

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 62 OF 104

The Lower Place

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Job 31-37
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 71-72
Gospels	Luke 10
General New Testament	Philippians 2

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

The aim this week is to move your class from admiring humility to practicing it. All four readings press downward. Job's final defense turns out to be a description of a man who bent down to servants, widows, and strangers. Psalm 72 measures a king by who is safer because he reigns. The Samaritan gets off his animal and into a ditch. And Paul says the mind we are to have is the mind of the One who came all the way down to a cross. By the end of the week your students should be able to name one specific place their own life is supposed to bend.

Doctrinally, the weight falls on Philippians 2. Christ's full deity and His genuine humanity both stand in that passage, and the class needs to see that the emptying was an addition, not a subtraction: He took the form of a servant. Guard also the balance of verses 12 and 13, which teaches that a Christian has real work to do and no independent power to do it, and which closes the door on both salvation by merit and the notion that nothing can be lost. In Job, hold the line that his oath of innocence is integrity, not sinlessness, and that Elihu is neither the villain nor the voice of God.

Formationally, the thread is the lower place, which is the only place where love becomes visible. Job proved it at his gate, Psalm 72 prayed for it from a throne, the Samaritan paid for it out of his own purse, and Christ demonstrated it on a cross. Ask your class this: name the one person whose need you have most successfully avoided noticing, and tell us what you are going to do about it before next Sunday.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Luke 10. It carries the week's thread most vividly and it teaches itself: the harvest, the redirection of joy, the Jericho road, and a kitchen in Bethany. Save at least twenty minutes for the parable and press the cost of mercy rather than the sentiment of it.

Second session: Take up Philippians 2. It is the doctrinal center of the week and the passage your class will still be thinking about in a month. Read 2:6-11 out loud before you say anything about it, then show why Paul put the deepest words about Christ in the middle of a plea for unity.

The other two readings: Job 31-37 and Psalms 71-72 fit the extended questions well. Tell the class to read Job 31 as the closing argument in a trial, and to watch the weather build through Elihu's speeches, because next week God answers out of the storm. Ask the older members to read Psalm 71 as their own prayer.

Job's Last Word, Elihu's First**PASSAGE OVERVIEW**

Job 31 is the high-water mark of Old Testament ethics outside the Law. Job swears an oath of innocence in the ancient form: if I have done this, let God do that to me. Notice what he swears about. Not ritual failures, but lust, business dishonesty, contempt for a servant, a closed hand toward the poor, trust in gold, secret pleasure at an enemy's fall. He is describing a man whose inner life and public life match. Then verse 40 closes the case: "The words of Job are ended."

Elihu has evidently been standing there the whole time, and his anger is aimed in two directions: at Job for justifying himself rather than God, and at the three friends for condemning Job without answering him. He is worth taking seriously. He is the first speaker in the book to suggest that suffering can be preventive and instructive rather than merely punitive, that God may be keeping a man back from the pit rather than settling a score (33:17–18, 29–30). He also insists God is not obligated to explain Himself, which is exactly the note the whirlwind will sound.

But Elihu is still on the outside looking in. He is long-winded, he repeatedly announces his own fairness, and he keeps assuming that Job must have sinned in some way that produced this. Watch chapters 36 and 37 closely, because as he speaks, weather moves in: clouds, lightning, thunder, whirlwind. Elihu is describing a storm he can see, and out of that storm God is about to speak.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Job is wisdom literature, mostly Hebrew poetry, set in the patriarchal age before the Law of Moses. There is no tabernacle, no priesthood, no nation of Israel in view.
- Job 31 is the last of Job's speeches. The three friends have run out of arguments (32:1), and the case now sits before the court of heaven, unanswered.
- Elihu appears with no introduction, is never mentioned again, and is neither rebuked nor commended when God settles accounts in 42:7–9. That silence is deliberate and should be respected rather than filled in.
- The ancient oath of innocence assumes a God who sees and who will act. It is not a boast to men; it is a legal appeal to heaven.
- Elihu's final speech in chapter 37 functions as the curtain rising. The storm he describes becomes the whirlwind of 38:1.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Job 31 is a list of sins Job says he never committed. Read through it and describe the kind of man it portrays, then talk about which of those standards would be hardest to keep in your own week.*

Read the chapter out loud if you have time; the cumulative effect is the point. Job denies lust (31:1), falsehood (31:5), adultery (31:9), injustice toward servants (31:13), neglect of the poor and the widow (31:16–21), trust in wealth (31:24–25), secret idolatry (31:26–27), joy at an enemy's calamity (31:29), inhospitality (31:32), and hidden sin covered up for appearance (31:33). This is not the résumé of a religious professional. It is a portrait of a man who is the same when nobody is watching.

Press the second half of the question hard, because it is where the class will get honest. Most of us could survive an audit of our attendance. Few of us would welcome an audit of our eyes, our anger at someone else's ruin, or what we quietly believe our bank balance will do for us. Ask each person to name the one line in Job 31 they would least like read aloud with their name in it, and then ask what they intend to do about it.

Question 2. *Elihu claims that God speaks to men in dreams, in pain, and through a messenger (Job 33:14–30). Where is his argument genuinely better than what the three friends said, and where does he still assume too much about Job?*

Elihu genuinely advances the argument. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had one category: suffering is punishment, so confess. Elihu adds a second: suffering can be God's voice, opening a man's ear (33:16), keeping him back from the pit (33:18), turning him from pride (33:17). That is a real biblical category. Hebrews 12:5–11 says the same thing about the discipline of sons, and Psalm 119:67 says it in the first person.

Where Elihu still fails is that he cannot resist explaining Job's particular case. He says Job has added rebellion to his sin (34:37) and drinks scorn like water (34:7), which is a verdict he has no way to reach. He is also remarkably impressed with himself (32:17–22; 36:4). Help the class see the difference between teaching a true principle and applying it to a man whose file you have not read. That distinction will change how they talk to the next hurting person they meet.

Question 3. *Job ties his integrity to how he treated servants, widows, and the fatherless (31:13–23). If that were the measure applied to our congregation this year, how would we come out?*

Job's answer to the question "was he a good man?" is not that he kept a schedule of sacrifices. It is that his servants could bring a complaint against him and be heard (31:13), that the widow's eyes did not fail waiting on him (31:16), that the stranger did not have to sleep in the street (31:32). He even counts his servants as men made by the same God who made him (31:15), which is a stunning line in the ancient world.

Bring this home to the congregation without letting it become a vague sigh about doing better. Ask for specifics: who in this church family has a need the rest of us have decided is someone else's assignment? Who works for us, cleans for us, or serves us food, and would our behavior toward them pass Job 31? Formation happens when a name is attached.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the pattern of "if I have done this, then let that happen to me" through Job 31 and list at least eight sins Job denies. What kind of righteousness is he describing, centuries before the Law of Moses was given?*

The oath formula runs through the chapter, most visibly at verses 5, 7, 9, 13, 16, 19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 29, 31, 33, 38. Job denies lust, falsehood, adultery, injustice to servants, neglect of the poor and widow and orphan, trust in gold, idolatry of sun and moon, gloating over an enemy, inhospitality, hidden sin, and even abusing his land. The righteousness described is inward before it is outward, which is why Jesus could later say the greatest commands were about love for God and neighbor rather than about paperwork.

2. *Job 31:1 says he made a covenant with his eyes. Read Matthew 5:27–30, then write down what such a covenant would actually require of you on an ordinary Tuesday.*

Answers will vary in application but not in substance. Jesus locates adultery in the look, not just the act, and prescribes radical measures. A covenant with the eyes today means decisions made in advance: what the phone is allowed to do at midnight, what happens when a certain kind of image appears, who has permission to ask you about it. Listen for concrete arrangements rather than good intentions.

3. *List the main claims Elihu makes about God in chapters 32 through 37. Mark the ones God Himself will take up out of the whirlwind in chapters 38 through 41.*

Elihu claims God is greater than man and owes no account (33:12–13; 35:5–7), that God speaks in dreams and in affliction (33:14–22), that He is never unjust (34:10–12), that human sin does not injure Him and human righteousness does not enrich Him (35:6–8), that He delivers the afflicted through their affliction (36:15), and that His power in storm and snow is past finding out (36:26–37:24). God takes up the last of these directly in chapters 38 through 41. He never confirms Elihu's reading of Job.

4. Read Job 33:23–28 and note what Elihu says a mediator does for a man. Compare 1 Timothy 2:5 and Hebrews 7:25, and describe what Job was reaching for without knowing His name.

Elihu imagines a messenger, one among a thousand, who declares to a man what is right and secures his ransom so that God is gracious to him. It is a longing for someone who can stand between a holy God and a suffering man, which is precisely what Job asked for earlier (9:33; 16:19–21). The New Testament names Him: one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who lives to make intercession.

5. Job 31:16–22 measures a man by the widow and the orphan at his gate. Name one person at your gate, and do this week the specific thing you have been putting off.

Answers will vary. Push for one name and one action with a date on it. Job's point is that righteousness is measured at the gate, where people with needs actually show up, not in the study where we think about them.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Job's oath is not a claim to sinlessness. He has already admitted sins of his youth (13:26) and will repent in dust and ashes (42:6). He is denying the specific charges his friends invented, not claiming perfection. Do not let the class read Job 31 as self-righteousness, and do not let anyone build a doctrine of human merit on it.
- Do not bind Job 31 on Christians as a code. It is an inspired record of one man's integrity under the patriarchal age, written for our instruction (Romans 15:4), not a set of commandments for the church.
- Elihu: say plainly that God neither condemns nor endorses him, and let that stand. Avoid both extremes, treating him as a fourth fool or as the voice of God. He speaks truth about God and overreaches about Job.
- Job 31:1 will raise the subject of lust in a mixed class. Handle it with plain dignity and without detail, and be aware that some people in the room are fighting this battle and have never told anyone.

Gray Hairs and a Coming King

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 71 has no title in the Hebrew, but its voice is unmistakable: an aging believer, surrounded by people who have concluded that God has abandoned him (71:10–11). Its power is in the arc. He was carried from the womb (71:6), taught from his youth (71:17), and now he is gray (71:18), and the one thing he will not accept is being dropped at the end. Notice that his argument with God is built entirely out of God's own past faithfulness. That is how a mature believer prays.

Psalm 72 is titled for Solomon, and it is a royal psalm, a coronation prayer. Read the requests and you see what Israel was supposed to want in a king: right judgment for the poor, deliverance for the needy who has no helper, mercy toward the weak, life and peace and abundance across the land, and dominion from sea to sea. It is a prayer no son of David ever fully answered, which is precisely why it keeps pointing beyond itself.

The two psalms belong together in a class hour. The first is a private man at the end of his strength; the second is a public reign that lifts the helpless. Put them side by side and you have the two halves of the same hope: that the God who does not drop an old man is also the God who will one day set a King over the whole earth who does not drop anyone. Verse 20 then closes Book Two of the Psalter with a note that David's prayers are ended.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 71 is anonymous and untitled. Many of its lines echo Psalm 22, Psalm 31, and Psalm 35, as though an old believer is praying with Scripture he has carried for decades.
- Psalm 72 is a royal psalm, a prayer for the reigning king, traditionally connected with Solomon's accession (1 Kings 3).
- Royal psalms describe the king Israel was meant to have. Because no king measured up, the New Testament reads them as finding their answer in Christ, whose reign began at His resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:29–36).
- Psalm 72:20 marks the end of Book Two of the Psalter. It is an editorial note about the collection, not a statement that David never prayed again.
- Old age, weakness, and the fear of being discarded are not modern anxieties. The Psalter has a vocabulary for them, which is one reason a congregation should keep singing and reading them.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 71 keeps circling back to a lifetime of trust, from the womb to old age. What does a life like that do to a person, and what does our congregation lose when older members stop telling their stories?*

Psalm 71 is what faith looks like when it has been carried a long way. The man is not naive: he has been shown "great and severe troubles" (71:20). He is not pretending that his body still works. What he has is decades of evidence, and he uses it as leverage in prayer. You have been my trust from my youth, so do not cast me off now. Nobody prays that way at twenty-five, because nobody has the material yet.

The second half of the question is the one that matters for your class. Most congregations have people who lived through hard things with God and have concluded that nobody wants to hear about it. That is a loss the church can actually fix. Ask your older members to tell one story before the quarter ends, and ask the younger ones to go sit down and ask for it. This psalm exists because somebody refused to go quiet.

Question 2. *Psalm 72 asks God for a king who defends the needy and crushes the oppressor. Hold our usual picture of greatness up against that standard and talk about the difference.*

Psalm 72 defines a good reign almost entirely by what happens to people who cannot defend themselves: he judges the poor with justice (72:2), saves the children of the needy (72:4), spares the weak (72:13), redeems their life from oppression, and considers their blood precious in his sight (72:14). Power, in this psalm, is measured by who is safer because you have it.

Set that against how greatness is usually counted: revenue, reach, reputation, followers. Then bring it down to the size of a life. Every person in the room has power over someone, an employee, a child, a student, a spouse, a customer service worker, a younger Christian. Ask what evidence exists that the weakest person under their influence is safer for it. That is Psalm 72 applied without a throne.

Question 3. *The old man in 71:18 will not let go until he has declared God's strength to the next generation. Who is your next generation, and what are they currently learning from watching you?*

Verse 18 is one of the great ambitions of Scripture: "Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come." He wants to live for the sake of a handoff. He is not asking for comfort or vindication. He is asking for enough breath to finish telling.

Make the class name people, not categories. Grandchildren, a class of teenagers, a new convert, the young couple three rows back. Then ask the harder half: what are those people learning from watching, as opposed to listening? Children and new Christians learn our theology from our sermons and our actual beliefs from our reactions in traffic, in illness, and at the end of a hard month.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every image Psalm 71 uses for God: rock, fortress, refuge, and the rest. Which of them fits where you are standing this month?*

The psalm calls God a refuge (71:1, 7), rock of habitation and fortress (71:3), deliverer from the wicked (71:4), hope and trust (71:5), the one who took him from the womb (71:6), his strong refuge (71:7), and the God of righteousness who has done great things (71:19). Answers on which one fits will vary; listen for people naming the actual pressure they are under rather than a favorite verse.

2. *Psalm 71:9 and 71:18 both plead with God not to forsake a man in old age. Read Isaiah 46:4 alongside them and write down how God answers that fear.*

Isaiah 46:4 is God's own answer to the fear: "Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." The psalmist pleads not to be dropped, and God replies that the carrying was never conditional on the strength of the one carried.

3. *Work slowly through Psalm 72 and write down everything the ideal king does for the poor, the needy, and the oppressed. Then read Luke 4:18–19 and compare the two lists.*

Psalm 72 gives the king justice for the poor (v. 2), salvation for the children of the needy (v. 4), deliverance for the needy who cries out and the one who has no helper (v. 12), pity on the poor and weak (v. 13), and redemption from oppression and violence (v. 14). Luke 4:18–19 has Jesus reading Isaiah 61 in Nazareth and announcing precisely that portfolio as His own. The King finally arrived and He came to the same people.

4. *Psalm 72:17 echoes the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 22:18. Trace how Solomon's prayer reaches past Solomon, and note where Galatians 3:16 and Acts 3:25–26 say that promise landed.*

Psalm 72:17 says "men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed," which is the language of Genesis 22:18. Solomon's reign was glorious and temporary; the promise was not. Galatians 3:16 identifies Abraham's Seed as Christ, and Acts 3:25–26 tells the men of Jerusalem that God sent His risen Servant to bless them by turning them from their iniquities. The promise came to rest on a throne at God's right hand, not on a map.

5. *Psalm 71:14–16 shows a man who keeps talking about God while he still hurts. Pick one person this week and tell them one specific thing God has done for you.*

Answers will vary. Guard against generic testimony. The assignment is one person, one conversation, one concrete thing God has done, this week. Many Christians have never once said such a sentence out loud, and doing it once changes what they believe is possible.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 72 is a royal psalm whose language reaches beyond any earthly king, and the New Testament applies that hope to Christ. Do not let it be turned into a prediction of a future earthly political kingdom. Christ reigns now, at the right hand of God, over His church (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13).
- Psalm 72 speaks of prosperity and abundance under a righteous reign. Read it as the Old Testament covenant picture of blessing, not as a promise that faithful Christians will be wealthy.
- Psalm 71:13 asks that the psalmist's accusers be confounded. Handle such lines as appeals to God's justice rather than permission for personal vengeance (Romans 12:19).

Sent Out and Bent Down

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke 10 is a chapter about the size of the harvest and the smallness of the workforce. Seventy are appointed and sent two by two into every place Jesus intends to visit. The instructions are urgent: travel light, do not stop to exchange pleasantries on the road, stay where you are received, eat what is set before you, heal the sick and say that the kingdom of God has come near. Where a town refuses, they are to wipe off its dust and say the same sentence anyway. The message does not change based on the reception.

They return elated: even the demons are subject to us in Your name. Jesus does not deny the power, but He moves their joy off it. Rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven. Then He rejoices in the Spirit that the Father has hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to babes, which is Luke's way of telling us who is actually able to receive the kingdom.

The two closing scenes belong together. A lawyer tries to justify himself with a definition question and gets a story that makes definitions useless: the man who helped was the one everybody in the room despised. Then Martha, busy with genuinely necessary work, complains that her sister is not helping, and Jesus tells her gently that she is worried about many things and Mary has chosen what will not be taken away. Both scenes ask the same question: what does love for God and neighbor actually look like in a body, on a road, in a house?

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Luke alone records the mission of the seventy. It parallels the sending of the Twelve in Luke 9 and is a limited commission, a preparation for towns Jesus Himself was about to enter.
- The Jericho road drops roughly three thousand feet in seventeen miles through rock and ravine, and it was notorious for robbery. The scene Jesus describes would have been entirely familiar to His hearers.
- Samaritans and Jews had centuries of hostility behind them (John 4:9). Making the Samaritan the hero was not gentle; it was pointed.
- A lawyer here is an expert in the Law of Moses, not an attorney. He is testing Jesus with a rabbinic question about the limits of the command in Leviticus 19:18.
- Bethany sat about two miles from Jerusalem. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus appear again in John 11 and John 12, and this household was clearly a place Jesus rested.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The seventy come back excited about power over demons, and Jesus redirects their joy in 10:20. Why does that redirection matter so much, and where do we make the same mistake about what is worth celebrating?*

Jesus does not scold them; He reorders them. Power is real, and it came from Him (10:19). But power is a poor foundation for joy, because it can be counterfeited (Matthew 7:22–23), it can inflate a man, and it can be lost. Having your name written in heaven rests on God's mercy rather than on your last success. Judas cast out demons too.

Ask where the class measures a good week by results and effect. A teacher who feels useless because nobody responded, a father who counts obedience as proof he is doing fine, a preacher who counts a crowd, a Christian whose confidence rises and falls with how well he performed his religion. Jesus is protecting these men from a joy that would collapse the first time the power did not work. Ask the class what would remain of their joy if every visible result were taken away this month.

Question 2. *The lawyer asks who his neighbor is, and Jesus ends by asking which man acted like a neighbor (10:29, 36). Talk about what that reversal does to the question, and what answering it cost the Samaritan.*

The lawyer asks a question designed to be answerable: draw me a boundary line, tell me where my obligation stops. Jesus tells a story with no boundary in it and then changes the grammar. Do not ask who qualifies as your neighbor; ask whether you are acting like one. The question moves from the other person's status to your own behavior, and there is no way to justify yourself with that version.

Then count the cost. The Samaritan gives up his schedule, his oil and wine, his own animal, a night's sleep, two denarii (roughly two days' wages), and an open-ended promise to pay more. He also takes on risk: robbers work in pairs, and a man stopped on that road is a target. Mercy in this parable is not a feeling. It is time, money, exposure, and follow-up. Ask your class which of those four they find hardest to give.

Question 3. *Jesus says Mary has chosen the good part, and Martha is doing genuinely useful work. How does a busy Christian serve without becoming Martha, and what would "one thing is needed" look like in a week like yours?*

Be fair to Martha. Hospitality was a serious duty, she is hosting the Lord Himself, and somebody has to cook. Jesus never says her work was worthless; He says she is anxious and troubled about many things. The problem is not the serving but the fretting, the sense that everything depends on her, and the resentment that leaks out sideways at her sister.

The pastoral application is not that busy people should quit working. It is that service which never sits at His feet turns sour, and a Christian who cannot stop is usually a Christian who has quietly decided the outcome is up to him. Ask for one practical arrangement: a fixed time in the word, a Sunday where they are not running something, a habit of praying before organizing. Note also, quietly but clearly, that a woman sitting at a rabbi's feet to be taught was unusual and Jesus defended it. Christ values women as disciples and learners.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the instructions Jesus gives the seventy in 10:1–12. Which belong to that limited mission, and which still describe how the gospel goes out today?*

Specific to that mission: going ahead of Him to particular towns, carrying no money bag or sandals, greeting no one on the road, and the miraculous healing that confirmed their preaching. Still true today: laborers are few and must be prayed for, workers go out in fellowship rather than alone, the message is the nearness of the kingdom, hospitality matters, rejection is expected, and the word is preached to those who refuse it as well as those who receive it. Distinguish the confirming miracles clearly; they authenticated the message in the absence of a completed New Testament (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4).

2. *In 10:18 Jesus says He saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Read the verse in the flow of the seventy's report and explain what He is describing, without importing anything from elsewhere.*

In context Jesus is responding to the success of the mission. Satan's hold on the towns of Israel is breaking as the kingdom advances; He saw it falling as fast as lightning. The verse is about the collapse of the enemy's grip under the preaching of the word, not a description of an event before creation. Do not import Isaiah 14 here.

3. *Count the separate actions the Samaritan takes in 10:33–35. How many are there, what does each cost him, and which one would you have skipped?*

He sees the man, has compassion, goes to him, bandages the wounds, pours in oil and wine, sets him on his own animal, brings him to an inn, takes care of him personally that night, produces money the next day, gives it to the innkeeper, and promises to repay anything more on his return. That is roughly ten actions, and the last two are the ones most people would skip: the money and the return trip. Mercy that ends when the emergency ends is not what Jesus described.

4. *Compare the lawyer's question in 10:25 with the question asked in Acts 2:37 and Peter's answer in Acts 2:38. Why does Jesus answer this man the way He does instead of giving him terms of pardon?*

The lawyer is a Jewish expert under the Law of Moses, asking about inheriting eternal life before the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and before the terms of pardon were preached at Pentecost. Jesus answers him from the Law he claims to keep, and the parable exposes that he does not keep it. Acts 2 is the other side of the cross: men convicted of killing the Messiah are told to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. The Samaritan is not a plan of salvation; he is a mirror.

5. *Name the person whose need you have most successfully managed not to notice, and put the inconvenience on your calendar before Sunday.*

Answers will vary. Look for a name, a date, and something that costs the person time or money. The whole point of the parable is that the priest and the Levite were not evil men; they simply had somewhere else to be.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not preach the good Samaritan as the plan of salvation. The parable answers a self-justifying question about the second great command. Salvation comes through Christ, on the terms the apostles preached (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4).
- The miraculous power of the seventy was confirmatory and belonged to that period of revelation (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10). Teach this plainly and kindly if it is raised.
- Luke 10:18 is not a narrative of Satan's original fall. Keep it in its context of the returning seventy.
- Mary and Martha is not a text against hospitality or hard work, and it is not primarily about the role of women in the assembly. It does show clearly that Christ taught women as disciples, and that is worth saying warmly.

The Mind That Came Down**PASSAGE OVERVIEW**

Philippians is a joyful letter with a crack running through it. Two women in the congregation are at odds (4:2), and Paul has been steering toward unity since chapter 1. When he gets to chapter 2 he does not scold. He asks: if there is any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, then finish my joy by being like-minded. Then he names the enemy of unity precisely. It is not disagreement; it is selfish ambition and conceit, wanting to be thought well of.

The remedy is a person. Verses 6 through 11 are the deepest statement about Christ in any of Paul's letters, and they are here as an illustration of how to treat one another. He was in the form of God, equal with God, and did not treat that as something to be clutched. He emptied Himself by taking, not by subtracting: He took the form of a bondservant, came in the likeness of men, humbled Himself, obeyed to death, and specifically the death of a cross. Then God exalted Him and gave Him the name above every name.

The rest of the chapter refuses to leave that in the abstract. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, because God is at work in you. Do everything without complaining and disputing, so that you shine as lights in a crooked generation. And then, two photographs: Timothy, who unlike nearly everyone else actually cares for people's state; and Epaphroditus, who carried the church's gift, got dangerously ill, and worried mostly that the folks back home would hear about it and be upset. That is the mind of Christ with a face on it.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Paul writes from imprisonment, most likely in Rome around A.D. 61–63, to the church at Philippi, the first congregation established in Europe (Acts 16).
- The Philippians had sent financial support more than once (4:15–18), and Epaphroditus was their messenger carrying the gift.
- Philippians 2:6–11 has the shape of an early Christian hymn or confession, which is why many translations set it as poetry.
- The word rendered “made Himself of no reputation” or “emptied Himself” is explained by the text itself: He emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant. It never says He ceased to be God.
- Philippi was a Roman colony proud of its citizenship, which gives an edge to Paul's later line that our citizenship is in heaven (3:20).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Philippians 2:6–8 traces a descent and 2:9–11 an ascent. Walk through the steps out loud, then talk about why Paul offers all of this as an argument for how church members should treat each other.*

Walk the stairs down with the class and make them count: He was in the form of God; He did not grasp equality with God; He emptied Himself; He took the form of a servant; He came in human likeness; He humbled Himself; He became obedient to death; and not just death, the death of a cross, the execution reserved for slaves and rebels. Then the stairs go up: God highly exalted Him, gave Him the name above every name, and every knee will bow. The one who went lowest sits highest, and God is the one who did the lifting.

Now ask why Paul put this here. Not to settle a Christological debate, though it does, but to end a quarrel between church members. The logic is devastating: if the One who had every right to be served gave it up, then your right to be recognized in this congregation is not worth what you are spending on it. Ask the class to name where unity in a church usually breaks. It is almost never over doctrine at that level. It is over who was thanked, who was consulted, and who got to decide.

Question 2. *Verse 12 tells us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, and verse 13 says God is at work in us. How do those two sentences fit together without either one canceling the other?*

Hold both halves. “Work out your own salvation” means exactly what it says: the Christian has something to do, and it is serious enough to be done with fear and trembling. That rules out a passive faith that waits to be acted upon, and it rules out the notion that once a person is saved nothing further is required or possible. Paul writes this to baptized believers about their ongoing life, not about earning a standing they do not have.

But verse 13 keeps it from becoming self-salvation: God is the one working in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. He works through His word, His providence, His people, and His Spirit’s work by the revealed word. Our part is real but never independent, and our salvation is never a wage. A good summary for the board: we work out what God works in. Ask the class where they have been waiting for God to do what He has already told them to do.

Question 3. *Paul says Epaphroditus risked his life to supply what was lacking in their service (2:25–30). Who is doing that kind of quiet work among us, and what would it take for the rest of us to notice?*

Epaphroditus is described in five words: brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, your messenger, and the one who ministered to my need. He came near death for the work of Christ, and Luke’s word for “risked” is a gambling term, he staked his life on it. What makes the account so human is verse 26: he was distressed, not because he was sick, but because the church had heard that he was sick.

Paul’s instruction is to hold such men in esteem. That is an assignment your class can complete this week. Ask who cleans the building, who drives the older members, who prepares the Supper, who sits with the family at the hospital, who prays with a struggling man at midnight. Then ask what the congregation actually does to honor that. Recognition is not the reward these people are after, which is exactly why they should get it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the four things Paul asks for in 2:1–4 and the steps of Christ’s humbling in 2:6–8, then show where the two lists line up.*

Paul asks for likemindedness, the same love, being of one accord and one mind (2:2), nothing done through selfish ambition or conceit (2:3), esteeming others better than self (2:3), and looking out for others’ interests (2:4). The hymn answers each: Christ did not grasp His own standing, He took the servant’s form, He humbled Himself, and He obeyed to the point of a cross for people who did not deserve it. The theology is not decoration; it is the pattern.

2. *Paul says Christ was in the form of God and took the form of a servant. Read John 1:1–14 and Colossians 2:9, then write down what He laid aside and what He could not lay aside.*

He laid aside the glory and the independent exercise of divine privilege, the visible majesty He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5). He did not lay aside deity. John 1:1 and 1:14 hold both: the Word was God, and the Word became flesh. Colossians 2:9 says that in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, written of the Christ who had already come. He added humanity; He did not subtract divinity.

3. *Read Isaiah 45:22–23 alongside Philippians 2:10–11, and state plainly what Paul is claiming about Jesus by applying those words to Him.*

Isaiah 45 is God speaking as the only God and Savior, saying that to Him every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear. Paul takes that language, which Jehovah reserves to Himself in the same passage where He says there is no other God, and applies it to Jesus. He is claiming deity for Christ as plainly as a Jewish monotheist ever could, and doing it to the glory of God the Father.

4. *Trace the word “mind” through 2:2, 2:5, and the description of Timothy in 2:20–21. Whose mind are we told to have, and what is the practical evidence that someone has it?*

Paul asks for one mind (2:2), says to let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (2:5), and then holds up Timothy as the man who is likeminded, who will sincerely care for their state, when all the others seek their own (2:20–21). The evidence of the mind of Christ is not a feeling or a phrase; it is a person who genuinely cares about somebody else’s situation when there is nothing in it for him.

5. *Name one person you have been quietly competing with, and do something this week that benefits only them and costs only you.*

Answers will vary, and this one may take a minute of silence. Almost everyone is quietly measuring himself against someone: a sibling, a coworker, another family in the church, another preacher, another ministry. The assignment is to do that person good in a way they will benefit from and you will pay for. Listen afterward for what it cost.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Philippians 2:6–8 must be taught with both hands. Christ did not stop being God when He became man, and He was fully man, not a divine being wearing a costume. If someone in the class has been taught that He emptied Himself of deity, correct it gently from the text: the emptying is explained as taking the form of a servant.
- “Work out your own salvation” is not salvation by merit and not a proof that a Christian can never fall. Read it with verse 13 and with Hebrews 3:12–14. Grace saves; grace also commands.
- Philippians 2:10–11 does not teach universal salvation. Every knee bowing includes those who bow in acknowledgment of a Lordship they refused (compare 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10).
- Do not let the chapter become a debate about Christological vocabulary. Paul’s stated purpose is unity in a local congregation, and that is where the hour should land.

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Job 38–42 · Psalm 73 · Luke 11:1–32 · Philippians 3–4

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