

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 63 OF 104

Seeing God Himself

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Job 38–42
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 73
Gospels	Luke 11:1–32
General New Testament	Philippians 3–4

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

The aim this week is to move the class from wanting answers to wanting God. Job asked for an explanation and received a Person. Asaph asked why the wicked prosper and found his footing in the sanctuary, not in an argument. The disciples asked how to pray and were given a Father. Paul had every answer Judaism could supply and traded the whole library for one thing: that I may know Him. By Sunday your students should be able to say what they have been requiring of God before they will trust Him, and then decide to trust Him without it.

Doctrinally, two matters need care. First, Job 42 must not become a prosperity formula; the restoration ends a particular story and does not promise herds to the faithful, and God never answers the question the book raises. Second, Philippians 3:9 must be taught precisely. Paul rejects a righteousness assembled out of his own law-keeping; he does not reject obedience, and the same chapter shows him still running, still not secure, still pressing on. Hold the line against both salvation by merit and the notion that a Christian can never fall.

Formationally, watch the thread of what happens to people who meet God in the middle of their worst arithmetic. Job covers his mouth. Asaph says whom have I in heaven but You. Paul calls his best work rubbish. Each of them ends up with less than they wanted and more than they asked for. Put this question to your class: if God gave you Himself and never explained the hardest thing in your life, would that be enough, and how would anyone watching you be able to tell?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Job 38–42. The class has been waiting eight weeks for God to speak, and this is the payoff. Read part of chapter 38 aloud, let the questions land without commentary, then spend real time on 42:5–10 and on why God rebuked the friends rather than Job.

Second session: Take up Philippians 3–4. It is the practical and doctrinal center of the week and it pairs beautifully with Job: one man loses everything and finds God, the other gives everything up and finds the same thing. Give at least fifteen minutes to 4:6–9, because your class needs it.

The other two readings: Psalm 73 and Luke 11:1–32 carry themselves for private reading. Tell the class to read Psalm 73 with a pencil and mark verse 17, and to read the model prayer slowly enough to notice its order. If time allows in either session, open with Psalm 73:25–26 as a reading.

The Voice from the Whirlwind

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

For thirty-seven chapters the reader has been waiting for God to take the stand. When He does, He does not mention Satan, the wager, the children, or the boils. He asks Job about the foundations of the earth, the gates of the sea, the springs of the deep, the treasures of snow, the constellations, the lion's prey, the mountain goat giving birth alone on a cliff, the ostrich who forgets her eggs, the hawk that knows when to migrate. It is the strangest answer to human suffering ever given, and it works.

It works because Job's real problem was never information. His problem was that he had begun to build a case in which either he was guilty or God was unjust, and no third option existed (40:8). The whirlwind shatters the frame. A world this wide, run by a God who feeds ravens and knows when a doe calves in the wilderness, is not a world Job has the standing to indict. Job's response in 40:4-5 and 42:1-6 is not crushed silence but relief. He is not being condemned; he is being met.

Then comes the turn most readers hurry past. God says to Eliphaz, "My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has." The men who defended God with tidy theology are the ones in trouble, and the man who shouted at heaven is called God's servant four times in three verses. Job must pray for them, and it is while he prays for the men who wounded him that the Lord restores him. Set that sequence in front of your class and let it sit.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Job 38:1 through 42:6 contains two divine speeches, each followed by a response from Job. Chapter 42:7-17 is prose narrative, matching the prose prologue of chapters 1 and 2.
- The reader knows what Job never learns. Chapters 1 and 2 let us behind the curtain; Job dies without being told. That is deliberate, and it is part of the book's message.
- Behemoth and Leviathan are described at length as creatures beyond human mastery. Their identity is debated; their function in the argument is not. They belong to God and not to Job.
- Job 42:7 is God's own verdict on the friends' speeches. Much of what they said sounded orthodox, which is exactly the warning.
- James 5:11 points back to this ending: "You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord, that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful."

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *God never tells Job why any of it happened. He asks roughly sixty questions instead. Talk about what those questions do to Job, and why this counts as an answer rather than an evasion.*

Count them with the class if you have the time; the sheer accumulation is the rhetoric. Each question does the same thing from a different angle: it moves Job out of the center of the universe. He had been standing at the middle of a courtroom demanding a verdict. God walks him outside and shows him wild goats giving birth in the rocks, a place where no human being has ever stood or ever will, and where God is attentive anyway.

Call it an answer, because it is. Job wanted to know that his suffering was not a sign of God's indifference or injustice. The speeches establish something better than an explanation: this God is present, powerful, and personally attentive to every hidden corner of His creation, including one man on an ash heap. Ask the class what they would actually do with an explanation if God gave them one. Most of us would still need to know He was there.

Question 2. *Job 42:5 says, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You.” What changed for Job in that sentence, and what would the same change look like in a person sitting in this room?*

Job had a theology before this; now he has a God. Hearing is secondhand: what a father taught, what a preacher said, what the tradition holds. Seeing is firsthand: God has spoken to me, out of my own storm, and I know Him. Notice that Job’s repentance in 42:6 is not a confession of the sins his friends accused him of. It is the repentance of a man who has been talking about things too great for him and has just met the One he was talking about.

For the class, the application is not to chase an experience. It is to notice that the difference between a religious person and a worshiper is usually made in a hard year. Ask who in the room can point to a season when God stopped being a subject and became a Person. Then ask what it cost them, because in this book it cost Job everything he had.

Question 3. *In 42:7–10 God’s anger burns against the three friends and He sends them to Job to be prayed for. How should that reshape what we say to a suffering person, and what we say about God on their behalf?*

This is the great reversal of the book. The friends spoke fluently, quoted tradition, and defended God’s justice, and God says they did not speak what was right about Him. Job accused, complained, and demanded, and God calls him His servant. The difference is not tone. The friends spoke about God to a sufferer in order to close the case; Job spoke to God in the middle of it and never let go of Him.

Take this straight into the practice of your congregation. Most of the damage done to hurting Christians is done by people trying to be helpful with sentences like “everything happens for a reason,” “God needed another angel,” or “there must be some sin in your life.” Ask the class what they actually say at a funeral or in a hospital room. Then note that the healing in this book begins when Job prays for the people who hurt him.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Work through chapters 38 and 39 and group God’s questions by subject: the earth, the sea, light and darkness, weather, the stars, and the animals. What is the cumulative weight of them meant to do?*

The questions run through creation itself (38:4–11), light and darkness (38:12–21), snow, hail, rain, ice, and lightning (38:22–30, 34–38), the constellations (38:31–33), and then a long parade of animals: lion, raven, mountain goat, wild donkey, wild ox, ostrich, horse, hawk, and eagle (38:39–39:30). The cumulative effect is to enlarge the world beyond Job’s ability to manage or audit it, and to show that God governs and provides in places no human eye has ever seen.

2. *Twice God says, “Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me” (38:3; 40:7). Compare Job’s earlier demands for a hearing in 13:3, 13:22, and 31:35, and note who ends up doing the questioning.*

Job had repeatedly asked for a hearing, saying he would order his case and fill his mouth with arguments (13:3; 23:4), and had signed his defense and asked that the Almighty answer him (31:35). God grants the meeting and immediately takes the questioner’s chair. Job gets his audience, and discovers that the point of the audience was never going to be his own vindication.

3. *Read Job 40:8 and write in your own words the difference between saying “I do not understand this” and saying “God has wronged me.” Which one has Job been drifting toward?*

God’s question is, “Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?” The line between the two statements is the line between humility and accusation. A believer may say honestly that he cannot understand and cannot see the good in it. He crosses over when, in order to hold on to his own innocence, he concludes that God must be in the wrong. Job never cursed God, but he had wandered up to that edge.

4. *Trace what happens in 42:10–17. List what is returned, what is doubled, and what is not. What did Job never receive back, and what question did God never answer for him?*

The Lord restored his losses and gave him twice as much when he prayed for his friends; his family and friends returned and brought gifts; he received fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, a thousand female donkeys, seven sons and three daughters, and a hundred and forty more years. Notice two things. His children are not doubled but replaced in number, because the first seven and three were not lost forever to a man of faith. And he never learns why. He receives God, not an explanation.

5. *Somewhere in your life you are quietly demanding an explanation before you will trust God again. Name it this week, decide to trust Him without it, and tell one person that you have.*

Answers will vary. Listen for something specific: a death, a diagnosis, a child who walked away, a prayer that went unanswered for years. The assignment is not to stop grieving but to stop making trust conditional on information God has not chosen to give. Saying it out loud to another person is what makes it stick.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not turn Job 42 into a prosperity formula. The doubling is the deliberate ending of a particular story, not a promise that faithful endurance produces herds and cattle. Job 1:21 and James 5:11 give the theology; the livestock do not.
- Resist spending the hour on the identity of Behemoth and Leviathan. Whatever they are, the argument is that they belong to God and are beyond Job, and that is the point the text makes.
- The friends teach us that orthodox-sounding sentences can be condemned by God when they are used to bludgeon a sufferer. Say that plainly, and be careful that your own class does not do it in the same hour.
- God never answers the question the book raises about why the righteous suffer. Do not supply an answer He withheld. Point instead to the cross, where the one truly innocent Man suffered, and to Romans 8:28 and 2 Corinthians 4:17, without using either verse to shut down grief.

Until I Went into the Sanctuary

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 73 is the most honest thing in the Psalter about envy. Asaph does not begin with the pious conclusion, he ends with it. He begins with an admission that he nearly lost his footing, and then he tells you exactly why: he saw men with no regard for God living easy, dying easy, mocking heaven, increasing in riches. His conclusion, stated flatly in verse 13, is that he had cleansed his heart in vain.

The hinge is verse 17. Nothing in his circumstances changed. What changed is that he went into the sanctuary of God, into the presence and worship of God with God's people, and there he understood their end. Perspective is not a mood; it is a place. Away from God, the prosperity of the wicked is the whole picture. In the presence of God, it is a slippery place and a dream that ends when a man awakes.

Then comes the turn that makes this psalm unforgettable. Asaph does not say, "I saw that they will be punished and I felt better." He says something far deeper: nevertheless I am continually with You, You hold my right hand, You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. He started out wanting what the wicked had. He ends up not wanting anything but God.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 73 opens Book Three of the Psalter and is the first of eleven psalms attributed to Asaph, a Levite whom David appointed over the music of the house of the Lord (1 Chronicles 16:4-5).
- It is a wisdom psalm, wrestling with the same question as Job, Psalm 37, Jeremiah 12:1, and Habakkuk 1: why do the wicked prosper?
- The sanctuary is the tabernacle or temple, the place of Israel's corporate worship. Asaph is a temple musician; this is his workplace and his refuge.
- Old Testament believers had a much dimmer view of what lay beyond death than we do, which makes verses 24 through 26 remarkable. Life and immortality were brought fully to light by the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).
- The psalm is a testimony: past crisis, turning point, present confession. It is written by a man on the other side, which is why he can afford to be so candid about the middle.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Asaph says his feet had almost stumbled (73:2). Read 73:3-14 and lay out his argument honestly, without softening it. Where have you made the same case inside your own head?*

Make the class read verses 4 through 12 without flinching. They have no pangs in their death, their strength is firm, they are not in trouble like other men, pride is their necklace, violence covers them, their eyes bulge with abundance, they speak loftily, they set their mouth against the heavens, and people even turn back to listen to them. Verse 12 sums it up: these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches. That is not a caricature. Most of us know such people by name.

Then ask the honest question. Every Christian who has paid for obedience has done this arithmetic at some hour: I gave up that promotion, that relationship, that Sunday morning, that comfortable silence, and look what it bought me. Verse 13 is the sentence nobody says out loud in Bible class. Say it out loud for them, and the room will exhale. You cannot pastor people out of envy you will not admit exists.

Question 2. *Everything changes in 73:16–17 when he goes into the sanctuary of God. What actually happened there, and what is the equivalent for a Christian on a Tuesday afternoon?*

Be careful not to mystify this. Asaph did not have a vision; he went to church. He put himself in the presence of God among the people of God, where the story is told, where the holiness of God is set out, where death and judgment are named, and where his own private arithmetic was exposed as small. He says “then I understood their end.” The sanctuary supplied the missing column in his ledger: the last chapter.

The equivalent is not complicated, which is why we neglect it. The assembly on the Lord’s Day, the Supper, the singing, the word read and preached, and the company of believers who are also carrying something. Ask the class what happens to their thinking during a month of missed Sundays. Most of them can tell you, and most of them have never connected verse 17 with their own attendance.

Question 3. *Verses 25–28 are what Asaph is left holding at the end. Could you say “whom have I in heaven but You” with a straight face this week, and what would have to be true of you for that to be honest?*

Verses 25 through 26 are a man who has been stripped of every secondary reason to serve God and has discovered the primary one. He is not saying he has no other blessings. He is saying that if he had nothing else, he would still have enough. My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

The second half of the question is where the class should slow down. Most of us love God alongside a comfortable life and have never had to find out which one we were actually after. That is not a reason for guilt; it is a reason for preparation. Ask what would have to be dismantled in their affections for verse 25 to be a true sentence, and note that God sometimes does that dismantling Himself, and that Job would understand.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every advantage Asaph says the wicked enjoy in 73:4–12. Then mark the ones that are actually true of the comfortable and godless people you know.*

They appear to die without struggle (v. 4), their bodies are strong and healthy (v. 4), they are not troubled like other men (v. 5), they wear pride openly (v. 6), they have more than heart could wish (v. 7), they threaten and speak oppression (v. 8), they blaspheme heaven and slander the earth (v. 9), they gather a following (v. 10), they assume God does not notice (v. 11), and they are at ease and increasing in riches (v. 12). Marking the honest ones matters, because envy grows in the gap between what we admit and what we deny.

2. *Compare Psalm 73:17 with Psalm 37:35–38 and Malachi 3:13–18. Write down what all three passages do with the same problem.*

All three refuse to settle the question by looking only at the present. Psalm 37 says the wicked man flourished like a green tree and then could not be found. Malachi records people saying it is useless to serve God, and God answering with a book of remembrance and a coming day. Psalm 73 says the whole matter looked different once Asaph considered their end. The problem is never the evidence; it is the time frame.

3. *In 73:21–22 Asaph describes himself as grieved, embittered, foolish, and like a beast before God. Trace that vocabulary and explain what envy had been doing to him.*

He calls his heart grieved and his inner being pierced, and says he was so foolish and ignorant that he was like a beast before God. Envy had made a thoughtful worshiper stupid. It narrowed his vision to a single comparison, made him bitter toward people he should have pitied, and nearly cost him his footing with God. Notice he says this about himself after the fact, which is the only way anyone ever sees it.

4. *Read 73:23–26 and count what he still has, item by item, after admitting he has nothing else. Which of those has been true through your hardest year?*

He has God’s continual presence (v. 23), God holding his right hand (v. 23), God’s guidance by counsel (v. 24), a reception into glory afterward (v. 24), God as the one thing he desires in heaven and on earth (v. 25), and God as the strength of his heart and his portion forever (v. 26). Answers on the hardest year will vary; listen for people who discovered that the list was not theoretical.

5. *Identify one way you have measured God's goodness by your circumstances this year. Write one sentence you can say instead, and say it out loud the next time the thought comes.*

Answers will vary. The most common version is quiet: a slow suspicion that a hard year means God is displeased or absent. The replacement sentence should be short enough to actually use. Something like, "God has not changed, and this is not the last chapter," is worth more than a paragraph they will never remember.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Guard against two opposite errors: that faithfulness guarantees prosperity, and that prosperity is evidence of wickedness. The psalm denies the first and never asserts the second.
- Verse 17 is corporate worship, not a private mystical state. Do not let the class turn it into an experience they wait for rather than an assembly they attend.
- The end of the wicked is described so that a believer stops envying, not so that he gloats. Handle verses 18 through 20 with sobriety, remembering that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11).

Teach Us to Pray

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The request in verse 1 is a compliment we usually miss. These men had prayed all their lives, three times a day, with set prayers they knew by heart. They ask to be taught because they have been watching Jesus pray and have realized they do not know how. Luke has already shown Him praying at His baptism, before choosing the Twelve, on the mountain, and alone in the wilderness. Something about it made them hungry.

The prayer He gives is startlingly short and startlingly ordered. Father. Your name be hallowed. Your kingdom come. Then daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from temptation. God first, God's honor, God's reign, and only then our needs, and even our needs are modest: today's bread, not next year's security. Then two stories that push in the opposite direction from our timidity. Keep knocking. Keep asking. Your Father is not a reluctant neighbor; He is a Father who will not hand His child a serpent.

The second half of the reading shows what happens when people who have seen the finger of God refuse to accept it. Jesus casts out a demon, and rather than repent, some accuse Him of collusion with Beelzebub and others demand a further sign. He answers that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, that He has bound the strong man, and that no sign will be given except Jonah: three days, and a man raised, and a city that repented when Nineveh had far less evidence than they do. The chapter is about prayer and about hardness, and the two are closer than we think.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Luke places this in the long travel section toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51 onward), where much of the teaching is unique to his Gospel.
- Jewish disciples commonly learned a distinctive pattern of prayer from their teacher; John the Baptist had done the same for his followers (11:1).
- The friend at midnight assumes a one-room village house where the whole family slept together and the door was barred. The request was genuinely disruptive.
- Beelzebub, a mocking Israelite name for a Philistine deity (2 Kings 1:2), was used as a title for the prince of demons. The charge was that Jesus was possessed rather than empowered.
- The sign of Jonah points to the burial and resurrection (Matthew 12:40), the one sign the Lord repeatedly refused to give in advance and gave in full afterward (Acts 2:32; 17:31).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The disciples ask to be taught to pray, and Jesus answers with a very short prayer followed by two stories about persistence. Look at the shape of that answer and talk about what our praying is usually missing.*

The shape preaches before the words do. The prayer begins with a relationship, not a request: Father. It then spends its first breath on God's name and God's reign, and only afterward mentions bread. And the bread it mentions is today's. Compare that with the average prayer, which is a list of outcomes we want, usually for the coming week, usually concerning our comfort and the health of people we know.

Then note what follows the prayer. Jesus does not say, pray briefly and leave it. He tells a story about shameless persistence and another about a father's goodness, and He uses present-tense verbs: keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. The two halves correct our two failures. We pray too much about ourselves, and we give up too quickly. Ask the class which of the two is their problem. Most people know immediately.

Question 2. *In 11:24–26 an evil spirit returns to a house that is swept and empty, and the man ends up worse. Discuss why getting rid of something bad is never enough, and what filling a house actually requires.*

The picture is vivid and unsettling. A house cleaned, swept, and put in order, and standing empty. The reform was real and the reform was not enough. Whatever is removed leaves a vacancy, and vacancies get filled. This is why quitting a sin by willpower alone so often ends in a worse version of the same sin, and why a person can clean up his life for a year and come apart in a month.

Filling a house is not a slogan. It means the word dwelling in a person richly (Colossians 3:16), the company of believers who know the truth about him (Hebrews 3:13), new habits occupying the hours the old ones used to own, and above all Christ Himself living in him (Galatians 2:20). Ask the class to identify the empty rooms in their own week: the evening, the commute, the hour after everyone goes to bed. That is where the seven spirits move in.

Question 3. *The crowd wants a sign and Jesus offers only Jonah (11:29–32). Why does He choose the resurrection as the one sign He will give, and what does that leave a person to do who has heard about it?*

He chooses the resurrection because it is the one sign that cannot be explained away and the one sign that requires a response. A miracle in Galilee can be attributed to Beelzebub, as the people in this very chapter had just done. But a man executed publicly and raised bodily, attested by witnesses who died rather than recant, leaves no neutral ground. Notice also that the Lord will not perform on demand. Signs confirmed the word; they were never entertainment for the curious.

The second half of the question is the sharp end. The men of Nineveh had one foreign preacher with a one-sentence sermon and no miracle at all, and they repented. The queen of the South crossed a desert on a rumor of wisdom. Jesus says these people have more, and they want more still. Ask your class what they are waiting for. The honest answer, usually, is not more evidence but more willingness.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the petitions of the model prayer in 11:2–4 and number them. How many concern God, how many concern us, and what do you make of the order?*

Five petitions in Luke: hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, give us day by day our daily bread, forgive us our sins, and do not lead us into temptation. The first two concern God; the last three concern us; and the order is not accidental. A prayer life that never gets past our own needs has the whole thing upside down, and a prayer that begins with God's name and reign reorders the requests that follow.

2. *Compare Luke 11:2–4 with Matthew 6:9–13, noting every difference. What do the differences suggest about whether Jesus gave a form to recite or a pattern to follow?*

Matthew includes "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and the closing petition about deliverance from the evil one, and the wording of the bread and debt petitions differs. That the Lord gave it in two forms shows it was never intended as a fixed liturgy to be recited word for word. It is a pattern, which is why Jesus introduces it in Matthew with "in this manner, therefore, pray."

3. *Luke 11:13 says the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Read Acts 2:38 and Acts 5:32, and write down who receives the Spirit, on what terms, and when.*

Acts 2:38 promises the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who repent and are baptized for the remission of sins, and Acts 5:32 says God gives the Spirit to those who obey Him. The Father gives the Spirit gladly, and He gives Him on His own terms, to those who come to Him His way. Do not confuse this indwelling gift, which belongs to every Christian, with the miraculous gifts that confirmed the word in the first century (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10).

4. *Trace the argument in 11:17–22: a kingdom divided, the finger of God, the strong man and the stronger one. State in one sentence what Jesus is claiming about Himself.*

Jesus argues that if He casts out demons by the prince of demons, Satan is working against himself and his house is falling. The alternative is that He works by the finger of God, which means the kingdom of God has come upon them.

Then the picture: a strong man guards his palace until a stronger one comes, overpowers him, and divides the spoil. The claim is that He is the stronger one, and that Satan's house is being plundered in front of them.

5. *Jesus says a greater than Jonah and a greater than Solomon is here. Name one thing you have been waiting for God to prove before you will obey Him, and this week act on what He has already shown you.*

Answers will vary. Listen for the common forms: waiting for certainty before committing, waiting to feel ready before confessing Christ, waiting for a better season before giving or serving. Then press the comparison Jesus made. The evidence is not the bottleneck.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The model prayer is a pattern, not a formula with power in the recitation. Teach it as a shape for prayer, and avoid both liturgical repetition and the opposite error of treating it as unusable.
- "Ask, and it will be given you" is not a blank check. Read it with 1 John 5:14 and James 4:3. God answers as a Father, which sometimes means no.
- Luke 11:4 links our forgiveness to our forgiving. Do not soften it; Matthew 6:14–15 says the same thing more starkly. Grace received is meant to travel.
- Matthew's parallel to this Beelzebub episode contains the saying about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. If someone raises it, handle it pastorally: it describes a settled, deliberate attributing of the Spirit's confirming work to Satan, not a stray thought, and the person terrified of having committed it almost certainly has not.

Everything Else Is Loss**PASSAGE OVERVIEW**

Chapter 3 begins with a warning about men who insisted Gentile converts be circumcised, and Paul takes their argument head on by out-qualifying them. If anyone can boast about Jewish credentials, he says, I can. Then comes the accounting language: what was gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Not worthless things traded for better things, but genuinely valuable things deliberately written off, because he had found something that made the whole column irrelevant.

Verse 9 is the doctrinal heart: not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ. Paul is not opposing obedience; he obeyed Christ from the moment he rose from the waters of baptism (Acts 22:16) and preached obedience everywhere he went. What he is rejecting is the notion that a man can assemble a standing before God out of his own record. Righteousness is received on God's terms, in Christ, and it is never a wage.

Then the runner. Not that I have already attained, but I press on. Forgetting what is behind, reaching forward to what is ahead. And chapter 4 puts all of it into a week: two good women who are at odds and need help, a command to rejoice repeated twice, anxiety answered by prayer with thanksgiving, a disciplined mind, and a man in prison who says he has learned contentment in abundance and in need. Philippians 4:13 belongs to that sentence, not to a locker room wall.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Paul writes from prison, probably Rome, around A.D. 61–63, to a congregation he loved and that had supported him financially more than once.
- The opponents of chapter 3 are Judaizing teachers who bound circumcision and law-keeping on Gentile Christians, the same error addressed in Acts 15 and Galatians.
- Paul's credentials are the best available: right birth, right tribe, right party, right zeal, and a blameless external record under the Law of Moses.
- The athletic imagery in 3:12–14 comes from the Greek footrace, where a runner who looked back lost the race. The prize was awarded at the finish, not at the start.
- Euodia and Syntyche were fellow laborers in the gospel, not troublemakers. Paul names them, commends them, and asks a third person to help them, which is a model worth noting.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul lists his credentials in 3:4–6 and then calls them loss and rubbish. Why such violent language for things that were genuinely good, and what would be on your version of that list?*

The language is deliberately shocking. The word translated rubbish or dung is not polite. Paul chose it because a milder word would have left room for a compromise, and the whole letter is aimed at people being told they needed Christ plus something. His point is not that his heritage was evil but that as a basis for standing before God it is worse than useless; it is the thing that keeps a man from receiving what only Christ can give.

Then ask for the modern version, gently, because every honest person has one. A family that has been in this congregation for four generations. A baptism date. A record of attendance. A career of good behavior. A reputation for soundness. None of those are bad. They become deadly the moment they function as the reason we expect God to accept us. Ask each person to name one line on their own résumé that they secretly present to God.

Question 2. *In 3:9 Paul refuses a righteousness of his own from law and wants the righteousness from God through faith. Talk carefully about what he is rejecting and what he is not rejecting, given that he also says to work out your salvation and to press toward the goal.*

Be precise here, because both ditches are deep. Paul rejects a righteousness that is “my own, from law,” that is, a standing earned by performance so that God owes me. He does not reject obedience. He is the man who wrote Romans 6:3–4 about baptism into Christ’s death, who told the Philippians to work out their own salvation (2:12), who says in this very chapter that he has not yet attained and must press on, and who warns in 3:18–19 about people who end in destruction.

The clean way to say it in class: we are not saved by our record, and we are not saved without obeying the One who saves us. Faith in Scripture is trust that acts, which is why the same book that says by grace through faith says we are created for good works (Ephesians 2:8–10). If someone in the room has been taught faith only, handle it kindly and stay in the text: Paul’s own conversion in Acts 22:16 answers the question without an argument.

Question 3. *Philippians 4:6–7 tells anxious people to pray with thanksgiving and promises a peace that guards the heart. How is that different from simply feeling better, and what does that promise actually cover?*

The promise is not that the circumstance improves or that the feeling lifts on schedule. It is that a peace which surpasses understanding will garrison, the word is military, the heart and mind in Christ Jesus. God posts a guard. That is what the verse actually offers, and it is better than an absence of trouble, because it is available while the trouble is still going on.

Note also the conditions Paul attaches, because they are the part we skip. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is the hinge. Anxious prayer that only recites the problem tends to deepen the groove. Ask the class to try one week of praying about the thing that worries them while naming three things God has already done. Then have them report back.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the seven items in Paul’s résumé in 3:5–6. Mark which ones he inherited and which he earned, and note what that distinction says about religious pride.*

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee concerning the law, a persecutor of the church concerning zeal, and blameless concerning the righteousness which is in the law. The first four he was born into and the last three he achieved. Religious pride feeds on both kinds, the accident of heritage and the record of effort, and Paul writes off both columns.

2. *Read 3:10–14 and write down every verb: know, attain, press, forget, reach forward. What kind of Christian life do those verbs describe, and what do they rule out?*

The verbs are relentless and unfinished: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings; if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead; I press on; I do not count myself to have apprehended; forgetting those things which are behind; reaching forward; I press toward the goal. They describe a Christian life that is still in motion and not yet secure, which rules out both spiritual complacency and the idea that nothing after conversion can be forfeited.

3. *Compare Philippians 3:20–21 with 1 Corinthians 15:42–49. Write down what happens to the body of a Christian, when it happens, and who does it.*

Philippians 3:20–21 says our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly wait for the Savior, who will transform our lowly body to be conformed to His glorious body. First Corinthians 15 says it is sown in corruption and raised in incorruption, sown a natural body and raised a spiritual body, and that this happens at the last trumpet when Christ comes. The one who does it is Christ Himself, by the power that enables Him to subdue all things.

4. *Trace exactly what Paul asks in 4:2–3 about the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche. Who is addressed, what is requested of each party, and what does he say about the two women themselves?*

Paul implores Euodia and implores Syntyche, naming each separately, to be of the same mind in the Lord. He then asks a true companion to help them. He calls them women who labored with him in the gospel and whose names are

in the Book of Life. Nobody is blamed, no verdict is given on who was right, and a third party is drafted to help. That is a pattern for handling conflict in a congregation without turning it into a trial.

5. Philippians 4:8 names what to think about. Write down what actually occupies your mind on the drive home, then make one specific substitution this week and see what changes.

Answers will vary. The point of verse 8 is that attention is a choice and a habit, not a mood. Listen for an actual substitution: a podcast or playlist replaced with Scripture read aloud, a news feed traded for a phone call to someone who needs one, a rehearsed grievance replaced with a rehearsed thanksgiving.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Philippians 3:9 is not a proof text for salvation by faith only. Paul rejects merit earned by law-keeping, not obedience to Christ. Keep Acts 22:16, Romans 6:3–4, and Philippians 2:12 in the same conversation.
- Philippians 3:11–14 shows an apostle who does not consider himself already secure. Use it plainly against once saved, always saved, and just as plainly against anxious insecurity: the runner's confidence is in Christ, and the running is real.
- Do not read 3:11 or 3:20–21 as a separate earlier resurrection for the righteous or as a rapture. Scripture speaks of one coming, one resurrection of the just and the unjust, and one judgment (John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15; 2 Peter 3:10–13).
- Philippians 4:13 is about contentment in plenty and in want, not about achieving whatever we set out to do. Restore it to its sentence.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Isaiah 1–5 · Psalm 74–76 · Luke 11:33–12:21 · Colossians 1:1–2:5

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