw the kingdom of God. Read Mark 9:1, Daniel 2:44, Acts 2:1-4 and 2:47, and Colossians 1:13. When did the kingdom come, who is in it, and where does Christ reign now?*

The kingdom came with power on Pentecost, as Mark 9:1 predicted and Acts 2 records, and Acts 2:47 says the Lord added the saved to the church daily. Daniel 2:44 said it would be set up in the days of those kings and would never be destroyed. Colossians 1:13 says Christians have already been conveyed into it. Christ reigns now, at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33-36; 1 Corinthians 15:24-25), and there is no earthly political kingdom still awaiting establishment.

2. *Trace the transfiguration in 9:28-36: who is present, what Moses and Elijah discuss with Jesus, what Peter proposes, what the cloud does, and what the voice says. Then read 2 Peter 1:16-18 and note what Peter says he learned there.*

Peter, James, and John go up with Jesus to pray. Moses and Elijah appear in glory and speak of His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Peter, half asleep, proposes three tabernacles, not knowing what he was saying. A cloud overshadows them and they are afraid, and a voice says, This is My beloved Son, hear Him. When it ceases, Jesus is alone. Second Peter 1:16-18 says Peter was an eyewitness of His majesty and heard the voice from the Excellent Glory, and that this confirms the prophetic word.

3. *Luke records two failures of the disciples back to back in 9:46-50: a dispute about who is greatest, and an attempt to stop a man casting out demons because he was not one of their group. Compare Philippians 2:3-4. What single attitude lies underneath both failures?*

Pride, in two directions. The dispute about greatness is pride looking inward and ranking ourselves against each other; the attempt to stop the outsider is pride looking outward and defending our territory. Philippians 2:3-4 answers both: let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem

others better than himself. Jesus answers the first by setting a child beside Him and the second by saying he who is not against us is on our side.

4. *Luke 9:51 says Jesus steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. Compare Isaiah 50:7 and Hebrews 12:2. What did He know was waiting there, and what does that tell you about the nature of His obedience?*

He knew exactly what was there: He had just told the disciples plainly that He would be delivered into the hands of men, killed, and raised (9:22, 44). Isaiah 50:7 says the Servant set His face like a flint because the Lord God would help Him. Hebrews 12:2 says that for the joy set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame. His obedience was not blind and it was not reluctant; it was informed, deliberate, and set.

5. *Jesus says in 9:62 that no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. Name what you keep looking back at, and take one concrete, irreversible step this week to stop.*

Answers will vary. A plowman who looks back cuts a crooked furrow, which is the picture. The requirement that the step be concrete and irreversible is what separates this from a resolution: a number deleted, an account closed, a resignation given, a conversation held. Ask for the step, not the sentiment.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Luke 9:27 is a kingdom passage. Be plain that the kingdom was established on Pentecost and that Christ reigns now, leaving no room for a future earthly reign still awaited.
- The transfiguration gives no warrant for venerating Moses and Elijah or for praying to anyone but God. The Father's correction of Peter's three tabernacles is the point, and there is one Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).
- The request of James and John to call down fire is rebuked. Do not let zeal be confused with Christlikeness; the passage explicitly separates them.
- "Let the dead bury their dead" is not a repudiation of family responsibility, which the New Testament elsewhere commands (1 Timothy 5:4, 8). It exposes indefinite delay disguised as duty.
- The disciples' failure with the demon possessed boy belongs to an era when confirming signs accompanied the word. Those signs served their purpose and ceased when revelation was complete (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4; 1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

To Live Is Christ**PASSAGE OVERVIEW**

Philippians is the warmest of Paul's letters, written to a congregation he founded on the second preaching trip with a jailer, a businesswoman, and a slave girl among its first members (Acts 16). He writes from custody, probably in Rome, and the striking thing about chapter 1 is the almost total absence of self pity. He thanks God for them every time he remembers them, he prays with joy, and he calls their support from the first day until now a fellowship in the gospel, a genuine partnership rather than charity.

Verses 12 through 26 are his report, and they invert every expectation. The things that happened to him have turned out for the furtherance of the gospel. The whole palace guard has heard why he is chained. Brethren have grown bold because of his imprisonment rather than intimidated by it. Even the preachers who are using his confinement as an opportunity to advance themselves cannot stop him rejoicing, because Christ is being preached. And then the famous sentence: for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain, followed by a man genuinely torn between the two and choosing to stay for the sake of others.

The chapter closes with the first command in the letter: only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Whether he comes or not, he wants to hear that they stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, not terrified by their adversaries. Then he says something that a comfortable church needs to hear slowly: it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake. Suffering is listed as a gift, given alongside faith.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Philippi was a Roman colony in Macedonia, and the church there was the first Paul established in Europe (Acts 16:11-40).
- Paul writes as a prisoner, most likely during the Roman imprisonment of Acts 28, around A.D. 61 or 62.
- The letter is partly a thank you note. The Philippians had sent support repeatedly (4:15-18), and Epaphroditus had carried their most recent gift and nearly died doing it (2:25-30).
- The greeting to "bishops and deacons" shows a plurality of qualified men serving in each congregation; the New Testament uses elder, bishop or overseer, and shepherd or pastor for the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
- The palace guard, or praetorium, refers to the imperial guard. Paul was chained to soldiers in rotation, which is how the gospel reached them.
- Joy is the running theme of the letter, appearing in some form more than a dozen times, all of it written by a man who did not know whether he would live.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. In 1:12-18 Paul says his imprisonment advanced the gospel and that he rejoices even when Christ is preached from envy and selfish ambition. Given that he condemns a different gospel in the strongest terms in Galatians 1:8-9, where exactly is the line between a wrong motive and a wrong message?

Make the distinction precisely, because it matters. In Philippians the men Paul describes are preaching the true gospel with rotten motives, hoping to add affliction to his chains. In Galatians the men are preaching a different gospel, adding circumcision and law keeping as requirements for justification, and Paul says let them be accursed. Motive is between a man and God, and a bad one does not corrupt a true message; content is public, and a false message damns whoever believes it.

The practical use of this is enormous in a congregation. It means we can be genuinely glad when the truth is preached by someone we do not like, or by someone who is glad we are not preaching it. It also means we cannot be glad about error simply because the person teaching it is sincere and pleasant. Ask the class which of those two mistakes they are personally more likely to make.

Question 2. *Philippians 1:21 says, for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Finish the sentence honestly for yourself: for to me to live is what? Then ask what would have to change for Paul's version to be true of you.*

Let the sentence sit before anyone answers. For to me to live is my family. My work. My retirement. My reputation. Being needed. None of those are evil, and that is the difficulty. Paul is not saying that nothing else exists in his life; he is saying that if you take Christ out of it, there is nothing left worth calling life, which is why death is straightforward gain to him and not loss.

Then ask the harder half. If living is Christ, dying is gain. If living is anything else, dying is pure subtraction, which is exactly why death terrifies most people. Ask what would have to change for Paul's sentence to be honest on their lips, and expect the answers to be about time and money, because those are where a life's center always shows.

Question 3. *In 1:27–30 Paul asks them to stand fast in one spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel, and then says suffering has been granted to them as a gift. What does striving together actually require of a congregation, and what most often breaks it?*

Striving together is a single word in the Greek, the picture of athletes or soldiers contending side by side. It requires a common object, which Paul names as the faith of the gospel, and it requires that people who did not choose one another act as one. That means shared work rather than parallel attendance: teaching, visiting, giving, and evangelism actually done together, with the same aim.

What breaks it is almost never doctrine in the first instance. It is selfish ambition and conceit, which is exactly what Paul addresses in the next chapter (2:3). Congregations divide over preference, offense, and position, and then find doctrinal language for it afterward. Ask the class to name, without naming people, the kind of thing that has broken unity in churches they have known, and then ask what 2:3–4 would have prevented.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Philippians 1:1 greets the saints with the bishops and deacons. Read Acts 20:17 and 20:28, 1 Timothy 3:1–13, and Titus 1:5–9. How many elders did a New Testament congregation have, what are they called, and who is qualified to serve?*

Each congregation had a plurality of elders, never one man over a church. They are called elders, bishops or overseers, and shepherds or pastors, all of the same men in Acts 20:17 and 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1–4. The qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 describe men of proven character who are the husband of one wife, with faithful children, able to teach, not new converts. Deacons are qualified servants, also men, described in 1 Timothy 3:8–13.

2. *Philippians 1:6 says He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. Read it beside Philippians 2:12–13 and 3:12–14, and beside Hebrews 3:12–14. Is this an unconditional guarantee about every individual, and how does the rest of the letter answer that?*

It is not an unconditional guarantee about every individual regardless of what he does. Paul is expressing confidence in a faithful congregation, and the same letter tells them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, describes Paul himself as not yet having attained but pressing on, and warns about those whose end is destruction (3:18–19). Hebrews 3:12–14 says we are partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. God will certainly finish what He began in everyone who remains in Christ; He does not finish it over a person's abandonment.

3. *List everything Paul actually prays for in 1:9–11. Notice that he asks for love to abound in knowledge and discernment rather than for comfort or release. How would your prayer list change if it matched his?*

He prays that their love may abound still more in knowledge and all discernment, that they may approve the things that are excellent, that they may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, and that they may be filled with

the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. Answers will vary on the comparison, and most students will notice that their own lists are dominated by health and circumstances.

4. *Trace Paul's situation in 1:12–14: where he is, what happened to the palace guard, and what the brethren did as a result. What does that suggest about God using circumstances no one would have chosen?*

He is in chains in Rome, and the result is that his imprisonment for Christ has become evident throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren have become confident and much more bold to speak the word without fear. God used a prison cell to reach the emperor's own soldiers and to embolden a church. It suggests that the circumstance we would never have chosen is often the very one God intends to use, which is exactly what the Philippians needed to hear about their own hardships.

5. *The Philippians partnered financially in gospel work from the first day (1:5; 4:15–16). This week give, sacrificially and specifically, to a work whose results you will never personally see, and tell no one you did it.*

Answers will vary. The two requirements, that the results be invisible to the giver and that no one be told, are what keep it from being a transaction (Matthew 6:1–4). Support for preaching in another place, for a struggling congregation, or for benevolence handled by the elders all qualify.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Philippians 1:6 must not be taught as unconditional security. God completes what He begins in those who continue in Christ; the same letter commands them to work out their salvation and warns of those who walk as enemies of the cross (2:12; 3:18–19; compare Hebrews 3:12–14; Galatians 5:4).
- Rejoicing that Christ is preached despite bad motives is not tolerance of false doctrine. Keep Galatians 1:8–9 in front of the class so the distinction is clear.
- Philippians 1:23, the desire to depart and be with Christ, teaches that the Christian who dies is with the Lord. Do not build elaborate speculation about the intermediate state beyond what Scripture states (Luke 16:22–23; 2 Corinthians 5:8).
- The greeting to bishops and deacons is a useful place to teach congregational organization plainly: a plurality of qualified men in each congregation, no office above the local church.
- Suffering is described in 1:29 as granted, a gift. Teach it as something accepted when it comes for Christ's sake, never as something sought or as proof of superior faith.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Job 31–37 • Psalm 71–72 • Luke 10 • Philippians 2

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