

THE PAULINE CAPTIVITY LETTERS • VOLUME TWO

To Live Is Christ

Teacher's Guide



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By Larry Herzog Jr. • companion to *To Live Is Christ*, volume two of The Pauline Captivity Letters

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SESSION ONE

Partners from the First Day

Philippians 1:1–11 · Introducing the Letter

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session One of *To Live Is Christ*. You are beginning an eight-session study of Paul's letter to the Philippians — the second of the four captivity letters this series walks through, and by common consent the warmest of them. If your class came to this study from *In Christ*, the first volume of the series, you are returning to a familiar room: the same Roman house arrest, the same guard at the door, the same chained apostle awaiting his hearing before Caesar. If your class is beginning here, take heart — the student book assumes nothing from the prior volume, and neither will this guide. Each letter stands on its own; the four together form a single witness to the Christ for whom Paul wore his chains.

What you hold is a companion to the main Bible study book. The book is written for the student — a reader who will engage the chapter, look up the passages in his or her own Bible, and come to class prepared to discuss. This guide is written for you — the person responsible for shaping that hour of teaching and conversation. Your students should read Philippians 1:1–11 and the first chapter of the student book before they arrive; your work is to gather what they bring.

Session One carries double duty. It must introduce the study — the letter, the city, the keynote — and it must teach eleven verses that are richer than their familiarity suggests. The temptation will be to treat the greeting and thanksgiving as a warm-up before the famous material arrives. Resist it. Everything Philippians will say about joy, about partnership, about life and death, is already seeded in these verses — and verse 6, the most quoted and most misquoted sentence in the letter, is one of the great assurance texts in all of Scripture. If your students leave today knowing that this letter's joy comes from a prisoner, that the joy has grounds, and that the One who began the good work in them will finish it, the whole study stands on solid ground.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Philippians opens with a chained apostle praying *with joy* for the church that has partnered with him in the gospel from the first day — and verse 6 names the ground beneath both the joy and the partnership: the God who began the good work will Himself bring it to completion; establish today that the letter's joy is grounded gift rather than commanded mood, and all eight sessions will land as gospel.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session One of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Philippians in one sitting. It takes about fifteen minutes. The student book will spend eight weeks in the parts; you should begin with a feel for the whole — and especially for how often the word *rejoice* appears in a letter written from custody.
- ♦ Read Acts 16:6–40 — the vision of the man of Macedonia, Lydia at the riverside, the slave girl, the jailer at midnight. This is the founding story of the congregation Paul is writing to, and the student book leans on it from the first page.
- ♦ Mark the joy vocabulary as you read the letter — *joy, rejoice, glad*. Some form of it appears sixteen times in four short chapters. You will be building a running list from that vocabulary all study long.
- ♦ Review Luther's Small Catechism on Baptism, Part Four, and the explanation of the Third Article. The student book reads the *good work* of verse 6 as begun at the font and sustained by the Spirit through Word and Sacrament, and you will want both connections close at hand.
- ♦ Pray. Eight weeks is a long walk with a congregation through one letter. Commit the study to the Lord's keeping from the start.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, and ideally copies of the student book for any students who do not yet have one.
- ♦ A map showing Philippi, Macedonia, and the Via Egnatia. Any basic Bible atlas will have one. The city's character — a Roman colony on the great east-west road, proud of a citizenship most of its residents did not hold — matters for this letter more than for most.

- ♦ A whiteboard or flip chart. Today you will write the word *joy* — and beside it the Greek *chara* — at the top, and begin a running list beneath it of where the letter locates joy: this week, *joy from partnership in the gospel* and *joy grounded in the One who finishes what He begins*. You will add to this list every week, and by Session Eight the board itself will preach.
- ♦ A notebook page you are prepared to keep for eight weeks. At the close of this session you will ask your students what they hope to receive from a study of Philippians, and you will write the answers down. Session Eight will read them back. Do not skip this; few things land at the end of a study like the hopes recorded at its start.
- ♦ Name tags if you have new students.

Knowing Your Class

Different classes will bring different backgrounds to Philippians. A few patterns to anticipate:

- ♦ Lifelong Lutherans may know individual verses by heart — *he who began a good work in you, rejoice in the Lord always, I can do all things through him who strengthens me* — without ever having read the letter as one sustained piece of pastoral correspondence from a real prison. The letter-from-a-cell frame will make familiar verses strange again, in the best way.
- ♦ Students who finished *In Christ* will arrive with the captivity setting already in their bones. Give them the continuity in a sentence — same imprisonment, same Rome, a different courier — and resist re-teaching at full length what they already own. Students new to the series need the fuller picture; balance accordingly.
- ♦ Students who hear *joy* as temperament — the property of naturally sunny people — may quietly brace themselves for eight weeks of being told to cheer up. The session's framing of joy as grounded gift rather than commanded mood is pastorally important for them, and for every melancholy saint in the room. Watch for visible relief when you say it.
- ♦ Students from evangelical backgrounds may carry a decision-theology reading of verse 6 — God *began* the good work when I gave my life to Him. Do not engage this head-on today; simply teach the verse's grammar carefully, with God as the subject of both verbs. The live wire comes in Session Four, when *work out your own salvation* arrives; note privately which students may need care when it does.
- ♦ Students in present suffering may find a letter of joy from chains either deeply comforting or quietly painful — especially if *rejoice always* has ever been used on them as law. Let them hear early that Paul never commands a feeling; he points to grounds. The whole study will keep that promise.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and introduction to the study
0:05–0:12	A second letter from the same prison: Philippians and its joy
0:12–0:20	How the gospel came to Philippi: Lydia, the slave girl, the jailer
0:20–0:27	Servants, saints, overseers, deacons (vv. 1–2)
0:27–0:34	I thank my God: partnership and joy (vv. 3–5)
0:34–0:43	He who began a good work (vv. 6–8) — the heart of the session
0:43–0:50	That your love may abound (vv. 9–11)
0:50–0:57	Discussion (choose one or two questions)
0:57–1:00	Hopes for the study, closing prayer, and Session 2 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Verse 6 — *He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion* — is the heart of the session, and the joy-from-partnership frame of verses 3–5 is what makes it land. If time gets tight, compress the Acts 16 story into three minutes and the Roman-colony background into two sentences. Never cut verse 6, and never cut the grounds of the joy. Everything in the next seven sessions stands on what you establish there.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

A Second Letter from the Same Prison

Open by locating the letter. Paul is in Rome, under guarded house arrest, in the early 60s — the same imprisonment that produced Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. He has been in custody for years, first in Caesarea and now in the capital, a Roman citizen waiting for his case to be heard before Caesar. If your class studied *In Christ*, one sentence restores the whole picture. If they did not, give it two minutes — the chains are not background color; they are the condition under which every word of this letter was written.

Then name the keynote, because it is astonishing: this prisoner's letter is the most joyful document in the New Testament. Some form of *rejoice* appears sixteen times in four short chapters. Paul calls the Philippians *my joy and crown*. He thanks God every time he remembers them. He will tell them — twice in one verse, so they cannot miss it — *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice*. Let your students feel the collision: the most joyful letter, from a cell. The chains do not produce the joy, and they cannot extinguish it. The joy comes from somewhere else, and finding out where is, in a real sense, the assignment of the next eight weeks.

One series note worth a sentence: unlike Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon — which left Rome together in the hands of Tychicus — Philippians has its own courier. A man named Epaphroditus carried it home, and he nearly died in the service that brought him to Paul's side. The class will meet him properly in Session Four. Planting his name now means the letter arrives in your students' hands the way it arrived in Philippi: carried by a friend, at cost.

Write *joy — chara* at the top of the whiteboard before you move on. Tell the class the list beneath it will grow every week.

Servants, Saints, Overseers, Deacons

The teaching move for verses 1-2 is the missing title. Read aloud how Paul opens Romans — *a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle* — or Galatians, where the apostleship comes out thundering. Then read Philippians 1:1: *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus*. No apostle. The Greek is *douloi* — slaves — and Paul shares the word with Timothy, no separation of rank between them. He is writing to friends. This church has never given him trouble, never challenged his authority, never required the credentials. He needs only to greet them as a fellow slave of the same Lord. Most students have never noticed this, and once they do, the whole temperature of the letter makes sense.

The recipients are *all the saints in Christ Jesus*. Take a moment with *saints — hagioi* — because the word has been kidnapped by popular usage. It does not name a spiritual elite; it names everyone set apart in Christ, made holy not by attainment but by the holiness of the One in whom they are found. Every baptized Christian in your classroom is a saint in exactly this sense. The Lutheran Confessions are emphatic here, and the student book quotes their emphasis: we are saints not by our doing but by His.

Then the detail unique in all of Paul: the greeting names *the overseers and deacons*. This is the only letter opening that mentions church officers, and the student book pauses over it. *Episkopoi* — from which English gets *bishop* — used here the way the New Testament broadly uses it, interchangeably with elders; *diakonoi*, the servants of the church first appointed in Acts 6. The point to make is the one the Augsburg Confession and its Apology will later make explicit: the officers are not a clerical class hovering above the body. They

are saints among saints, called to particular service within the body — the office existing by divine institution to give the gospel and the sacraments, given *to* the church as servants, not lords. One minute here, well spent, honors every called worker in the room without turning the session into a polity lecture.

Close the segment with the greeting proper: *grace and peace*. *Charis* picks up the everyday Greek greeting and fills it with gospel; *eirene* translates the Hebrew *shalom*. Greek and Gentile, Hebrew and Jew, fused into one benediction — and the gifts come *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*, Father and Son named together with no distinction of dignity. The Christology of this letter has begun by verse 2. The Christ Hymn of Session Three is already warming up.

How the Gospel Came to Philippi

This is your map moment, and your storytelling moment. Show the city: northeastern Macedonia, sitting on the Via Egnatia — the great Roman road running east from the Adriatic — named four centuries earlier for Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander. By Paul's day, a Roman colony: a veterans' settlement, intensely proud of a Roman citizenship most provincial cities could only envy. Plant that civic pride now and say nothing more about it; Session Six will harvest it when Paul tells this colony of proud citizens that *our citizenship is in heaven*.

Then tell the Acts 16 story, and tell it as story. The vision of the man of Macedonia. The crossing of the Aegean. The place of prayer by the riverside, where the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, baptized with her household. The slave girl with the spirit of divination, set free in Jesus' name — and her owners, furious at the loss of income, dragging Paul and Silas to the magistrates. Rods. Prison. Hymns at midnight. The earthquake, the jailer's drawn sword, and Paul's voice in the dark: *Do not harm yourself, for we are all here*. The question every evangelist dreams of being asked — *What must I do to be saved?* — and the answer that is the gospel itself: *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household*. Wounds washed and baptisms given before sunrise.

If you read one passage aloud in this segment, make it Acts 16:25–34. Then land the teaching point the student book builds on it: look at who this church is. A businesswoman of means. A slave girl. A Roman jailer and his household. From the very first day, the congregation at Philippi has been what the gospel always makes a church to be — a fellowship of people who would never otherwise have been in the same room, drawn into one body by one Lord, across every social line the ancient world recognized. There is also a quiet irony worth one sentence: the first time Paul was in a Philippian prison, he sang. Now he writes to Philippi from another prison — and the letter sings.

I Thank My God

Verses 3–5 give you Paul's settled habit — the thanksgiving that opens nearly every letter he wrote — at its warmest. There is no rebuke embedded in this one, no concern leaking through, nothing held back for chapter three. The student book notes that even Galatians could barely make Paul skip the thanksgiving; here it overflows. *Always, in every prayer, for you all, with joy* — and the Greek construction places *joy* at the climactic position. Joy is not one feature of the prayer. It is the texture of the prayer itself.

Then ask the question the text is begging: where does a chained man's joy come from? Paul answers before we can ask: *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now*. Here is the letter's keyword, and you should put it on the board beside *joy*: *koinonia* — partnership, fellowship, the most intimate kind of sharing, the kind that holds things in common and bears one another's burdens and suffers and rejoices together. The Philippians have been Paul's *koinonia*-partners from the first day — from the night the jailer washed his wounds, from the morning Lydia opened her home. They have sent money. They have sent Epaphroditus. They have not abandoned him in his imprisonment as some others have. His joy is not the absence of chains; it is the presence of brothers and sisters who have walked with him through the chains and never let him walk alone.

This is where the Lutheran teaching of the communion of saints stops being a phrase in the Creed and becomes visible. The Small Catechism's Third Article puts it in your students' own confirmation vocabulary: the Holy Spirit *calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth* — and within that fellowship, daily and richly forgives. We are not saved alone, and we do not walk alone. Add the first entry under *joy* on the board: *joy from partnership in the gospel*.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Do not let joy float free. Everything in this session — and in this letter — depends on your students seeing that Paul's joy has *grounds*: partnership in the gospel (v. 5) beneath the joy, and the faithfulness of God (v. 6) beneath the partnership. Joy in Philippians is never freestanding optimism and never commanded mood; it is the steady gladness of people who know what God has done, is doing, and will finish. If your students leave hearing *rejoice* as law — one more thing to perform — the study starts wrong, and the next seven weeks will feel like pressure. If they leave hearing joy as grounded gift, every *rejoice* in the letter will land as gospel. State this plainly today. You will be glad you did by Session Seven.

He Who Began a Good Work

Now the heart of the session. Verse 6 may be the most quoted sentence in Philippians, and the student book is honest that it is also the most misquoted. We hear it applied to whatever project we happen to be working on — a marriage, a career change, a difficult recovery — as though Paul promised that our undertakings will succeed. Read the verse again and ask the class: what is the *good work*? Paul means something more specific and more astonishing than our projects. The good work is the work God Himself has begun *in* the Philippians — their salvation, their being-made-saints, their conversion to Christ. The work of grace itself.

Then do the grammar, slowly, because the grammar is the doctrine. Who is the subject of *began*? God. Who is the subject of *will bring it to completion*? God. The Philippians are not the agents of the verbs; they are the objects — the field, as the student book puts it, in which the good work is being done. This is monergism in a single sentence: salvation God's work from start to finish. And it is why Paul is *sure* — the verb is strong — not confident in the Philippians' perseverance but confident in God's. We Lutherans call this the doctrine of preservation: the grace that called and justified us is the grace that keeps us. The Formula of Concord says it with characteristic care — faith and good works follow from regeneration, but the power to believe and to do good is given by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament; the confidence rests in the Worker, not the works.

Give the pastoral force its full weight. Philippi was a colony saturated with the imperial cult and the civic ceremonies that went with it, and Christians who would not participate paid socially for it. This little church was under pressure, and had suffered for its confession in ways small and large. What Paul says to a church under pressure is not *try harder*. He says: the One who began the good work in you will finish it. The pastoral force of monergism is not that it takes the Christian life off our hands — the very next verses speak of the Philippians as active partakers. The pastoral force is that it places the weight of our perseverance on the One who can bear it. When the saints are weak, He is strong. When their faith trembles, His grip does not. Say those sentences slowly and watch the room; for some students, this is the moment the session becomes personal.

Mark the horizon too: *at the day of Jesus Christ*. The completion is eschatological — the return of Christ, the resurrection, the saints seen at last for what they have been made to be. We are saved; we are being saved; we shall be saved. Nothing begun at the font is finished on this side of the resurrection, and that is not a defect of the work but its scale.

Verses 7–8 then warm the doctrine through. *Partakers with me of grace* — the Greek is *synkoinonous mou tes charitos*, and the point is startling: grace is shareable, held in common with our fellow saints, not possessed privately. The Philippians share Paul's imprisonment — by their gifts, their prayers, their Epaphroditus — though they are hundreds of

miles from the dungeon. And Paul's yearning for them has the texture of *the affection of Christ Jesus: splachnois*, the deep inward parts, the seat of the strongest feeling. His love for them is not merely his own; it is Christ's own affection flowing through him. That is what pastoral love is at its truest — not a sentiment the pastor generates but a participation in the love of the Shepherd.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

When verse 6 lands, give the good work a date and an address: the font. The student book reads the verse exactly this way — the work of grace *begun in baptism, sustained through the Word and the sacraments, brought to completion at the day of Christ* — and the Small Catechism's Fourth Part on Baptism is the connection your students already own. For a class that studied *In Christ*, this also ties the volumes together: everything Ephesians located *in Christ*, Philippians now sets in motion — the God who placed you in His Son at the font is the God who will carry the work home. You do not need to develop this at length today. Plant it, and let verse 6 quietly become a baptismal verse for the rest of your students' lives.

That Your Love May Abound

Verses 9–11 are Paul's actual prayer, and the surprise is what he does not pray for. Not that the Philippians' troubles would lessen, not that the persecution would cease, not that their finances would improve. He prays *that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment*. Let the class sit with that for a moment — a prisoner praying for his friends, and this is what he asks.

Then unpack the pairing, because it is the section's teaching point. The love is *agape* — the love God has for the world, the love that sent the Son to the cross, the love the Spirit pours into the baptized — and Paul prays it would overflow beyond its current measure. But not love alone: love *with knowledge* — *epignosis*, full and deep knowledge — *and all discernment* — *aisthesis*, trained moral perception, the sense that can tell apart things that look similar but are not. Christian love is not sentimentality. The student book's formulations are worth using almost verbatim: love without knowledge cannot tell the difference between affirming a brother in his sin and loving him toward repentance; love without discernment cannot tell false teachers from true; love without judgment cannot tell the gospel from a counterfeit that sounds almost like it. The faith we confess is a specific faith; the Lord we love is a specific Lord; and love must grow up into the knowledge of the Christ whose love put it in us.

A pastoral caution for your own delivery: keep this section gospel-toned. In some classes, the discernment language can curdle into license for sharper criticism of everyone outside the room. Notice what Paul actually prays for — the growth of *love*, with know-

ledge and discernment as its eyes, so that the Philippians may *approve what is excellent* (*dokimazein* — test and then approve) and be *pure and blameless for the day of Christ*. The prayer aims at love that sees clearly, not suspicion that feels holy.

Then the climax, and make sure the class hears the voice of the verbs. Paul does not pray that the Philippians would *produce* the fruit of righteousness. He prays they would be *filled* with it — passive, receiving — and that the righteousness *comes through Jesus Christ*. The fruit is not generated; it is given, the way branches bear what the vine supplies. The righteousness is His; the fruit is His; the filling is His; and the destination is His as well — *to the glory and praise of God*. The student book names it with the Reformation's own words: *solī Deo gloria*. We are not the source of the fruit, and we are not the destination of the praise. We are the field in which the One who began the good work is bringing it to completion — and when the harvest comes in, every basket is carried to Him.

Gathering the Threads

Close the teaching the way the student book does: by counting. Eleven verses, and Christ has been named seven times. He is the One whose slaves Paul and Timothy are, the One in whom the saints are found, the One whose grace and peace are given, the One whose day is coming, the One whose affection Paul feels, the One through whom the fruit comes, the One to whose glory everything is ordered. Paul has not yet described his chains, has not yet sung the Christ Hymn, has not yet counted his credentials as loss — and Christ is already everywhere in this letter, because Christ is already everything to the man writing it.

Then read the student book's last sentence of teaching aloud, or paraphrase it closely: *To live is Christ, Paul will say in a few verses. He has already started to show us what he means*. That sentence is your bridge to Session Two, and it is the title of the whole volume arriving on the doorstep. Let it hang in the air as you turn to discussion.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Choose one or two for this session — the introductory teaching is substantial, and a single unhurried conversation will serve your class better than four rushed ones. Notes on each:

Question 1 — Servant rather than apostle. A good low-stakes warm-up. The contrast with Romans and Galatians does the work; most students will move naturally to memories of church relationships where the role fell away and the fellow-servant bond remained. If your pastor is in the room, this question quietly honors the right things.

Question 2 — Three baptisms across social lines. A celebratory question, and most congregations can answer it warmly. Two cautions: in a homogeneous congregation it can turn into either self-congratulation or guilt, and neither is the point. Keep the focus where the question puts it — on what *the gospel* produces and where the Spirit is visibly drawing people together — rather than on demographic scorekeeping.

Question 3 — Partnership rather than a service you receive. The most searching question of the set. It carries an implicit critique of consumer Christianity, and if your class can be honest, the conversation can be remarkable — most adults have experienced both the cost and the strength of real *koinonia* and have rarely been asked to name them. Keep it testimonial rather than accusatory; the question is about what students have *experienced*, not about diagnosing the congregation's failures.

Question 4 — Verse 6 misquoted and rightly read. The theological payoff question, and the one most directly on the session's heart. The shift from *my projects* to *God's work of salvation in me* is the whole teaching of the session in miniature, and the second half — what comfort the verse offers when faith feels weak and progress feels slow — gives quieter students a doorway into honest speech. Expect at least one answer that is really a confession of weariness; receive it gently and let verse 6 do its work.

Question 5 — Love with knowledge and discernment. The question most likely to drift. Steered well, it produces a genuinely useful conversation about what informed love looks like in practice — in parenting, in friendship, in doctrinal disagreement. Steered poorly, it becomes a grievance session about everything wrong in the wider church. Anchor it to the text's own purpose: the knowledge serves the love, never the other way around.

Question 6 — To the glory and praise of God. A good closing question with a strong vocation angle: the ordinary week — the desk, the kitchen, the shop floor — reframed as the field where fruit is being grown for Someone else's glory. If discussion time is short, this question can be answered in a sentence apiece around the room and still land.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question for Session One, make it Question 4 — verse 6 misquoted and rightly read. It requires no background knowledge, it consolidates the session's central teaching, and it surfaces the pastoral need — weary saints who wonder whether the work in them will hold — that this letter exists to answer. Whatever you choose, save the final three minutes for the hopes exercise: ask each student what they are hoping to receive from eight weeks in Philippians, and write the answers down where you will not lose them. Session Eight will read them back, and that reading will be one of the best moments of the study.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ The joy-from-partnership frame and verse 6 taught with its true grammar. This is the session's reason for being. Never cut it.
- ♦ The Acts 16 founding in compressed form — Lydia, the slave girl, the jailer, three baptisms across every social line, in three minutes. The story is the texture of everything Paul says about partnership.
- ♦ The whiteboard begun: *joy — chara* at the top, with this week's two entries beneath it.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 4.
- ♦ The hopes exercise, the closing prayer, and the Session 2 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The Roman-colony background of Philippi. Name the Via Egnatia and the citizenship pride in two sentences; Session Six will rebuild the full picture when *our citizenship is in heaven* arrives.
- ♦ The overseers-and-deacons material. Greet the officers in one minute; the Augsburg Confession background is for your own grounding and can surface later in the study.
- ♦ The Greek word studies of verses 9–11. Keep “love with its eyes open” and the passive voice of *filled*, and move on.
- ♦ The series framing for returning classes. One sentence — same prison, second letter, new courier — is enough for a class that finished *In Christ*.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be Philippians 1:6 taught with God as the subject of both verbs — *He* began the good work, *He* will bring it to completion — and your students as the field in which He is working. Everything else can be compressed or deferred. That verse, rightly read, is the ground of the letter's joy, the engine of the study's comfort, and the truth your weariest student came tonight needing to hear. Establish it today, and the next seven weeks have solid ground under them.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Acts 16:6–40.** The founding of the church at Philippi — the vision, Lydia, the slave girl, the jailer. The essential narrative background for the whole study, and the relational history behind every warm sentence in the letter.
- ♦ **2 Corinthians 8:1–5.** Paul's own description of the Macedonian churches: *in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity.* The Philippians' profile, drawn by the man who knew them best — joy and giving fused, exactly as this letter will show.
- ♦ **Psalms 138.** *The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me... do not forsake the work of your hands.* The Old Testament's own verse 6 — the saint's confidence that the God who began will not abandon the work.
- ♦ **John 15:1–11.** The vine and the branches, fruit that the branch bears but does not generate, and the purpose clause that joins this session's two halves: *that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Small Catechism, the Creed, Third Article with explanation.** *I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.* Verse 6 in catechism form, and the confessional ground of this session's monergism.
- ♦ **Small Catechism, Baptism, Part Four.** The daily significance of baptism — the good work begun at the font, drowning and rising daily until the day of its completion.
- ♦ **Augsburg Confession, Articles V and XIV.** The office of the ministry and ecclesiastical order — the confessional background for the only Pauline greeting that names overseers and deacons.
- ♦ **Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II.** On free will and conversion: the Spirit working through Word and Sacrament as the One who begins, sustains, and completes. Your doctrinal footing for verse 6, and your preparation for Session Four's *work out your own salvation.*

Commentaries

- ♦ **R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians* (Augsburg).** The classic confessional Lutheran treatment — verse-by-verse, dogmatically careful, and warmly pastoral. If you used Lenski for the first volume, the same volume serves you here.
- ♦ **Harlyn J. Kuschel, *Philippians* (People's Bible Commentary, Northwestern/CPH).** Brief, accessible, and confessionally Lutheran — written for exactly the kind of class you are teaching. A good gift for a student who wants to go one step deeper.
- ♦ **Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT, Eerdmans).** Fee is not Lutheran, but his commentary is the standard thorough treatment of the letter, particularly strong on joy, partnership, and the flow of Paul's argument. Consistently valuable for the teacher who wants the exegesis exact.

A Final Word

You are about to walk eight weeks with a group of students through the most personal and most joyful of Paul's letters. It is a letter the Church has been singing from for twenty centuries — Luther returned to it constantly, the Confessions quote its great Hymn, and your students have fragments of it lodged in their memories whether they know it or not. Take the teaching seriously. Prepare each week. Pray for your class. Trust the Lord to do what only the Lord can do.

Session One is the foundation. If you establish the frame — a chained apostle whose joy has grounds, a church born across every social line, and a God who finishes what He begins — the rest of the study has solid ground under it. Do not skimp on this session because it is “introductory.” The joy your students will be invited into for eight weeks is anchored tonight, in the grammar of one verse and the texture of one friendship.

Next week, the most concentrated statement of the Christian's relationship to life and death in all of Paul. Your students will read Philippians 1:12–26 before they arrive — Paul's chains advancing the gospel, rival preachers preaching Christ anyway, and the sentence that gives this volume its name: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*. Prepare carefully; some of your students have been waiting their whole lives to hear that verse taught slowly.

And keep the page of hopes somewhere safe. Eight weeks from now, you will read it back to a room that has been changed by this letter — and you will be glad, then, that you wrote things down tonight.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the God who began His good work in you and in every student He sends you bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TWO

Whether by Life or by Death

Philippians 1:12–26

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Two. Last week your class met a prisoner whose prayers were full of joy; this week Paul turns to look directly at the chains themselves — and what he sees will occupy your students for the rest of their lives. The passage moves in three great steps: the chains have advanced the gospel rather than hindering it; Christ proclaimed is Christ at work, whatever the preacher's motives; and life and death alike are stages on which Christ is to be magnified. At the center stands the sentence that gives this volume its title, and it is hard to think of a verse more quoted and less examined: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

Your teaching challenge this week is the opposite of obscurity. Nothing in this passage is hard to understand; the difficulty is that verse 21 has been a banner, a bookmark, and a coffee mug for so long that your students may believe they already know it. They do not — not in the way Paul means it — and the session succeeds when the verse stops functioning as a slogan and starts functioning as a description: of Paul, and then, startlingly, of every baptized Christian in the room. The student book builds carefully to this. Trust the build.

One pastoral note before you walk in. This session talks plainly about death — about death as *gain*, as a door, as entrance into Christ's full presence. In almost every adult class, someone is grieving, someone is afraid, and someone is privately carrying a diagnosis. Taught well, this material is among the most comforting in Scripture, and Lutherans have been dying well on it for five centuries. But let it be comfort, not bravado. Paul writes about death from inside the real possibility of his own; teach it with the same sobriety, and the students who most need verses 21–23 will be able to receive them.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

From inside chains whose outcome he cannot see, Paul testifies that his imprisonment has cut a road for the gospel, that Christ proclaimed is Christ at work whatever the preacher's motives, and that his own body — living or dying — is the stage on which Christ will be magnified, because *to live is Christ, and to die is gain*; teach verse 21 as substance rather than slogan, and the session has done its work.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Two of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Philippians 1:12-26 several times, at least once aloud. Mark the chain of surprises: the chains *advance* the gospel; the rival preachers cause *rejoicing*; the undecided verdict produces *confidence*. The passage runs on reversals, and your teaching will too.
- ♦ Read Acts 28:16, 30-31 — Paul's Roman custody in his own rented quarters, a soldier guarding him, *welcoming all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God... with all boldness and without hindrance*. This is the room the letter was written in, and the student book's picture of the rotating guard depends on it.
- ♦ Sit with verse 21 in the Greek if you are able, or at least with the student book's rendering of its compactness: *emoi gar to zēn Christos* — five words, no verb of being. *The living, Christ*. You will want that starkness at your fingertips.
- ♦ Review the Small Catechism's explanation of the Second Article — *that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom* — and Augsburg Confession VIII. Both are load-bearing this week.
- ♦ Pray — especially for the students for whom death is not an abstraction this season.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible and the student book; the whiteboard with the *joy — chara* list begun last week.
- ♦ Two new entries ready for the board: *joy from the gospel's advance — even through chains* (v. 12) and *joy that Christ is proclaimed — whatever the preacher's motives* (v. 18). The list is doing its quiet work: every entry so far locates joy outside circumstances.
- ♦ Optional: a road map or a picture of a Roman road. The student book's controlling image for verses 12-14 is *prokopē* — pioneers cutting a road ahead of an advancing army — and a single visual can carry it.
- ♦ The page of hopes from Session One, filed where it will stay safe for six more weeks.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **The theology of the cross.** God does His best work where, by every human measure, He should be least at work. The crucified Lord is the visible center of divine power, and the kingdom does not run on the rails of human strategy — it runs on the cross. Paul's chains are the session's working example: the apparent defeat that became the gospel's road into Caesar's own household. Name the doctrine when the student book names it; your students will use it for the rest of the study.
- ♦ **The objectivity of the means of grace.** The validity of the ministry does not depend on the moral perfection of the minister. Baptism cleanses even when poured by an unworthy pastor; the Word preached is the Word of God even when the preacher's motives are mixed — not because character is indifferent, but because the gospel rests on Christ, not on the man carrying it. This is Augsburg Confession VIII in Pauline narrative form, and it is the doctrinal engine of verses 15–18.
- ♦ **The total claim of the Second Article.** *To live is Christ* is not apostolic overstatement; it is the Small Catechism's confession that Jesus Christ *is my Lord, who has redeemed me... that I may be His own* — purchased not with gold or silver but with His own precious blood, body and soul, in life and in death. Every baptized student in your room has already confessed verse 21 in catechism form. Show them.
- ♦ **Death as gain.** For the one who belongs to Christ, death is not loss but entrance — *to depart and be with Christ... far better*. Scripture holds two truths together without strain: death is the last enemy, and death is a door. Lutheran piety has always held both, and this session is where your class learns to hold them too.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review: the joy board and verse 6
0:05–0:13	The chains cut a road: <i>prokopē</i> and the Praetorian Guard (vv. 12–14)
0:13–0:21	Pretense or truth: the rival preachers and Paul's rejoicing (vv. 15–18)
0:21–0:28	Deliverance, prayers, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ (vv. 19–20)
0:28–0:38	To live is Christ, and to die is gain (v. 21) — the heart of the session
0:38–0:45	Hard pressed between the two: departing and remaining (vv. 22–26)
0:45–0:52	Gathering the threads: the theology of the cross
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose one or two questions)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 3 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Verse 21 is the heart of the session and the title of the study; give it the full ten minutes even if everything else compresses. If time gets tight, the rival-preachers material of verses 15–18 can be taught in three minutes — the reversal and the doctrine, without the speculation about motives — and the Praetorian Guard history can shrink to the single image of the soldier across the room. Never compress verse 21, and never skip the catechism connection that makes it confessable by your students and not just by Paul.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

What Has Happened to Me

Open with a question before you open the text: what would you expect years of imprisonment to do to a missionary's mission? Let the class answer honestly — stall it, shrink it, end it. Then read verse 12: *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.* The whole session lives inside the gap between what we expect and what Paul reports.

Give your students the word the student book gives them: *prokopē*, the verb translated *advance* — a military and naval term, used of pioneers cutting a road through dense terrain ahead of an advancing army, of a ship making headway against the wind. The chains have

not blocked the road; the chains *are* the road-cutting. Then make it concrete, because the concreteness is what students remember. Acts tells us Paul lived in his own rented quarters with a soldier guarding him — rotating shifts of the Praetorian Guard, Caesar's elite household troops, the men responsible for the emperor's most important prisoners. Paint the room: Paul praying aloud, Paul teaching whoever came, Paul dictating this very letter — and a soldier sitting across the room, hearing all of it, shift after shift, month after month. Sooner or later the soldier asks what the case is about, and the answer comes back: *it is about Christ*. The unit talked. The gospel, by the slow work of the imperial schedule, reached the emperor's own household — and Paul will say so outright in the letter's last lines, *especially those of Caesar's household*. Plant that forward reference; Session Eight will harvest it.

Then the second surprise: the chains stiffened the spine of the church in Rome. One would expect Paul's arrest to intimidate the brothers into silence — if *Paul* can be chained, who is safe? It worked the other way. *Most of the brothers... are much more bold to speak the word without fear*. If Paul could speak Christ in irons, they could speak Christ in their shops and homes. For a class that studied *In Christ*, one sentence ties the volumes: the *ambassador in chains* of Ephesians 6 turns out to have been doing ambassadorial work the entire time.

Name the doctrine before you leave the segment, because the student book names it and the whole letter runs on it: this is the theology of the cross. God works His best work where He appears least at work. Asked in advance where the gospel would advance fastest in the empire, no strategist alive would have answered *in Caesar's personal guard, by means of a chained apostle awaiting execution*. But that is what God did — and it is the kind of thing God is always doing. Add the board entry: *joy from the gospel's advance — even through chains*.

Pretense or Truth

Verses 15–18 contain one of the strangest pastoral situations in the New Testament, and you should let its strangeness land before you resolve it. There were Christians in Rome — men genuinely proclaiming Christ — who were preaching *out of selfish ambition*, with the specific aim of afflicting Paul in his imprisonment. The text does not explain their motives, and the student book is careful not to over-explain either: perhaps drawing away his supporters, perhaps making the movement look threatening to his captors, perhaps simple resentment of his authority while he was off the stage. What the text gives us is their aim: they wanted to wound Paul through their preaching.

Then Paul's response, which no one in your class will see coming if they have not read ahead: *What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice*. Be precise here, because the student book is precise. Paul is not saying motives do not matter — he distinguishes the two motives care-

fully, and bad motives in ministry are no small thing anywhere in his letters. He is saying something narrower and stronger: the proclamation of Christ, even carried by ambition, even aimed at hurting him, is still the proclamation of Christ — and what that proclamation accomplishes is not finally up to the preacher. It is up to the One being proclaimed. The man weaponizing the gospel against Paul discovers, despite himself, that the only thing he can do with the gospel is give it to people who need it.

Apply it in both directions, as the student book does. To the parishioner who has come to suspect the preacher's motives: the Word can still come to you; listen for the gospel; the unworthy preacher cannot rob you of Christ. To the preacher whose motives are mixed — and what preacher's motives are not? — preach Christ anyway; the Word is greater than your heart. Keep a hand on the wheel in discussion, though: this section is comfort for burdened consciences, not amnesty for bad shepherds, and not an invitation for the class to audit the synod's pulpits.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

When verses 15–18 land, give them their confessional name: this is why the Augsburg Confession (Article VIII) insists that the sacraments and the Word are efficacious even when administered by evil men — because the means of grace are objective, resting on Christ's institution and not on the minister's heart. Your students have lived this doctrine without knowing it: every Lutheran who has ever received absolution without first interviewing the pastor's soul was standing on Article VIII. Paul rejoicing at the rival preachers is the article in narrative form — the preacher is the instrument; Christ is the substance. Name it in two minutes, and you will have turned a strange anecdote into one of the most comforting teachings your class owns.

Christ Will Be Honored

Verses 19–20 turn from what is happening around Paul to what is happening in him, and the first thing to notice is what he does *not* claim. *I know that... this will turn out for my deliverance* — the word is *sōtēria*, the standard word for salvation, and Paul deliberately leaves the verdict open. He does not say he will be acquitted. He says that whatever the court of Caesar decides — acquittal or conviction, life or death — the court of heaven has already ruled, and he is on his way to deliverance. The student book catches the echo your students will not: Paul is appropriating Job's words from the Greek Old Testament — *this will turn out for my salvation* (Job 13:16) — taking the confidence of the great sufferer as his own. A sentence on this is enough, but it is a rich sentence: Paul reads his chains through Job, and invites us to read ours through both.

His confidence has two named supports, and each deserves a minute. First, *your prayers* — and Paul means it. The Philippians' prayers are not pious wishes; they are active partnership in his ordeal, doing real work in his life. Lutherans are rightly careful to keep prayer from eclipsing the means of grace, but the Catechism is equally clear that prayer is commanded, invited, and heard for Christ's sake — and Paul is counting on it. Second, *the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ* — a striking phrase, not Paul's usual idiom. The Spirit helping Paul is the Spirit who belongs to Jesus, who does the work of Jesus in the lives of Jesus' people: the same Spirit who hovered over creation, descended at the Jordan, raised Christ from the dead — present in a Roman cell. Of course Paul is confident.

Then verse 20, the hinge into the great confession: Paul's *eager expectation and hope* that *Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death*. The verb — *megalynthēsetai*, *magnified* in the older versions — means to make great, to show the greatness of. Paul's body is the stage on which Christ is to be shown great, and the script does not depend on the ending. If the prisoner walks free, Christ magnified; if the prisoner is led to execution, Christ magnified. Pose the student book's orienting question to the room and let it sit: *will Christ be magnified in this body?* — by health or sickness, success or failure, long years or sudden death. It is the question the rest of the session answers.

To Live Is Christ

Now the verse, and take your time. Read it aloud: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*. Then show your students how compact it really is. The Greek is barely five words — *emoi gar to zēn Christos kai to apothanein kerdos* — and there is no verb of being. Paul does not say living is *like* Christ, or living *means* Christ. He says: *the living, Christ*. Christ is not a feature of Paul's life, not even the most important feature. Christ is the substance of it — what his life *is*. Remove Christ and you have not removed part of Paul; you have removed all of him.

Then press where the student book presses, because this is where the verse stops being a mug and starts being a mirror. We are accustomed to religion as one compartment among many — work, family, hobbies, politics, and somewhere in the array, church. Paul will not let us divide his life this way, because for him there is nothing to put in the other compartments. There is no Paul-apart-from-Christ left over to allocate. Say it plainly and let the discomfort do its teaching; Question 5 will give the class room to respond.

Then — and this is the move that makes the session pastoral rather than merely convicting — show them that the verse is already theirs. The Small Catechism's Second Article makes the identical total claim for every baptized Christian: *Jesus Christ is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person... not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood... that I may be His own*. Body and soul, in life and in death. Paul is not the only one who can say *for me to live is Christ*; every Christian can say it, because of what

Christ has done. The question, as the student book puts it, is whether we have grasped the magnitude of what is being said.

And the second half: *to die is gain*. Handle it with the doubleness Scripture gives it. Death is not good in itself — Paul elsewhere calls it the last enemy to be destroyed — but for the one who belongs to Christ, death is entrance into Christ's full presence. *To depart and be with Christ... is far better*. Paul wants this, says so, and can say so without a trace of morbidity, because he has seen by faith what death is to the one whose life is hidden with Christ. The student book's image is the one to leave on the table: death is a door, and on the other side of the door is the One who is the substance of life. Watch your room as you teach this. For the grieving and the frightened, these are not theoretical sentences — and taught gently, they are among the kindest in the Bible.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Do not let verse 21 remain a slogan. The student book says it exactly: *this is not a slogan; it is a way of seeing the whole of a life*. Your move is a two-step. First, strip the verse to its Greek starkness — five words, no verb of being, *the living, Christ* — so your students feel its totality. Second, hand it back to them through the catechism — *that I may be His own* — so they discover they have already confessed it. A class that leaves admiring Paul's devotion has missed the session. A class that leaves realizing the baptismal font made this verse *their* biography — that is the session. Everything else this hour serves those ten minutes.

Hard Pressed Between the Two

Verses 22–26 give us something rare: the apostle thinking out loud. *Which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two*. The verb — *synechomai* — is the word for being squeezed between opposing forces, and Paul genuinely feels both: the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, and the desire to remain and serve the church. The student book adds a caution worth repeating: do not press the “choosing” language literally. Paul has no power to schedule his death; he is using a rhetorical figure to express two godly longings. The choice is the Lord's — and the choice the Lord has made, Paul becomes convinced as he writes, is for remaining: *I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith*.

Mark the direction of that sentence, because it is the chapter's final reversal. Paul will live a while longer — not for his own sake, but for theirs. His remaining is ministry; his life, like everything else about him, is not his own. This is vocation in its purest form: existence itself given over to Christ for the sake of Christ's body. And it lets you close the teaching with the student book's summary, which deserves to be read nearly verbatim: the chains have served the gospel; the rival preachers have served the gospel; the trial and its

outcome will serve the gospel; even Paul's life and death will serve the gospel. There is nothing in this passage that is not serving the gospel. Everything has been gathered into the service of Christ — the cell become a workshop, the chains become roads. *May the Lord grant us, in our own much smaller troubles, the same set of eyes.*

Gathering the Threads

The synthesis this week is the theology of the cross, and the student book states it in a sentence you can put on the board: the world looks at chains and sees a man defeated; the eyes of faith look at chains and see the road the gospel is cutting. Behind everything stands verse 21, and beneath verse 21 stands last week's verse 6 — the same Lord who began the good work at the font is the One in whose hand both our living and our dying are held. He decides whether we remain; He decides when we depart; and whichever it is, the calling is one: to be the body in which Christ is honored.

End where the student book ends, with the comfort: every Christian has wondered whether a present difficulty has any meaning. Paul's chains had meaning. Ours do too — not because suffering is good in itself, but because the Christ in whose service we suffer is good, and He is making, out of every chain, a road. Add the second board entry if you have not already, and turn to discussion.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. The teaching content this week is weighty, and the questions are unusually personal; one or two unhurried conversations will serve better than four rushed ones. Notes on each:

Question 1 — Setbacks that became roads. The most accessible question of the set and a natural warm-up. Nearly every adult has a story of a closed door God used, and the *prokopē* image gives them fresh language for it. One caution: do not let the conversation imply that every setback's purpose becomes visible. Paul could see what his chains accomplished; many saints cannot, and the doctrine holds anyway.

Question 2 — Witness where God has put you. The Praetorian Guard question, and a quietly powerful one for ordinary vocations: the break room, the bleachers, the hospital waiting area — places no one chose as a mission field and God uses as one. This question pairs beautifully with Question 1 if you have time for two.

Question 3 — Mixed motives in the pulpit and the pew. Handle with the same precision Paul uses. The first half (how this affects the way you listen to preaching) is comfort — the Word comes to you regardless of the vessel. The second half (your own mixed motives in

speaking of Christ) keeps the question from becoming an audit of the clergy. If the conversation drifts toward critiquing specific preachers, bring it back to Article VIII's comfort and Paul's *Yes, and I will rejoice*.

Question 4 — Christ magnified in your body. The vocation question, and the bridge from Paul's dramatic situation to your students' ordinary ones. The phrase *the stage on which the greatness of Christ is shown* unlocks it: the body at the desk, in the kitchen, in the sickbed. For homebound or chronically ill students, this question can be a gift — magnifying Christ does not require a healthy body, only a yielded one.

Question 5 — If you took verse 21 seriously. The session's payoff question and the most searching. *What things in your life currently function as competing centers?* invites real confession, and the closing phrase — displacement *not in slogan, but in substance* — keeps answers honest. Give it silence; the first thirty seconds of quiet after this question are usually the most productive of the hour.

Question 6 — To die is gain. The tenderest question, and in the right class, the most pastoral hour you will have all study. Let students speak of their own deaths and their own grief at whatever depth they choose, and do not rush to tidy what they say. If someone in the room has been recently bereaved, consider naming the question's weight aloud and giving explicit permission to listen rather than speak. End any conversation on this question with gospel, spoken plainly: the door, and the One on the other side of it.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question for Session Two, make it Question 5 — verse 21 taken seriously, competing centers named. It is the title of the study turned into a mirror, and it consolidates everything the session has taught. Question 1 is the strong alternative for a newer or quieter class. And whichever you choose, consider closing the hour by having the class say verse 21 aloud together — slowly, as confession rather than recitation. A room full of baptized Christians saying *for to me to live is Christ* over their own actual lives is the session's teaching, completed.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ Verse 21 taught in full — the Greek starkness, the no-compartments challenge, and the catechism hand-back. This is the session's reason for being and the study's title. Never cut it.

- ♦ The *prokopē* road image and the soldier across the room, in five minutes. The reversal of verses 12–14 sets up everything.
- ♦ The theology of the cross, named — two sentences will do, but say the words; the rest of the study leans on them.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 5.
- ♦ The closing prayer and the Session 3 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The rival preachers of verses 15–18. Compress to the reversal and the comfort — Christ proclaimed is Christ at work — and save Article VIII for a richer treatment when a student raises the question, as one eventually will.
- ♦ The Job 13:16 echo and the *sōtēria* word study. Keep “the verdict is open; the deliverance is not,” and move on.
- ♦ The Praetorian Guard history. The soldier across the room carries the whole image; the institutional detail can go.
- ♦ The *synechomai* word study in verses 22–26. Keep “hard pressed between two godly desires” and the resolution — remaining *for your progress and joy*.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be verse 21 moved from slogan to substance — five Greek words with no verb of being, confessed already by every baptized Christian in the catechism's Second Article. A student who leaves knowing that *to live is Christ* is not Paul's achievement but the baptized Christian's identity has the whole letter in hand. Establish that, and even a shortened session has done its work.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Acts 28:16, 30–31.** Paul's Roman custody — the rented quarters, the single guard, two whole years of *proclaiming the kingdom of God... with all boldness and without hindrance*. Luke's last sentence is this session's first teaching point in narrative form.

- ♦ **Job 13:13–18.** The sufferer's confidence Paul borrows in verse 19 — *this will turn out for my salvation* — spoken first from inside a trial with no visible verdict. Reading Job's words after Paul's lets you feel the lineage.
- ♦ **Romans 14:7–9.** *Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.* The doctrinal twin of verses 20–21, written by the same apostle in a calmer hour — and proof that the confession is for every Christian, not only for prisoners.
- ♦ **2 Timothy 4:6–8.** Paul facing death the second time, years later — the drink offering, the finished race, the crown. *To die is gain*, kept to the end.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Small Catechism, the Creed, Second Article with explanation.** *That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom* — verse 21 in the words your students memorized at confirmation. The single most important cross-reference of the session.
- ♦ **Augsburg Confession, Article VIII.** The Word and sacraments efficacious even when administered by evil men — the confessional ground beneath Paul's rejoicing in verses 15–18, and lasting comfort for consciences troubled by unworthy ministers.
- ♦ **Luther, A Sermon on Preparing to Die (1519).** Luther's pastoral masterwork on facing death with the eyes of faith — the door image, the sacraments as provisions for the journey. The richest companion to *to die is gain* in the whole tradition, and still strikingly readable.
- ♦ **"Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart."** The third stanza — *Lord, let at last Thine angels come* — is verse 21 and verse 23 set to music, and generations of Lutherans have died with it on their lips. If your class sings, this is the week to sing it.

Commentaries

- ♦ **R. C. H. Lenski, *Philippians* (in the Galatians–Ephesians–Philippians volume, Augsburg).** Particularly careful on verses 15–18 — the distinctions Paul draws and does not draw about the rival preachers — and dogmatically sure-footed on verse 21.
- ♦ **Harlyn J. Kuschel, *Philippians* (People's Bible Commentary).** Warm and brief on the whole passage, with a pastor's touch on *to die is gain*; a good loan to a student wrestling with Question 6.
- ♦ **Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT).** The fullest treatment of the *praitōrion* question and the Greek of verse 21 — where the compactness, and the missing verb, get their exact due. Not Lutheran, but exegetically indispensable here.

A Final Word

This week you taught the sentence the whole study is named for, and you taught it the hard way — not as a banner but as a biography, first Paul's and then your students'. That is no small thing. Most Christians go a lifetime hearing verse 21 quoted and never once hearing it explained; your class now knows what the words cost, where they came from, and why the baptized can say them. Whatever else this study accomplishes, that knowledge will outlast it.

Do not be surprised if this session lingers in your students through the week. The compartment question — what would have to change — tends to follow people home, and the death question tends to surface in private conversations afterward. Make yourself available for both. Some of the best teaching of this study will happen in the parking lot.

Next week, the summit. Your students will read Philippians 1:27–2:11 before they arrive — the call to live worthy of the gospel, to stand firm in one spirit against opposition, and then the Christ Hymn itself: *who, though He was in the form of God... emptied Himself... became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him.* It is the most exalted Christological passage in Paul, the Confessions return to it again and again, and you will have one hour to walk your class through it. Begin preparing early this week; Session Three rewards every minute you give it.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may Christ be magnified in your body and in the bodies of all your students — whether by life or by death, until the day He returns.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION THREE

Have This Mind

Philippians 1:27–2:11

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Three — the summit of the study. This week your class reaches the Christ Hymn, the most exalted Christological passage in all of Paul: the descent from the form of God to the slave's death of the cross, and the ascent to the Name above every name. The Lutheran Confessions return to these verses again and again; the Church has sung them for twenty centuries; and you have one hour.

The passage has a double character, and your teaching must honor both halves. Paul did not write Philippians 2:5–11 as a freestanding doctrinal treatise; he embedded it in an exhortation about how Christians in one small congregation should treat each other — stand firm together, count others more significant, do nothing from rivalry or conceit. The most common way to mis-teach this session is to choose: either soar through the Christology and leave the church-life material as preamble, or grind through the ethics and treat the Hymn as illustration. The student book refuses the choice, and so should you. The ethic of the church *is* the ethic of the Christ Hymn — the highest confession grounding the most practical appeal — and a class that sees the connection has learned something about how the whole New Testament works.

One word of realism: this is the fullest hour of the study. The teaching segments below are tight, and the temptation to lecture will be strong. Resist it by deciding in advance what you will compress (the guidance under *Where to Slow Down* is blunt about this), and remember that the Hymn itself, read well aloud, does a great deal of your teaching for you. Paul is quoting the church's own worship; let your class hear it as worship before they hear it analyzed.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Paul grounds his call to gospel-worthy citizenship and self-forgetful unity in the church's own hymn of Christ — who, being true God, did not grasp at equality but emptied Himself to the slave's death of a cross, and was therefore super-exalted with the Name above every name — and he grounds it as gift before command: *have this mind... which is yours in Christ Jesus*; teach the Hymn as both the church's highest confession and the mind already given to the baptized, and doctrine and life will arrive in the same hour.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Three of the student book carefully, at least twice. This is the chapter to give a third reading if you can.
- ♦ Read Philippians 1:27–2:11 aloud several times, and read the Hymn (2:5–11) aloud until its two movements — down, then up — are in your voice. You will read it to the class, and the reading matters.
- ♦ Read Isaiah 45:20–25. *To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance* — spoken by the LORD of Israel, applied by Paul to Jesus. The boldest move in the Hymn depends on your students hearing the source.
- ♦ Read Genesis 3:1–7 with verse 6 of the Hymn in mind. Adam reached out to grasp at being like God; the Second Adam, who *was* God, did not grasp. The contrast is the student book's, and it preaches.
- ♦ Review Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII — at least its opening paragraphs on the person of Christ. The Confessions wrote an entire article in part because of this hymn; an hour with it now will steady everything you say about *emptied Himself*.
- ♦ Pray for precision. This is the week the class handles the deepest things, and loving care with words is itself a form of reverence.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible and the student book; the whiteboard with the *joy — chara* list.
- ♦ One new entry ready: *joy completed in the church's like-mindedness* — Paul's own words, *complete my joy by being of the same mind* (2:2). For the first time, the list shows joy flowing not only to the church but through it.
- ♦ A simple descent-and-ascent diagram for the board — a V shape works: *form of God* at the top left, steps down through *servant, man, obedient to death, death on a cross* at the bottom, then steps up the right side through *highly exalted* and *the Name* to *every knee, every tongue* at the top right. Build it live as you teach the Hymn; by 2:11 the board itself will show that the cross is the path to the crown.
- ♦ Optional: a hymnal. If your class sings, this is the week for it — see the suggestion under *From the Lutheran Tradition*.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **The two states of Christ.** Humiliation and exaltation receive their classic biblical formulation here: the One who was in the form of God took the form of a servant, was obedient to death on a cross, and was therefore highly exalted. The Formula of Concord devotes an entire article to the person of Christ in part because of this hymn. Both forms are real; both are His; the same Person who is true God is true man, humiliated to the cross and exalted to the throne.
- ♦ **Kenosis rightly taught.** *He emptied Himself* — but not of His divinity. Divinity is not a coat that can be taken off. The Lutheran tradition has been careful here, and the student book follows it exactly: what Christ set aside was the full and unrestricted *use* of His divine prerogatives, taking on the real limitations of a servant's life. Get this distinction firm in your own mind before class; Question 4 will ask your students to articulate it.
- ♦ **The theology of the cross at its scriptural home.** Luther's insistence that God is revealed in suffering and hiddenness — not on a throne but on a cross — is not imported into this passage; it grows out of it. The God we look for is the God who has shown Himself: in the form of a servant, in obedience to death.
- ♦ **The imperative grounded in the indicative.** *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.* The mind is theirs already, because Christ is theirs already; Paul commands them to live what is true of them. This Reformation insight — gift before demand, possession before performance — is the pastoral hinge of the session.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review: the joy board
0:05–0:13	Citizens worthy of the gospel: <i>politeuesthe</i> in a Roman colony (1:27–28)
0:13–0:20	Granted to suffer: the strange grace (1:29–30)
0:20–0:27	Same mind, same love: the four ifs and the two enemies (2:1–4)
0:27–0:40	The Christ Hymn, descent: the form of God, the form of a servant (2:5–8) — the heart of the session
0:40–0:48	The Christ Hymn, ascent: the Name and every knee (2:9–11)
0:48–0:52	Gathering the threads: the mind that is already yours
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose one or two questions)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 4 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

The Hymn is the heart, and the descent is the heart of the Hymn; protect the thirteen minutes for verses 5–8 at all costs. If time gets tight, the Roman citizenship background can shrink to two sentences (Session Six will rebuild it), the four conditionals of 2:1 can be named in one breath, and the Isaiah 45 connection can be a single sentence with the reference left on the board. Never compress *emptied Himself* and its Lutheran guardrails, and never skip *which is yours in Christ Jesus*. Doctrine and gift — those two things are the session.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Citizens Worthy of the Gospel

Paul has finished speaking about his own situation; with a single word of transition — *only* — he turns to theirs. *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ*. Give your students the word underneath the English phrase, because it is the seed of the whole letter's civic theme: the verb is *politeuesthe*, a single Greek word built on *polis* — city — and its cousin *politeuma*, citizenship. To *politeuesthe* is to conduct your life as a citizen of a particular city. And the Philippians, of all people, knew what citizenship meant. They lived in a Roman colony where the prized possession of every adult male freeman was his certificate of Roman citizenship — the *libertas* that protected him from beating without

trial, gave him appeal to Caesar, marked him as a member of the body that ruled the world. Paul takes that pride and turns it: whatever Roman papers you hold, you hold a deeper citizenship, and the deeper one shapes your walk. The student book's sentence is worth quoting to the room: the Christians at Philippi are not first Romans who happen to be Christians; they are first Christians who happen to be Romans. Plant the seed and move on — *our citizenship is in heaven* arrives in Session Six, and this is its sowing.

What does gospel citizenship look like? Two things, says Paul: *standing firm in one spirit*, and *not frightened in anything by your opponents*. The images are military and athletic at once — *standing firm* is soldiers holding ground against a charge; *striving side by side* is *synathlountes*, athletes contending as a team. Paul sees the little congregation as a body of fighters arrayed together, refusing to break ranks under pressure. The opposition was real; the opponents had not yet broken them; Paul prays they never will.

Granted to Suffer

Then one of the most counterintuitive sentences in the New Testament, and you should let your class feel its strangeness before you explain it. *It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake*. The verb *granted* — *echaristhē* — is built on *charis*, grace. What has been granted is, literally, what has been *graced* to them. Suffering for Christ, Paul says, is a grace. A gift. Something God has bestowed as a sign of His favor.

This is not how the world uses the word *grace*, and the student book says so: we associate grace with ease, with the softer path. Paul reverses it. The grace of God can take the form of suffering for Christ — and when it does, that suffering is not a sign that grace has failed but a sign that grace has come. The same Lord who gives faith gives the privilege of suffering for the faith, and the second gift is no less a gift than the first. Luther saw this clearly: the believer is conformed to Christ not only by sharing His resurrection but by sharing His sufferings — the *theologia crucis* your class met last week, now applied to them rather than to Paul. And Paul closes the loop himself: the Philippians are *engaged in the same conflict* — *agōn*, the contest in the arena — *that you saw I had and now hear that I still have*. They watched him beaten in their own city; they have heard of his Roman chains; now they run the same race. One body. What happens to one happens to all.

A pastoral caution for your delivery: this teaching is for the suffering, not against them. Its purpose is to dignify what your students have endured for the faith, not to demand that they enjoy it — and it concerns suffering *for Christ*, not every pain of life. Said rightly, verse 29 has steadied persecuted Christians for two thousand years. Said carelessly, it wounds. Say it rightly.

Same Mind, Same Love

Chapter two opens with four conditional phrases — *if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy* — and the teaching point is that the conditionals are not real conditions. Paul is not wondering whether these things exist among the Philippians; he knows they do. He is stacking four certainties as the ground of what he is about to ask: *complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind*. Notice for the board, and for the joy list: the prisoner's joy can be *completed* by a congregation's like-mindedness. The same fourfold piling-up marks the request — same mind, same love, full accord, one mind — and the student book is right that Paul is not asking for theoretical unity but for the lived experience of a congregation that thinks, loves, agrees, and aims together. That kind of unity is not produced by congregational management techniques. It is produced by a shared participation in Christ that runs deeper than any difference the members bring into the room.

Then the two enemies, named precisely. *Selfish ambition* — *eritheia* — is the very word Paul used in chapter one for the bad-motive preachers in Rome; make sure your class catches the echo, because it is deliberate: the spirit that plagued the Roman pulpits is the spirit that threatens every congregation, partisan rivalry that wants to win at others' expense. *Conceit* — *kenodoxia* — is literally *empty glory*, the hunger to be thought greater than one is. Both feed on the self; both produce factions; and Paul tells the Philippians to do *nothing* — nothing — from either.

What he commands instead is harder than what he forbids: *in humility count others more significant than yourselves*. The verb — *hēgeomai* — is the bookkeeper's verb: to consider, regard, account. Counting others more significant is not feeling sentimental affection for them; it is a deliberate accounting in which their interests, needs, and good are entered above one's own. The student book's formulation deserves the whiteboard: humility is not a feeling about oneself; it is a posture toward others. And the posture has eyes — *let each of you look* (*skopountes*, fixing the gaze, scanning the horizon) *not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others*. Here the Lutheran teaching of vocation steps quietly into the text: every Christian is placed by God among neighbors, and the work of vocation is to look after their good — the mother for the child, the worker for those he serves, the Christian for the brother in the next pew. We are placed for one another.

The Descent: The Form of a Servant

Now the Hymn, and begin with the hinge sentence, because the whole session's pastoral weight rides on it: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus*. The unity Paul has called for, the humility he has commanded — all of it has a model and a *source*, and the source clause changes everything. The Philippians already possess this mind, be-

cause they belong to Him. Paul is asking them to live what is already true of them. Say that before you sing a note of the Christology, and say it again after.

Then set the frame the student book sets: verses 5–11 are widely considered an early Christian hymn — liturgical poetry the church may have been singing before Paul ever wrote this letter, taken up and embedded here because it says what he most wants said. Your class is about to read words that first-century believers sang. Read the Hymn aloud, all of it, before you teach a word of it. Then walk the descent, building the left side of your board diagram as you go.

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Two words carry the verse. *Form* — *morphē* — does not mean outward shape; it means the essential character of a thing, the substantial reality. To say Christ was in the form of God is to say He shared the essential reality of God — the verse the Confessions and the whole catholic tradition have read as witness to His preexistence: true God, very God of very God. And *grasped* — *harpagmos* — clutched, hoarded, exploited for advantage. Then hand the class the student book's contrast, which lands every time: Adam, in the garden, reached out to grasp at being *like God*. The Second Adam, who *was* God, did not grasp at what was His by right. He let it go.

But emptied himself — ekenōsen, the verb that named the doctrine of kenosis — *by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*. Here is where your preparation pays off, because the Lutheran tradition has been exact and your students deserve the exactness. Christ did not empty Himself of His divinity. He could not; divinity is not a coat that can be taken off and put on. What He set aside was the full and unrestricted use of His divine prerogatives, taking upon Himself the real limitations of a human life. And mark the parallel the hymn itself builds: the form of God, the form of a servant — *morphē* both times, substantial reality both times. He did not appear to be a servant while remaining secretly above servitude. He really was a servant; He really was born; the incarnation was not a divine costume drama. The Son of God genuinely entered the condition of a human servant — fatigue, hunger, thirst, sorrow, temptation. He came in through a womb like the rest of us, grew like the rest of us, had a body that could be tired at evening and beaten in a courtyard and pierced.

He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Do the work the student book asks here: recover the horror that the word *stauros* carried before we wore it as jewelry. Crucifixion was the death reserved for slaves and the worst criminals, engineered for maximum shame and maximum pain; Cicero said a free Roman should not even *speak* of the cross. And it was this death that the One in the form of God chose. The descent is staggering — form of God, form of a servant, obedience to death, death on a cross — and there is no further down to go. Then give Luther the last word of the segment, as the student book does: the cross is the visible sign of the hidden God. We

do not look for God in places of human strength. We look for Him where He has shown Himself — in the form of a servant, in obedience, on a cross.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

When *emptied Himself* lands, name where the Church wrote it down: the Formula of Concord's article on the Person of Christ (Article VIII) exists in part because of this hymn. Two sentences carry the move: the Son who was in the form of God did not cease to be in the form of God when He took the form of a servant — both forms are real, both are His, one Person, true God and true man, humiliated to the cross and exalted to the throne. Your students confess this every time they say the Creed; showing them the hymn beneath the Formula beneath the Creed turns Sunday's liturgy into this session's review. It also quietly inoculates the class against every version of a Jesus who is *almost* God or *temporarily* not God — errors that are never more than a generation away.

The Ascent: The Name and Every Knee

Therefore. Stop on the word, because the hymn does. The exaltation is not a separate movement bolted onto the humiliation; it is the divine response to the obedience that went all the way down. Because He humbled Himself, *therefore* God has highly exalted Him. The cross is the path to the crown — draw the right side of your V as you say it.

Highly exalted — *hyperupsōsen* — is an emphatic compound: super-exalted, raised above everything. And the gift bestowed is *the name that is above every name*. What name? Walk your class to the answer the way the student book does, through Isaiah. In Isaiah 45 the LORD of Israel declares: *To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance*. Paul takes that prophecy — spoken by the God of Israel about Himself — and applies it without flinching to Jesus. The knees that will bow before the LORD are the knees that will bow at the name of *Jesus*, because Jesus *is* the LORD: the divine name, *Kyrios*, the Greek rendering of the unspeakable Name, now borne by the man who hung on the cross. Three realms answer — in heaven, on earth, under the earth: angels and saints, every human living or yet to live, the dead and the demons and every power that ever set itself against God. All of them. Every one.

And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Here is the earliest Christian creed — *Kyrios Iēsous Christos* — the baptismal confession of the first century, spoken in an empire where the only lord the state recognized was Caesar. The Christians said it knowing the cost: there is one Lord, and His name is Jesus — Lord whether the world is willing to confess it or not. And the hymn's last clause turns home: *to the glory of God the Father*. The exaltation of the Son is not at the Father's expense but for His glory; the Son obeyed the Father, the

Father exalted the Son, the Spirit gives believers the confession — the whole movement Trinitarian, the way your students' worship is.

Then close the Hymn the way the student book closes it, by handing it back to the congregation. This is the mind Paul wants among them — not because they will be crucified for one another, though some might be, but because the mind of Christ is the mind that does not grasp, does not stand on its rights, empties itself for others, obeys to the end, and trusts the Father to exalt at the right time. We do not seize our own exaltation. We let it go — and trust that the God who exalted His Son will, in His good time, raise every member of His Son's body.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Keep the Hymn tethered to its little clause: *which is yours in Christ Jesus*. The session fails in two opposite ways — Christology floating free of the congregation, or church-niceness shrinking the Christology — and the clause prevents both. The mind of Christ is not a summit your students are commanded to climb; it is a possession they were given at the font, now commanded into use. Indicative before imperative, gift before demand. Say it when you enter the Hymn, and say it again when you leave: *you are not being asked to manufacture this mind; you are being asked to live the mind that is already yours, because Christ is already yours*. A student who hears the Hymn as demand leaves crushed or complacent. A student who hears it as gift leaves free — and freed people are the ones who actually start counting others more significant.

Gathering the Threads

The synthesis names the chapter for what it is: in a real sense, the heart of the letter. The ethic of the church is the ethic of the Christ Hymn; the mind we are to have toward one another is the mind Christ first had toward us. Run the Lutheran threads quickly — the two states of Christ given their classic biblical formulation; the theology of the cross fully present, because the path to the throne ran through the cross and there is no other path; the imperative grounded in the indicative; and the priesthood of all believers peering through the seams, since the counting of others more significant happens not in dramatic acts but in each Christian's small, daily vocations. Then end on the student book's doxological close: above all, the chapter teaches us the Name of the One in whose service we live — and to live worthy of the gospel is to live worthy of Him.

For a class continuing through the series, one forward glance rewards a sentence: volume three will meet this Hymn's sibling — the great Christology of Colossians 1, written from the same cell, carried on a different errand. The prisoner kept singing.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions, and this week they range from the intimately practical to the doctrinally precise. Choose one or two; the teaching hour is full. Notes on each:

Question 1 — Suffering as a grace granted. A question that dignifies experience most students have never had named. Expect small stories — the awkwardness at work, the strained family conversation — alongside larger ones, and receive both; verse 29 does not grade suffering by size. The second half (suffering read as *something wrong* versus *a sign of grace*) is where the reframing happens. Keep the focus on suffering *for Christ*, and do not let the conversation drift into treating every hardship of life as persecution.

Question 2 — The deliberate accounting. The most practical question of the set, and the bookkeeping language is its gift: *count*, not *feel*. The question asks for concrete relationships where the counting is hardest — marriage, a difficult sibling, a church committee — and what would actually change. This conversation works best with specifics; gently press past generalities. It also pairs naturally with vocation: the relationships students name are usually their stations.

Question 3 — The God who came all the way down. The worshipful question, and for many students the deepest of the study so far. *How does the descent of Christ change your image of what God is like?* invites people to notice the god they have been imagining — distant, demanding, withholding — and to set the Hymn against it. Give this one room and silence. Answers here are often quiet and often permanent.

Question 4 — What kenosis does and does not mean. The doctrinal precision question. Let students attempt the distinction in their own words — emptied of the *use* of divine prerogatives, not of divinity itself — and help them see why it matters: a Christ who set aside His deity could not bear the world's sin or be worth the world's worship; a Christ who never truly descended could not be our servant or our substitute. The coat image from the student book helps the wording stay honest.

Question 5 — Confessing Him now. The question that joins doxology to daily life: every knee *will* bow, willingly or not — so what is the difference of bowing now, while the confession is still a free act of faith? Watch the second half, which asks about relationships with those who do not yet confess Him; keep it evangelistic and tender rather than triumphal. The first-century believers said *Kyrios Iēsous* knowing the cost; the question is what it costs, and gives, now.

Question 6 — Highest Christology, most practical ethic. The question for the readers and teachers in your class. That Paul's deepest teaching about who Christ is arrives as the

ground of an appeal about getting along is a window into how the whole New Testament works — doctrine never ornamental, ethics never freestanding. A short conversation here will change how some students read everything else.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question for Session Three, make it Question 3 — the God who came all the way down. It requires no technical vocabulary, it gathers the whole descent into a single act of beholding, and it converts the session's doctrine into worship, which is what a hymn is for. Question 2 is the strong alternative if your class runs practical and you want the Hymn walking out the door in their relationships. Whichever you choose, consider ending the hour by reading the Hymn aloud one final time — slowly, as the church's confession — and letting it stand without commentary. Some sessions should end in analysis. This one should end in awe.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ The Hymn, both movements, read aloud and taught — the descent in full, the ascent at least through the Name and Isaiah 45 in compressed form. This is the summit; never cut it.
- ♦ *Which is yours in Christ Jesus* — the gift-before-command frame, stated plainly at least twice.
- ♦ The kenosis guardrails — the coat sentence and the two-states sentence. Two minutes, but non-negotiable minutes.
- ♦ Suffering as *echaristhē*-grace, in two minutes. The strangest sentence in the passage deserves at least its strangeness.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 3.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The Roman citizenship background. One sentence — *a colony proud of its papers, told it holds deeper papers* — and let Session Six rebuild the rest.
- ♦ The four conditionals of 2:1. Name them in one breath as four certainties and move to the request they ground.

- ♦ The *stauros* horror and Cicero. One sentence restores enough of the scandal; the full recovery can wait for a richer hour.
- ♦ The word studies in 2:3–4 (*hēgeomai*, *skopountes*). Keep “humility is a posture toward others, not a feeling about oneself,” and move on.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the Hymn read aloud in full, framed by its hinge: *have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus*. The descent, the cross, the Name, every knee — and all of it already given to the baptized before any of it is asked of them. A student who hears the church's oldest hymn and learns that its mind is his own possession in Christ has received the session, whatever else fell away.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Isaiah 45:20–25.** *To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance* — the LORD's own oath, which the Hymn places on the lips of all creation at the name of Jesus. The single most important background text of the session.
- ♦ **Isaiah 52:13–53:12.** The Servant who was *high and lifted up* precisely through being despised, crushed, and poured out to death. The Hymn's descent-then-exaltation pattern, prophesied seven centuries early.
- ♦ **Genesis 3:1–7.** The first grasping — *you will be like God* — read against verse 6 of the Hymn. Adam seized; the Second Adam released. The whole gospel sits in the contrast.
- ♦ **John 13:1–17.** The form of a servant enacted in an upper room: *knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands... he laid aside his outer garments and washed feet*. The Hymn as narrative, from the night before the descent reached its bottom.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII.** The person of Christ — the two natures, the two states, the majesty communicated to the human nature. The Confessions' fullest engagement with this hymn, and the deep grammar behind everything the session says about *emptied Himself*.
- ♦ **The Athanasian Creed.** *Perfect God and perfect man... who although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ*. The catholic confession your congregation recites on Trin-

ity Sunday is the Hymn in creedal form; reading it this week joins the study to the liturgy.

- ♦ **Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness” (1519).** Luther’s early sermon on this very text — Philippians 2:5–11 as the pattern of the righteousness given to us and the righteousness we then live toward the neighbor. Short, rich, and astonishingly on point for this session’s doctrine-to-life movement.
- ♦ **“A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth.”** Gerhardt’s great descent hymn — the willing Servant bearing the load all the way down. If your class sings one stanza this week, the Hymn will have met its match in the hymnal.

Commentaries

- ♦ **R. C. H. Lenski, *Philippians*.** Dogmatically exact on 2:6–8 — the *morphē* parallel, the kenosis question, the two states — and unafraid to say where the tradition’s guardrails run. His pages on this passage are the volume’s best.
- ♦ **Harlyn J. Kuschel, *Philippians (People’s Bible Commentary)*.** A clear, confessional walk through the Hymn at lay level — useful for students who want the doctrine again, slowly, after class.
- ♦ **Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians (NICNT)*.** The fullest accessible treatment of the Hymn’s structure, the *harpagmos* debate, and the Isaiah background. Fee resists calling it a pre-Pauline hymn more than most; reading his caution will sharpen how you present the “early hymn” framing.

A Final Word

You have just taught the summit of the letter — the passage the Confessions lean on, the hymn the church was singing before the New Testament was finished, the descent that goes below every human bottom and the ascent that ends with every knee. Few Bible classes ever walk through it slowly. Yours now has, and the mind of Christ has been named in your classroom not as an aspiration but as a possession: *which is yours in Christ Jesus*. Whatever your students remember of this study in ten years, pray it is that clause.

Expect the Hymn to keep working through the week. Students who said little in discussion will hum it in the car; the descent diagram will surface in someone’s devotions; Question 3’s silence will finish itself in private. The deepest sessions often have the quietest endings, and that is not failure — it is the material doing what worship does.

Next week, the live wire. Your students will read Philippians 2:12–30 before they arrive — *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you* — the verse pairing that has launched a thousand arguments about grace and effort, followed by two flesh-and-blood portraits of the Hymn’s mind: Timothy, the son in the gospel, and Epaph-

roditus, the brother who nearly died on the Philippians' errand. In Session One you noted privately which students carry decision-theology instincts; Session Four is where that care comes due. Prepare the grammar of 2:12-13 with special attention, and the session will be one of the most liberating of the study.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the mind of Christ — given to you at the font, sung by the church through every age — take its shape in you and in every student He has placed beside you.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION FOUR

God at Work in You

Philippians 2:12–30

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Four — the live wire. Since Session One you have known this hour was coming: *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling* is the sentence in Philippians most likely to set off every alarm your students carry. Those raised in decision theology will hear it confirming that salvation finally depends on them. Lifelong Lutherans may flinch at it, half-suspecting it doesn't belong in their Bible. The anxious will hear a threat; the weary will hear a demand. And all of them will be set free by the same thing: the second half of the sentence, which almost no one quotes. *For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* Verse 12 has never once appeared in Scripture without verse 13. Your week's work, in one line, is to make sure it never appears without it in your classroom either.

The session then does something wonderful: it refuses to leave sanctification abstract. After the grammar of 2:12–13 comes the texture — a congregation that doesn't grumble, lights shining in a crooked generation, an apostle glad to be poured out like wine over an altar — and then two flesh-and-blood portraits of the mind of Christ at work: Timothy, the son who has served in the slow obedience of the long second, and Epaphroditus, the courier who gambled his life on an errand of mercy. The Epaphroditus your class has been hearing about since Session One finally steps onto the stage, nearly dead and homesick for the people worrying about him. Teach the doctrine first and the portraits second, and your students will leave knowing not only what Lutherans believe about the Christian life but what it looks like on an ordinary Tuesday.

One framing thought to hold all hour: this session corrects two caricatures at once. The first says salvation is partly our work; the second says Lutherans therefore believe in doing nothing. Paul demolishes both in a single sentence — real working, real fear and trembling, and all of it God's own energy in us. No boasting, and no idleness. If your class leaves holding both halves, the live wire becomes a lifeline.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Paul follows the Christ Hymn with its *therefore* — work out your own salvation with fear and trembling — and grounds the command entirely in the gift: *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*; teach the two halves as one unbreakable sentence, then let Timothy and Epaphroditus show the class what God's working looks like in ordinary lives, and the session will free both the striver and the spectator in your room.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Four of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Philippians 2:12–30 aloud, and practice reading verses 12–13 as one sentence with the stress on *for*. The conjunction is the gospel, and your voice can teach it before your words do.
- ♦ Read Exodus 16:1–12 and Deuteronomy 32:1–9. The *grumbling and disputing* of 2:14 and the *crooked and twisted generation* of 2:15 are both wilderness language — Paul is quoting the Song of Moses — and hearing the source will sharpen your teaching of both verses.
- ♦ Read Acts 16:1–5 and notice the geography: Timothy joined Paul at Lystra on the very journey that founded Philippi. The Philippians *know Timothy's proven worth* because Timothy was there at their beginning. The detail makes verse 22 glow.
- ♦ Review Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II — particularly its teaching that the converted believer, by the Spirit, genuinely cooperates in the new obedience without contributing anything to his salvation. This is the precise confessional rail under 2:12–13, and you will want its balance in your bones.
- ♦ Pray for the two kinds of students this session serves: the ones working as if it all depended on them, and the ones waiting as if nothing depended on them at all.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible and the student book; the whiteboard with the *joy — chara* list.
- ♦ One new entry ready: *joy in shared sacrifice — glad to be poured out* (2:17–18). Paul rejoicing at the prospect of becoming the drink offering is the strangest joy yet on the list, and the list is supposed to get stranger as the letter deepens.

- ♦ For the board: write verses 12–13 out in full before class, with *for it is God who works in you* underlined. You will return to the sentence at least three times; having it visible all hour is worth the marker ink.
- ♦ The page of hopes, still filed safely — four weeks to go.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **Sanctification, Lutheran-shaped.** The student book says it plainly: the whole Lutheran understanding of sanctification lies in these two verses. *Work out* — *katergazesthe* — is not the verb for producing something from nothing; it is the verb for developing to full expression a reality already present. The salvation is God's; the working out is ours; and our working out is, at its deepest level, His working in us. No boasting, because everything good in us is His. No passivity, because He is at work.
- ♦ **The Formula's careful "cooperation."** Before conversion, the natural man has no power toward God — conversion is entirely the Spirit's work. After conversion, the believer is not a bystander: the Spirit produces in him a willing and a working that are genuinely his while remaining fully the Spirit's. Hold that sentence with both hands; it is the difference between biblical sanctification and both of its counterfeits.
- ♦ **Vocation as the theater of shining.** The Philippians shine as lights not by being plucked out of the crooked generation but by holding fast to the word of life within it — the mother, the worker, the citizen, each luminous in an ordinary station. Timothy and Epaphroditus are this doctrine with names attached.
- ♦ **The cruciform pattern reproduced.** The drink offering, the courier's gamble, the decade of second-chair service — the Christ Hymn's descent is already taking shape in the people who sang it. We are not called to seek the cross; we are called to our work, and the cross finds us in the doing.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review: the Hymn and its <i>therefore</i>
0:05–0:17	Work out, for God works in: the grammar of sanctification (2:12–13) — the heart of the session
0:17–0:23	Without grumbling or disputing: wilderness echoes (2:14)
0:23–0:30	Lights in a crooked generation: vocation and the word of life (2:15–16)
0:30–0:35	The drink offering: Paul poured out, and glad (2:17–18)
0:35–0:42	Timothy: the slow obedience of the long second (2:19–24)
0:42–0:48	Epaphroditus: the gambler for Christ (2:25–30)
0:48–0:52	Gathering the threads: what sanctification looks like
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose one or two questions)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 5 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

The twelve minutes on 2:12–13 are the session; protect them absolutely, and do not let the clock push you into teaching verse 12 in one breath and verse 13 in another. If time gets tight, the wilderness background of verse 14 can be one sentence, the drink-offering cultus can be one sentence, and the two portraits can share a compressed segment — but Timothy and Epaphroditus should never disappear entirely, because they are the session's proof that the doctrine has a face.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Work Out, For God Works In

Begin with the *therefore*. The Christ Hymn has just ended — the descent sung, the Name bestowed, every knee bowed — and Paul does what he always does after a stunning piece of theology: he draws the implication for daily life. *Therefore, my beloved... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*. Read the whole of verses 12–13 aloud before you explain anything, and read them as one sentence, because they are one.

Then name the misreading directly, because half your class is silently performing it. *Work out your own salvation* has been heard for centuries as *earn your salvation* — manufacture

your standing, supplement Christ's work with your own. The student book's rebuttal is airtight and worth giving verbatim: the man who has just finished singing of Christ's self-emptying, the man who in next week's chapter will count his own righteousness as rubbish for a righteousness from God by faith, cannot mean that we are to earn what Christ has already given. So what does he mean? He means what he says in the very next phrase — and here is where your underlined *for* does its work. *For it is God who works in you.* The reason we work out our salvation is that God is already working it in. The imperative is grounded in the indicative; the command rests on the gift — the same grammar your class learned at the Hymn's hinge last week, now applied to every day of their lives.

Give them the verb: *katergazesthe* does not mean to produce from nothing; it means to work something through to its full expression — and then give them the student book's image, which will carry the whole doctrine home in their memories. A field that is plowed and planted still needs working: tending, watering, weeding, so that the seed already sown produces its full harvest. The Philippians have the seed. They were baptized into Christ; they received the Word; the good work God began in them — your class will hear Session One's verse 6 arriving right on schedule — He will bring to completion at the day of Christ. Their part is to tend the field. God's part is the harvest.

Then *with fear and trembling* — and rescue the phrase from its threat-reading, because Luther loved it and used it rightly. We tremble not because we are afraid of losing what we have been given. We tremble because we have grasped, however dimly, *what* has been given. To be a Christian is to handle holy things, and fear and trembling is the posture of people who know what they are handling. The difference between terror and awe is the difference between law misapplied and gospel received; say it plainly for the anxious student in the third row.

Now the second half, the half that anchors everything. *For it is God who works in you* — the verb is *energōn*, the root of our word *energy*: God is energetic in us, the active worker — *both to will and to work for his good pleasure*. Two levels: the willing — wanting, desiring, choosing — and the working — doing, acting, performing. From the first stirring of desire to the final act of obedience, the whole movement of the Christian life is God's work in us. This is the monergism of Session One, the student book notes, now applied not only to conversion but to the entire shape of the Christian life. We do not generate the willing; we do not generate the working; we discover, day by day, that we *are* willing and working — and recognize, with fear and trembling, that the One willing and working through us is God Himself.

Close the segment with the line that dissolves both errors at once, and put it on the board under the verse: the salvation is His; the working out is ours; and our working out is, in its deepest reality, His working in us. There is no place for boasting, because everything good in us is His. There is no place for spiritual idleness, because He is at work. And one phrase more, easily missed: *for his good pleasure*. The end of God's work in us is not first

our happiness or success; it is His delight. We are being shaped into something He delights in — the blessedness comes as byproduct.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

When a sharp student asks the inevitable question — *so do we cooperate or don't we?* — reach for the Formula of Concord's answer (Solid Declaration, Article II), because it is one of the most carefully balanced sentences the Lutheran fathers ever wrote. Before conversion: no. The natural man has no power to will the things of God; conversion is entirely the Spirit's work through the means of grace. After conversion: yes — but listen to how. The believer cooperates *not in the sense that he contributes anything of his own to his salvation*, but in the sense that the Spirit produces in him a willing and a working that are genuinely his while remaining fully the Spirit's. The Christian life is not God's work done *to us* while we stand by; it is God's work done *in us*, taking shape *through* us. Two minutes of this precision will spare your students twenty years of ping-ponging between striving and despair.

Without Grumbling or Disputing

Verse 14 sounds like a small housekeeping note until your class hears where the vocabulary comes from. *Do all things without grumbling or disputing* — *gongusmōn* and *dialogismōn* — is wilderness language. Israel, redeemed from Egypt, grumbled in the desert; fed with manna from heaven, complained about the menu; on the verge of the Promised Land, disputed and rebelled. Paul is warning the new Israel not to repeat the pattern, and the student book's dry observation deserves repeating: the redeemed people of God can be remarkably ungrateful.

Then connect it backward, because Paul has. Grumbling and disputing are not minor matters; they corrode the unity of chapter two's opening, and they are the *verbal expressions* of the selfish ambition and empty glory the Hymn was sung against. Where there is much grumbling, there is little humility; where there is much disputing, there is little counting others more significant. Most congregational damage is not done by scandals. It is done by speech-habits — the parking-lot complaint, the meeting-after-the-meeting — and verse 14 names them as wilderness behavior in a redeemed people. Say it gently; every person in your room, including the teacher, has manna-complaints on record.

Lights in a Crooked Generation

Verses 15–16 give the *why*: because of what the church is in the world. Walk the three phrases. *Blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish* — the word is *amōma*, the Old Testament's word for the unblemished sacrificial animal: God's possession, set apart, free of defect — and the student book is careful to head off the obvious objection: this is

not arrogance or sectarianism; it is the truth about what Christ's blood and the Spirit's sanctifying have made the church to be. *In the midst of a crooked and twisted generation* — Moses' own words from his Song, now describing the world around the colony. And *among whom you shine as lights in the world* — *phainesthe*, the verb for the appearing of a heavenly body. The Philippians are stars in a dark sky. They are not the source of the light; Christ is. But the light becomes visible in their neighborhoods through their lives.

And how do they shine? By *holding fast to the word of life* — *epechontes*, gripping firmly through opposition. The shining is not a separate strategy or a special program; it is what happens when Christians hold the gospel fast and live their ordinary lives in their ordinary places. Here the doctrine of vocation steps forward again, and the student book's litany is worth reading aloud almost verbatim: the mother who feeds her child without grumbling, the worker who does his job without grumbling, the husband who serves his wife without grumbling, the citizen who pays his taxes and votes his conscience without grumbling — each of them shines, in the crooked generation around them, with the light of the One who has come into the world. Notice how verse 14 and verse 15 have quietly fused: the un-grumbling life *is* the shining.

The Drink Offering

Verses 17–18 close Paul's exhortation with an image your students may never have examined. In the Old Testament cultus, a drink offering of wine was poured out over the main sacrifice as part of its presentation to the LORD. Paul casts the Philippians' faith as the main sacrifice — and himself as the wine. *Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.* His life, his ministry, his blood if it comes to that, poured over their faith — and he is *glad*.

Make the connection the student book makes, because it is the hinge between the doctrine and the portraits to come: as Christ emptied Himself for the church, so Paul is being emptied for the church. The mind of the Hymn is taking shape in the man who quoted it. And the joy is shared because the sacrifice is shared — *likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me*. Add the board entry here: *joy in shared sacrifice — glad to be poured out*. The joy list has been growing stranger by the week, and this is its strangest entry yet; let the class notice that the strangeness is the point.

Timothy

Now the first portrait. Paul hopes to send Timothy soon, and the reason he gives is quietly devastating: *I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare*. The student book is right that this is not a compliment but a comparative judgment — and the comparison lands in the next sentence: *for they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ*. Among the Christian workers in Paul's orbit, Timothy is *rare*. Let the hard sentence be hard. We have always had a tendency, even in our service of Christ, to serve ourselves

— ministries that fit our gifts, assignments that advance our reputations, service where we will be appreciated — and Paul's comment is a quiet rebuke to the whole pattern. It is also, the student book adds, a quiet exaltation of the few who have escaped it.

Then what makes Timothy different. The Philippians know his *proven worth* — *dokimē*, built on the same root as *approve what is excellent* from Session One's prayer: what has been tested and found genuine. And here your Acts 16 preparation pays off in one glowing sentence: Timothy joined Paul at Lystra on the very journey that brought the gospel to Philippi — the Philippians have known him from their own beginning, watched him travel, suffer, work, and endure beside Paul for a decade or more, *as a son with a father*. The relationship is generational, not peer-to-peer: the older man discipling, the younger laboring under him, the gospel served by both. And give your class the student book's vocational gem, which deserves the whiteboard: many of us are called not to be the apostles but to be the Timothys — to come alongside those further on in the work, in *the slow obedience of the long second*. There is great glory in that calling, though it never looks like glory at the time.

Epaphroditus

The courier promised in Session One finally takes the stage, and Paul introduces him with a pile of titles that tells the whole story: *my brother* — *adelphos* — *and fellow worker* — *synergos* — *and fellow soldier* — *systratiōtēs* — *and your messenger* — *apostolos*, their sent-one — *and minister to my need* — *leitourgos*. Brother, worker, soldier from Paul's side; messenger and minister from theirs. Epaphroditus is the bridge between the apostle and the church.

Then tell his story the way the student book reconstructs it, because it is one of the most human passages in Paul. Epaphroditus carried the Philippians' gift to Rome. Somewhere on the road, or soon after arriving, he fell gravely ill — *near to death*, Paul says, and Paul does not exaggerate. News of the illness reached Philippi; word of the recovery had not yet caught up; and Epaphroditus, hearing that his home church was worried about him, was *distressed* — not for himself, but for them. A dying man, anxious about the people anxious about him. So Paul sends him home early, to ease both hearts at once. And mark the verse your students will walk past without you: *God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow*. Paul, in chains, awaiting trial, names his friend's recovery as God's mercy *to Paul*. The God who works in us also works around us, in the lives of those near us, in mercies sized exactly to our load.

Then the instruction: *receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men* — because he *nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life* to complete the church's service. The participle is wonderful: *paraboleusamenos* — the gambler's word. Epaphroditus rolled the dice with his own life, willingly hazarding everything for the work. And now the student book's pastoral masterstroke, which you should deliver in full: Epaphroditus did not seek martyrdom. He simply did what his church sent him to do — carry the gift, serve the

apostle, see the work through — and the danger was not his choice but the cost of his obedience. This is how most Christian suffering happens. We are not called to seek the cross; we are called to our work, and the cross finds us in the doing. Epaphroditus is *the patron saint of the ordinary Christian* whose faithfulness in an unglamorous errand carried him somewhere costly. The church always has Epaphrodituses in it — and the church should always honor them.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Never let verse 12 and verse 13 come apart — not in your teaching, not in your students' memories, not for sixty seconds of this hour. Every time you say *work out your own salvation*, finish the sentence: *for it is God who works in you*. The conjunction is the gospel; severed from it, verse 12 becomes the very works-righteousness Paul spent his life fighting, and your decision-theology students will hear their old bondage confirmed while your weary perfectionists quietly despair. The single most effective thing you can do all session costs ninety seconds: have the class read verses 12–13 aloud together, as one sentence, with the emphasis on *for* — and then tell them that in all of Scripture, verse 12 has never once appeared without verse 13, and it never should in their hearts either. Worked out, always; worked *for*, never.

Gathering the Threads

The synthesis is the doctrine wearing work clothes. The great Christology of the Hymn has been translated into the lived texture of a community: the mind of Christ is not an idea to admire but a pattern to walk in — and the walking is itself the work of God in those who are walking. Run the threads: the Lutheran shape of 2:12–13, with its double *no* to boasting and to idleness; vocation in every paragraph — lights shining in their stations, Timothy in his long second, Epaphroditus on his errand; the theology of the cross continuing its quiet work in the drink offering, the apostle emptied for the church as Christ was emptied for the world. And close where the student book closes, because the sentence reframes what your students think holiness is: this is what sanctification looks like. Not heroism, not drama, not the grand gesture — two men in a particular city, doing what their Lord gave them to do, with their eyes on Him and not on themselves. The church will always need more of them.

For classes continuing in the series, one sentence forward: in volume three Paul will say it of himself in almost the same breath — *struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me*. The grammar of 2:13, signed by its author, from the same cell.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions, moving from the session's doctrinal heart out to its portraits. Choose one or two. Notes on each:

Question 1 — The two halves of the sentence. The question most directly on the session's heart, and the one to choose if you choose only one. The two named temptations — spiritual self-sufficiency and spiritual passivity — give every student a door, because everyone lives nearer one than the other. Consider asking the room which side they drift toward before opening discussion; the answers will tell you how to weight your closing words.

Question 2 — The slow damage of grumbling. A question about congregational life that requires careful chairing: invite honesty about the *pattern* without permitting a re-enactment of it. Keep the focus on speech-habits students recognize in themselves — the wilderness is in every heart — and end on the Spirit's power to break them, not on cataloging the congregation's offenders.

Question 3 — Shining and dimming. The vocation question, and a gentle one. *Where do you find yourself shining most clearly? Where dimmed? What does the difference depend on?* The third part is the gold: students usually discover the difference depends on their grip on the word of life — *epechontes* — which turns the conversation toward means of grace rather than toward trying harder.

Question 4 — Honest about motives. The Timothy question, and the most exposing of the set. Paul's contrast — genuine concern versus seeking one's own interests — cuts into patterns of service most of us have never audited. Model the honesty yourself with one sentence about your own mixed motives in teaching; the class will follow your level. Keep Article VIII's comfort from Session Two nearby: mixed motives do not void the service, but the gospel does invite us to outgrow them.

Question 5 — The cost of obedience. The Epaphroditus question. *In what callings has the cost of obedience surprised you?* dignifies sufferings your students never thought to call Christian — the caregiving that consumed a decade, the integrity that cost a promotion. The reshaping half matters too: faithfulness usually looks like an errand, not a stage.

Question 6 — Honor such men. The warmest question of the set, and a beautiful closer: who are the Timothys and Epaphrodituses of your congregation, and how might you honor them? Expect names — the trustee who has mowed for twenty years, the woman who visits shut-ins — and let the naming itself be the honoring. If your class takes to this question, consider letting it produce an actual act: a note, a recognition, a Sunday thank-you. Doctrine that ends in honor given has been understood.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question for Session Four, make it Question 1 — the two halves of the sentence and the two temptations. It consolidates the session's doctrine and tells you, by the students' own sorting, who needed which half. Question 6 is the strong alternative for a class that has gone deep all month and needs an hour that ends warm. And whichever you choose, close by reading 2:12–13 aloud together one last time, the class supplying the emphasis on *for* without prompting. When they emphasize it themselves, the session has done its work.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ Verses 12–13 taught as one sentence, in full — the misreading named, the field image, *fear and trembling* rescued, *energōn*, both to will and to work. This is the session; never cut it.
- ♦ The communal reading of 2:12–13 with the stress on *for*. Ninety seconds, permanent yield.
- ♦ Timothy and Epaphroditus, compressed into a single combined portrait segment if necessary — the long second and the gambler's errand, five minutes together. The doctrine needs its faces.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 1.
- ♦ The closing prayer and the Session 5 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The wilderness background of verse 14. One sentence — *Israel's grumbling, warned against in the new Israel* — carries it.
- ♦ The drink-offering cultus. One sentence restores the image; the full Old Testament background can wait.
- ♦ The star-imagery word studies (*phainesthe, epechontes*). Keep “stars in a dark sky, holding the word fast,” and move on.
- ♦ The extended indictment in *they all seek their own interests*. One sentence preserves the contrast without opening the full examination of ministry motives.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be Philippians 2:12–13 taught — and read aloud — as one unbreakable sentence: salvation worked *out* with fear and trembling, precisely because it is God who works *in*, both the willing and the working, for His good pleasure. A student who owns that sentence whole is permanently armed against both works-righteousness and dead passivity. Establish it, and even a shortened session has given your class the Lutheran doctrine of sanctification entire.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Exodus 16:1–12.** The grumbling of redeemed Israel — manna from heaven, complaints about the menu. The background hum of Philippians 2:14, and a mirror the church has needed in every generation.
- ♦ **Deuteronomy 32:1–9.** The Song of Moses, source of *a crooked and twisted generation* — sung first about Israel itself, which sharpens Paul's reversal: the church now stands where Moses stood, shining toward the bent world around it.
- ♦ **Daniel 12:3.** *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above* — the Old Testament's stars-in-darkness promise behind *you shine as lights in the world*, with Matthew 5:14–16 as its Gospel twin.
- ♦ **Acts 16:1–5.** Timothy joining Paul at Lystra, on the very journey that founded Philippi. Why the Philippians *know* his proven worth: he has been part of their story since their first day.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II.** Free will and conversion — including the carefully fenced teaching that the regenerate believer cooperates in the new obedience by the Spirit's power, contributing nothing to salvation. The confessional rail under 2:12–13.
- ♦ **Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article IV.** Good works — necessary, yet flowing from faith as fruit, never as cause. The article that lets your students say “we must do good works” and “works do not save” in the same breath without contradiction.

- ♦ **Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520).** The great double thesis — perfectly free lord of all, perfectly dutiful servant of all — and the classic account of how faith, having everything in Christ, pours itself out for the neighbor. The drink offering in treatise form.
- ♦ **Luther, *Preface to Romans*.** Home of the famous sentence that faith *is a living, busy, active, mighty thing* — incapable of not doing good. Read it beside 2:13 and the two texts annotate each other.

Commentaries

- ♦ **R. C. H. Lenski, *Philippians*.** Characteristically firm that 2:12–13 teaches neither synergism nor quietism, with the dogmatic distinctions drawn out at length; his treatment of *katergazesthe* is a teacher's gold mine.
- ♦ **Harlyn J. Kuschel, *Philippians* (People's Bible Commentary).** Brief and pastoral on the whole chapter, with a warm touch on Timothy and Epaphroditus as portraits of ordinary faithfulness.
- ♦ **Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT).** Excellent on the wilderness echoes of verses 14–16 and on reconstructing the Epaphroditus story; his pages on the drink offering give the image its full sacrificial depth.

A Final Word

You have just taught the session most likely to change how your students live the other six days of the week. The Christ Hymn was the summit; this was the trailhead back down into Monday — and you have sent your class home with a sentence that holds both their effort and their rest in one grammar, and with two names, Timothy and Epaphroditus, that make holiness look like something a person could actually do in their town. Do not underestimate what that combination accomplishes. Most Christians live for decades with verse 12 and verse 13 in separate rooms; yours now hold them as one.

Watch this week for the question that follows this session home: *but how do I know God is working in me?* It will come — in the parking lot, by email, over coffee — and the Lutheran answer is ready: look to the means, not the feelings. The God who works in you has told you where He does His working — the Word in your ears, the water on your head, the body and blood on your tongue. Point your students there, and the assurance question becomes a worship-attendance answer.

Next week, the autobiographical heart of the doctrine of justification. Your students will read Philippians 3:1–11 before they arrive — Paul's sharp warning against the circumcision party, the most impressive religious résumé in the New Testament, and the great accounting in which all of it is counted as loss, as *rubbish*, for the surpassing worth of

knowing Christ Jesus: *not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.* It is the Reformation's favorite autobiography. Read it slowly this week; Session Five is where the whole study's doctrine of justification stands up and says its own name.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure, bring His harvest out of your field and out of every field in your classroom.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION FIVE

The Surpassing Worth

Philippians 3:1–11

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Five — the doctrinal homecoming. This week your class arrives at the autobiographical heart of justification by faith: Paul's triple warning against the circumcision party, the most impressive religious résumé in the New Testament, and the great accounting in which every line of it is moved to the loss column — *rubbish*, he says — for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, and for a righteousness *not my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ*. The student book says it without blinking: the Reformation began here. For a Lutheran class, this is the week the study walks into the family's own house.

And that is precisely the danger. Your students have heard *justification by faith* since confirmation; they can nod at it in their sleep. The session fails if it remains a doctrine they agree with, and succeeds only if it becomes an accounting they perform. Paul does not argue the doctrine here — he tells it as his own story, ledger lines and all, and the teaching must keep that personal edge. The single most important thing you will do this hour (the callout below makes it explicit) is to have your students draft their own portfolio before the accounting falls on Paul's, so that when verse 7 arrives it lands on their columns too. Be prepared for what that surfaces: in a room of lifelong church people, the credentials that must change columns are often *church* credentials — the perfect attendance, the offices held, the family name on the cornerstone. Paul's list was religious too. That is the point.

One more pastoral note. The list's sixth item — *as to zeal, a persecutor of the church* — is the most painful sentence Paul ever wrote about himself, and the student book treats it with appropriate gravity. Some of your students carry pasts they consider disqualifying. Watching Paul name his worst chapter as a former credential, and then watching grace move even that to the loss column and answer it with Christ, can be one of the most healing moments of the whole study. Teach it gently and do not rush it.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Paul lays the most impressive religious résumé in the New Testament on the table and counts every line of it as loss — as *rubbish* — next to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord, receiving in its place a righteousness not his own but from God, through faith; teach the great accounting so personally that every student drafts a portfolio of their own and watches it change columns, and the Reformation's chief article becomes their autobiography too.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Five of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Philippians 3:1–11 aloud several times, listening for the ledger: *gain, loss, count, counted, suffered the loss*. Paul writes this passage in a bookkeeper's vocabulary, and your teaching will borrow it.
- ♦ Read Acts 9:1–22 — the Damascus road. The moment the portfolio flipped columns, told in narrative. Several details (the letters to Damascus, the persecutor's zeal) sit directly behind the credential list.
- ♦ Read Augsburg Confession, Article IV, and have a copy with you in class. You will read it aloud beside verse 9 — the session's Classic Lutheran Move — and the reading works best from a physical book your students can see.
- ♦ Read Luther's 1545 preface to his Latin writings — the “tower discovery” account, where the *righteousness of God* turned from terror to gate of paradise. Luther's autobiography of receiving passive righteousness is the Reformation's mirror of Paul's, and a sentence of it in class joins the two stories.
- ♦ Pray for the students whose credentials are heaviest — they have the most to lose, and the most to gain.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, the student book, the Augsburg Confession (a Book of Concord or any edition of the Augsburg Confession will do), and the whiteboard with the *joy — chara* list.
- ♦ One new entry ready: *joy located in the Lord — not in credentials* (3:1). *Rejoice in the Lord* is the letter's first naming of joy's address, and it arrives, not accidentally, in the same breath as the warning against confidence in the flesh.

- ♦ For the board: a simple two-column ledger — GAIN on the left, LOSS on the right. You will build Paul's seven credentials in the left column as you teach verses 4–6, and then, at verse 7, draw a single arrow moving the entire column to the right. The visual is the sermon.
- ♦ Index cards or scrap paper, one per student, for the portfolio exercise described in the Most Important Teaching Move.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **Justification by faith alone.** Verse 9 distinguishes two righteousnesses: *a righteousness of my own that comes from the law*, and *the righteousness from God that depends on faith*. The Christian's standing before God is given, not produced; bestowed, not achieved; ours by imputation, not by nature. The Augsburg Confession's Article IV is this verse in confessional form, and the student book says so in as many words.
- ♦ **Christ-plus is Christ-isn't-enough.** The false teachers were not denying Christ; they were adding to Him — and Paul saw that the addition was a subtraction. To say *Christ plus circumcision* is to say *Christ is not enough*, and to say that is to be left, in the end, with neither. Every age manufactures its own plus; naming this generation's versions is part of the session's work.
- ♦ **Good things as substitutes.** The student book's deepest sentence: the deepest sin is not gross immorality but the use of good things as substitutes for Christ. Paul's credentials were good gifts that became loss the moment they functioned as his standing before God. This is the law-gospel distinction wearing biographical clothes — the law good, deadly when climbed as a ladder.
- ♦ **Justification produces the most active life.** The same chapter that gives the clearest statement of justification gives the most strenuous portrait of justified living: knowing Him, sharing His sufferings, being conformed to His death, pressing toward resurrection. *Sola fide* does not breed passivity; it frees a man to go all in. Verses 10–11 are the standing answer to every charge that grace makes people idle.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review: the joy board
0:05–0:13	Look out for the dogs: the triple warning and the pun (3:1–2)
0:13–0:19	The true circumcision: three marks (3:3)
0:19–0:28	The portfolio: seven credentials on the ledger (3:4–6)
0:28–0:40	The great accounting: loss, rubbish, and the righteousness from God (3:7–9) — the heart of the session
0:40–0:48	That I may know him: resurrection, sufferings, death (3:10–11)
0:48–0:52	Gathering the threads: the Reformation began here
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose one or two questions)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 6 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Verses 7–9 are the heart — the column-flip and the two righteousnesses — and they deserve their full twelve minutes plus the Augsburg Confession reading. If time gets tight, compress the credential backgrounds (Benjamin's tribal history and the Gamaliel detail can each be one sentence), shorten the *skubala* discussion to its force, and name the three aspects of knowing in verses 10–11 without developing each. Never cut verse 9, never skip Article IV, and never skip the students' own portfolio moment. The session is the accounting, performed in the room.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Look Out for the Dogs

Mark the tonal swerve first, because your students will feel it before they understand it. The letter has been all warmth — thanksgiving, the Hymn, Timothy and Epaphroditus — and Paul opens this section with *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord*. Then, in the very next breath: *Look out for the dogs*. The student book notes that Paul has evidently warned them before — *to write the same things to you is no trouble to me, and is safe for you* — and is glad to repeat himself, because this danger does not go away. Neither, you might add, has it yet.

The warning comes three times — *blepete, blepete, blepete* — like a sentry calling out, and each name is more pointed than the last. *Dogs*: not a casual insult but a deliberate inversion — in first-century Jewish usage, *dog* was a slur sometimes applied to Gentiles, the unclean outsiders — and Paul throws it back: you who would exclude the uncircumcised are yourselves the outsiders, scavenging at the edges of God's people. *Evildoers* — *kakous ergatas*, evil workers: men who think themselves laborers in God's vineyard, doing work that is in fact against the gospel; and work against the gospel, however sincere, is evil work. And third, the brutal pun your students will remember for years: *those who mutilate the flesh*. The Greek word for circumcision is *peritomē* — to cut *around*. Paul coins *katatomē* — to cut *down*, destructively: to slash, to mutilate. What these men call circumcision, he says, is mere mutilation — flesh cut in a way God no longer recognizes as a sign, and worse, the body of Christ cut up along ethnic lines.

Then make the stakes explicit, because this is the verse the whole session hangs on. These teachers were not denying Christ; they were *adding* to Him: to be fully Christian, a Gentile must also become Jewish — circumcision, food laws, festivals. And Paul saw, more clearly than anyone in the first generation, that the addition was a subtraction. *Christ plus circumcision* means *Christ is not enough* — and Christ-is-not-enough leaves you, in the end, with neither circumcision nor Christ, only a mutilated flesh and a hope that cannot save. Ask the room, briefly, where they have met this generation's pluses — Christ plus politics, Christ plus prosperity, Christ plus the right spiritual experiences, Christ plus a denominational pedigree — and leave the question hanging for Question 1.

The True Circumcision

Verse 3 answers the counterfeit with the real thing: *For we are the circumcision* — and then three marks, each worth a minute. *Who worship by the Spirit of God*: the verb is *latreuō*, the Old Testament's word for the priestly service of God's set-apart people — worship located now not at a temple or in a ritual but in the Spirit. *And glory in Christ Jesus*: *kauchaomai*, to boast in, to make one's pride — the Christian's pride is Christ; not pedigree, not learning, not zeal, not law-keeping; Christ. *And put no confidence in the flesh*: *sarx*, in Paul's vocabulary, the natural human standing — what you are by birth, by training, by achievement, apart from the Spirit. The Christian has been taught by the gospel that the flesh cannot bear the weight; only Christ can — and having been transferred from the one confidence to the other, never goes back. Write the three marks on the board beside your empty ledger; the contrast between them and the column you are about to fill is the architecture of the chapter.

The Portfolio

Now the list, and build it line by line in the GAIN column as you teach. Frame it with Paul's bitter irony, which the student book catches exactly: having just said the true cir-

cumcision puts no confidence in the flesh, Paul confesses that if flesh-confidence were the right strategy, he would be its master practitioner. *If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.* Then seven items — four gifts of birth, three earned achievements, a structure your students should see, because the law's ladder has rungs of both kinds.

The four of birth, briskly. *Circumcised on the eighth day* — native covenant membership, not a proselyte's late entry; belonging exactly as the law of Moses defined it. *Of the people of Israel* — the chosen line, the patriarchs, the promises. *Of the tribe of Benjamin* — the honored small tribe: the only patriarch born in the Promised Land, the tribe of Israel's first king (Paul's own namesake, Saul), the tribe that stayed with Judah and the temple when the kingdom split. *A Hebrew of Hebrews* — a family that kept the Aramaic at home and the Hebrew Scriptures in the original, unassimilated to Greek culture even in a Greek-speaking world. Four lines on the ledger, and Paul did nothing for any of them — they were given. Then the three he built. *As to the law, a Pharisee* — the most rigorous of the interpretive parties, and Paul at the top of it, a student of Gamaliel, the most distinguished rabbi of the generation. *As to zeal, a persecutor of the church* — pause here, because the student book does. This is the most painful line for Paul to write: he had hauled Christians from their homes, voted for their deaths, carried the letters to Damascus — and he lists it because, by the standards of Jewish zeal running back to Phinehas, it *was* a credential. Let your class feel the vertigo of a world where that counted as gain; some of them know what it is to have old credentials they now grieve. And the climax: *as to righteousness under the law, blameless* — *amemptos*, not sinless, but unchargeable: no accusation could be laid against him by the law's measurable standards. A teacher could point to Saul of Tarsus and tell his students, *that is what righteousness under the law looks like.*

Step back and let the room see the full column. By every standard of religious attainment his world possessed, this is the strongest portfolio in the New Testament — every advantage of birth, compounded by every advantage of devotion. If God graded on human righteousness, this man heads the list. Then say the student book's four-word paragraph exactly as it stands, and stop: *And then he met Christ.*

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Before you read verse 7 — before the arrow moves the column — hand out the index cards and give your students ninety silent seconds with one instruction: *write your own portfolio. The three or four things that, by the standards of your world, count as your credentials — the things you would quietly reach for if asked why you stand well with God.* No one will read them aloud. Then, with their own lists in their hands, read verses 7–8 over the room. The accounting that was about to be Paul's biography becomes, in that moment, theirs — and the difference between admiring the doctrine and undergoing it is the whole difference this session exists to make. (Expect church credentials on those cards — the years served, the family pew, the catechism prizes. Paul's list was religious too. Say so, gently.) Keep the cards in their hands through verse 9, so that when the righteousness from God arrives, each student receives it standing next to their own surrendered column.

The Great Accounting

Now the flip, and let the ledger language do its work. *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.* The seven items were *kerdē* — gains, assets, lines counted in his favor against the day of accounting. And Paul moves them, all of them, to the other column: *zēmian*, loss, debits. Draw the arrow on your board. Then guard the nuance the student book guards: the credentials were not bad in themselves — they were good gifts. They became loss *the moment they functioned as substitutes for Christ.* And here is the sentence to slow down for, the deepest in the chapter: the deepest sin is not gross immorality; the deepest sin is the use of good things as substitutes for Christ. The Pharisee is not damned by his pedigree, his learning, or his obedience — he is damned by his *confidence* in them. The law, given as a guide, becomes — misused — the very obstacle. Paul knows it from the inside; he had been the man for whom the credentials were the problem.

Then the intensification, and the tense. *Indeed, I count everything as loss — hēgeomai*, present tense. Not *I counted*, once, on the Damascus road. *I count.* From the Roman cell, this morning, still. The accounting is not a conversion-day event; it is a daily reckoning, and your students' cards are not a one-time exercise either. And what towers over the surrendered column: *the surpassing worth — hyperechon*, exceeding, towering over — *of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.* The knowing — *gnōsis* — is not information but relation, one person known by another. And do not let the last two words slip by: *my Lord* — the warmest genitive Paul owns. Not the Christ of the creeds only; *his* Christ, the One who met him and took him.

Two more steps down before the verse that changed the world. *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things — ezēmiōthēn*, passive voice: Paul did not so much discard his portfolio

as watch its value collapse, the way a proud currency goes bankrupt overnight when the kingdom behind it falls. And: *I count them as rubbish* — *skubala*, a deliberately coarse word: refuse, scraps, what the street dogs eat, with *dung* inside its range. The student book's image is the one to use: not the kind of thing you display in the parlor — the kind of thing you carry out the back door. Why so strong? Because the gospel is at stake and Paul is closing every loophole: not *less valuable* than Christ, which would leave the credentials recoverable as supplements, but *rubbish*, out of the house, in the alley. Christ alone is the substance of his confidence. Everything else has gone to the dump.

Then read verse 9, slowly, twice. *That I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.* Walk its clauses on the board: *not my own* — not earned, not constructed, not generated; *from God* — *ek theou*, given, bestowed; *through faith* — *epi tē pistei*, received, not achieved. Ours not by production but by gift; not in us by nature but upon us by imputation; granted by the work of Another. Students of the first volume will hear a whole letter inside *found in him* — everything Ephesians located *in Christ*, here received as a verdict. And Luther's happy exchange stands one step behind the verse, worth a sentence of teacher's gloss: the bridegroom takes the bride's debts; the bride wears the bridegroom's righteousness — the *fröhlicher Wechsel* that made the Reformer sing.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

When verse 9 has been read, pick up the Augsburg Confession — physically, so the class sees the book — and read Article IV aloud: human beings *cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are justified freely on account of Christ, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake... This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight.* Then say what the student book says: Article IV is Philippians 3:9 in confessional form — the Reformation began here. Your students confess this article every time they sing the liturgy of the Divine Service; letting them hear the verse and the article back to back, in one minute, welds the study to their Sunday and the Sunday to Paul. Few moves in the whole eight weeks cost so little and anchor so much.

That I May Know Him

Do not let the session end at the verdict, because the chapter does not. The student book's frame is exact: the doctrine is the foundation; what follows is the building. *That I may know him* — what Paul wants is not a status but a Person. The righteousness is settled; the knowing has just begun — *gnōnai*, the same root as verse 8's *gnōsis* — and Paul names three inseparable aspects. *The power of his resurrection*: the same power that opened the tomb at work in everyone baptized into Him — newness of life now, the raised body on the day of

Christ. *The fellowship of his sufferings* — and make sure the class hears the word, because it is the letter's keyword come home: *koinōnia*, the partnership of Session One, now applied to suffering. Paul's beatings, imprisonments, abandonments — he files them all under fellowship with Christ. *Becoming like him in his death: symmorphizomenos* — and there is the Hymn again, the *morphē* of Session Three taking shape in a believer: dying daily to the old self, the old confidences, the old columns.

And the last clause, which keeps the chapter honest: *that by any means possible — ei pōs — I may attain the resurrection from the dead*. Paul is confident of Christ and not casual about himself; willing, if it must come through chains or martyrdom, to come through them. The student book's summary is the segment's landing: this is what justified life looks like — not the static possession of a proposition but the dynamic running of a race, the daily knowing of a Person, the steady conformity to a death, the eager pressing toward a resurrection. The man with nothing left in the gain column is the most all-in man in the New Testament. Hold that paradox up; Question 6 will hand it to your students.

Gathering the Threads

The synthesis says plainly what the hour has shown: this passage is the Pauline center of the letter and arguably the autobiographical heart of justification by faith in all of Paul. Sola fide here is not an abstraction; it is a confession of personal failure and personal rescue — *I had every advantage, I built every credential, and it would not have saved me; only Christ saved me* — and what Paul holds, he holds by faith, because, as the student book puts it, faith is the only hand that can receive a gift this large. The gospel admits no cooperation in the question of justification: Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone — Paul says it here in his own person. And the same gospel produces a life: the freest man in the chapter is the most strenuous. The gospel that frees us from earning our salvation does not free us from caring about it; it frees us to give ourselves entirely to the One who gave Himself entirely to us. Close with the student book's last line, which belongs to the room: this is the Pauline gospel; this is the Lutheran gospel; and by God's grace, this is the gospel that is ours, in Christ.

For series classes, one forward whisper: in volume four, a runaway slave will stand where the portfolio stood, and Paul will write *if he has wronged you at all, charge that to my account*. The accounting language of this chapter, enacted on a single human life. The doctrine has a sequel.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions, and this week they move from diagnosis to autobiography. Choose one or two. Notes on each:

Question 1 — The dogs and today's pluses. A two-part question: why such heat from Paul, and where *Christ-plus-something-else* passes for gospel today. The first half is answered by the stakes — addition as subtraction. The second half needs chairing: keep the class naming *categories* of plus (moralism, politics of any stripe, prosperity, experience, heritage) rather than indicting named congregations or parties, and be ready to note that every plus on the list has a conservative and a progressive version. Paul's heat was for teachers burdening consciences; keep the heat aimed there.

Question 2 — The three marks. The self-examination question, and quieter than it looks. *Which of the three is hardest for you?* sorts a room quickly — and the third mark, no confidence in the flesh, is where most honest answers land. Let students name their flesh-confidences in their own words; the portfolio cards from earlier will already have done the excavation.

Question 3 — Your own portfolio. The session's payoff question, and the natural continuation of the index-card exercise. The second half — *what would it cost you to count those things as loss?* — is where the conversation becomes real: the cost is usually identity, and saying so aloud is half the surrender. Receive every answer gently; columns do not flip painlessly, and Paul's passive *ezēmiōthēn* gives permission for the loss to feel like loss.

Question 4 — What the gospel gives in place. The balancing question, and important after the severity of loss-and-rubbish: when the gospel asks us to count something as loss, it does not leave the column empty — it gives the surpassing worth, the Person, *my Lord*. Steer the conversation toward the exchange rather than the deprivation; this is where the happy-exchange image earns its keep.

Question 5 — The two righteousnesses. The doctrinal-pastoral question, with its lovely triple frame: how the distinction shapes the way you face God, yourself, and other people. The third clause is the sleeper — students rarely connect imputation to how they judge their neighbors, and the discovery that a person clothed in alien righteousness has no standing for contempt can reorder a congregation. Give the third clause its own minutes.

Question 6 — The most active life. The anti-caricature question: how does sola fide produce, in Paul, the most strenuous life imaginable? Useful for any student who has heard — or quietly believed — that grace alone makes people passive. The answer the session has built: free people run hardest, because they run *from* acceptance, not *for* it. The second half grounds it: what does the running look like for you?

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question for Session Five, make it Question 3 — your own portfolio and its cost. It completes the index-card exercise, it converts the chapter's autobiography into your students', and it is the question this passage was written to provoke. Question 5 is the strong alternative for a class that leans doctrinal. And whichever you choose, consider ending the hour by reading verse 9 aloud together — the class speaking *not having a righteousness of my own* over the cards still in their hands. Some weeks the closing reading is a summary. This week it is an absolution.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ The great accounting of verses 7–9 in full — the column-flip, the present-tense counting, *skubala*, and the two righteousnesses. This is the session; never cut it.
- ♦ The portfolio exercise — ninety seconds of silence and the cards. The session's personal edge depends on it.
- ♦ The Augsburg Confession Article IV reading beside verse 9. One minute, permanent.
- ♦ The portfolio of verses 4–6 in compressed form — the shape (four given, three achieved, climaxing in *blameless*) in four minutes, without the tribal and rabbinic backgrounds.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 3.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The triple warning's backgrounds. Keep the *katatomē/peritomē* pun in one sentence and the Christ-plus stake in two; the slur inversion can go.
- ♦ The three marks of verse 3. Name them in one breath and let the ledger carry the contrast.
- ♦ The Benjamin history and the Gamaliel detail. One clause each.
- ♦ Verses 10–11 compressed to the naming of the three aspects and the *koinōnia* echo — the building acknowledged, the tour deferred, with next week's *pressing on* picking up the thread.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be Philippians 3:9 taught as the two righteousnesses — *not my own... from God... through faith* — received by each student as their own baptismal possession, with Augsburg Confession IV read beside it. A student who can say *the righteousness I wear is not mine, and that is the best news I own* has the chief article, the chapter, and the Reformation in one sentence. Establish that, and even a shortened session has done the work of a whole catechesis.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Acts 9:1–22.** The Damascus road — the letters of authorization, the light, the three days, the chosen instrument. The narrative of the morning the portfolio went bankrupt, told by Luke; reading it beside the credential list joins the doctrine to its biography.
- ♦ **Romans 3:21–28.** The doctrinal twin of verse 9: *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... apart from works of the law*. Paul's autobiography here, stated as theology there — the two passages annotate each other.
- ♦ **Genesis 15:1–6.** *Abram believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness*. The Bible's first imputation text, in the very accounting vocabulary this chapter runs on — faith entered in the ledger as righteousness, two millennia before Damascus.
- ♦ **Luke 18:9–14.** The Pharisee and the tax collector — this chapter as a parable, ending in Jesus' own verdict vocabulary: *this man went down to his house justified*. The shortest possible summary of Session Five.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Augsburg Confession, Article IV.** The session's anchor text — justification freely, on account of Christ, through faith, imputed for righteousness. Read it in class; reread it at home with verse 9 open beside it.
- ♦ **Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV.** Melancthon's vast defense of the article — the most thorough treatment of justification the Lutheran church possesses, and the place to send any student whose questions outgrow the hour.

- ♦ **Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article I.** The first and chief article — *nothing in this article can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven and earth and everything else falls*. Luther's measure of how much weight verse 9 bears.
- ♦ **Luther, Preface to the Complete Edition of His Latin Writings (1545).** The tower account: the *righteousness of God* turning from the phrase Luther hated to *the very gate of paradise* — the Reformer's Damascus, in his own old-age telling. Paul's story and Luther's, laid side by side, are the session's two witnesses.

Commentaries

- ♦ **R. C. H. Lenski, *Philippians*.** At full dogmatic strength on 3:9 — the two righteousnesses, imputation, and the exclusion of every synergism; his pages here read like a confessional commentary on the Augsburg Confession itself.
- ♦ **Harlyn J. Kuschel, *Philippians (People's Bible Commentary)*.** Clear, warm, and reliably Lutheran on the whole chapter — especially good at keeping *rubbish* pastoral rather than merely shocking.
- ♦ **Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians (NICNT)*.** Thorough on the credential list's structure, candid about the force of *skubala*, and rich on verses 10–11 as the relational goal of the whole accounting. Not Lutheran; consistently illuminating.

A Final Word

You have just taught the chapter where this study's deepest doctrine stood up and told its own story — and if the index cards did their work, the story was told twice in your classroom: once by a Pharisee from Tarsus, and once, silently, by every student holding a list of their own. That is what this passage is for. The Reformation's chief article was never meant to live in dogmatics textbooks; it was born as autobiography, Paul's and then Luther's, and this week it became your students' as well. Treasure what happened in that silence. Much of it you will never hear about.

Expect the cards to keep working. Some students will throw theirs away on the way out — a small liturgy of verse 8. Some will keep them in a Bible for years. One or two will want to talk privately about a line they wrote, often the line that corresponds to Paul's *persecutor* entry. Be available, and let verse 9 do in conversation what it did in class: cover the column.

Next week, the race. Your students will read Philippians 3:12–4:1 before they arrive — *not that I have already obtained this... but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* — and then the verse this whole series of city-and-citizenship seeds has been growing toward: *our citizenship is in heaven*. The Roman colony finally hears its true ad-

dress. Session Six gathers everything Sessions One and Three planted; review your *politeuma* notes, and prepare to watch the letter's civic theme come home.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the righteousness that is not your own — from God, through faith, for Christ's sake — be the only credential you and your students ever need.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION SIX

Citizens of Heaven

Philippians 3:12–4:1

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Six — the harvest. Twice this study has planted citizenship seeds and asked you to wait: Session One named Philippi's pride in its Roman papers, and Session Three gave your class the verb *politeuesthe* — live as citizens worthy of the gospel — with a promise that the noun was coming. This week it arrives. *Our citizenship is in heaven — politeuma* — spoken to a colony of people who knew exactly what a colony was, and who now learn that they are one: an outpost of heaven planted on Macedonian soil, awaiting a Savior who is not in Rome.

But the citizenship verse is the destination, not the whole journey, and the road to it matters. The passage opens with the most striking confession a newly justified man could make — *not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect* — and gives the Christian life its great athletic picture: forgetting what lies behind, straining toward what lies ahead, pressing on toward the upward call. One week after Session Five, this is delicate ground. Taught carelessly, *press on* sounds like the portfolio creeping back onto the table; taught rightly — and verse 12 itself shows you how — the running is pure response: *I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own*. Grasp before grasping. Keep that order all hour and the race stays gospel.

Two more notes for your preparation. The middle of the passage carries the letter's most sorrowful paragraph — the enemies of the cross, described through tears — and the session's tone there should match Paul's: grief, not contempt; warning, not scorekeeping. And the close carries its most tender — *my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown*. Few sessions ask a teacher to move through this many registers in one hour: confession, exertion, lament, homesickness, and love. Read the passage aloud enough times this week that the registers are in your voice before they need to be in the room.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Justified and still running, Paul presses on toward the prize of the upward call — grasping the One who has already grasped him — weeps over lives organized around the belly rather than the cross, and then gives the proud Roman colony its true address: *our citizenship is in heaven*, from which we eagerly await the Savior who will transform these lowly bodies into the likeness of His glorious body; teach the race as response and the citizenship as vocation rather than escape, and the session lands as both comfort and commission.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Six of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Philippians 3:12–4:1 aloud several times, marking the registers: the disclaimers of verses 12–13, the strain of 13–14, the gentleness of 15–16, the tears of 18, the home-ward turn of 20–21, the endearments of 4:1. Your reading in class should let each be heard.
- ♦ Reread your Session One and Session Three notes on Philippi the colony — the Via Egnatia, the *libertas* pride, *politeuesthe*. This is the week those minutes pay their dividend, and a one-sentence callback (“remember the citizenship papers?”) will make your veterans feel the letter’s architecture.
- ♦ Read 1 Corinthians 15:35–58 — Paul’s full exposition of the resurrection body. Verse 21 of this week’s text is its summary, and questions about what *transformed* means will come.
- ♦ Review the Small Catechism’s explanation of the Third Article — *on the Last Day He will raise up me and all the dead* — and Augsburg Confession XVI on civil life. The first anchors verse 21; the second anchors the two-kingdoms teaching the citizenship verse opens.
- ♦ Pray for the homesick — and for the too-much-at-home. Both live in every class, and this passage is aimed at both.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible and the student book; the whiteboard with the *joy — chara* list.

- ♦ One new entry ready: *joy embodied in people — my joy and crown* (4:1). After seven entries locating joy in God's acts, the list's newest line is a congregation's faces. Let the class notice the development.
- ♦ The map from Session One, if you still have it. Pointing again at Philippi — the piece of Rome planted abroad — while reading *our citizenship is in heaven* is the cheapest and most effective visual of the study.
- ♦ For the board: a simple two-line address block — *Residence: Philippi (Macedonia) / Citizenship: Heaven* — to build during the 3:20 segment. Your students all live at that address.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **The already and the not yet.** The justified man is not yet the glorified man. Paul has the righteousness from God — settled, received, sure — and has *not* yet obtained the resurrection completion he runs toward. Justified; being sanctified; one day glorified. The Christian lives in that gap, and maturity, the passage says with a smile, is precisely *knowing* you live there: the mature Christian knows he is still running; the immature one imagines he has finished.
- ♦ **The race as response.** Both halves of verse 12 use the same verb — *katalambanō*, to take hold of. Paul presses on to take hold *because Christ Jesus has taken hold of him*. The pursuit answers a prior pursuit; the running is the form gratitude takes in people already seized by Christ. This is the Lutheran balance that keeps the whole passage from undoing last week.
- ♦ **The two kingdoms.** Citizens of heaven, resident in Philippi — and not exempted from Philippi but planted there. Heavenly citizenship does not pull Christians out of their earthly callings; it transforms how they hold them. The kingdom of the right hand and the kingdom of the left meet in the colonist who belongs to one city and serves in another.
- ♦ **The resurrection of the body.** Not the immortality of the soul in the Greek manner — the transformation of *this* body, the lowly one, into the likeness of Christ's glorious one, by the power that subjects all things to Him. The body that was baptized and fed at the altar and worn out in vocation will be raised. Your students confess it every week in the Creed; this is the text beneath the clause.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review: the joy board
0:05–0:15	Pressing on: the race and the upward call (3:12–14)
0:15–0:21	Mature thinking and the gentle provision (3:15–16)
0:21–0:29	Enemies of the cross: four marks, through tears (3:17–19)
0:29–0:40	Our citizenship is in heaven: the colony and the Savior (3:20) — the heart of the session
0:40–0:46	He will transform our lowly body (3:21)
0:46–0:50	Stand firm, my beloved (4:1)
0:50–0:54	Gathering the threads: colonists of heaven
0:54–0:58	Discussion (choose one question — the hour is full)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 7 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

The citizenship verse and the transformation verse — 3:20–21 — are the heart, with the race of 3:12–14 a strong second; protect both. If time gets tight, the maturity material of verses 15–16 can be two sentences, the enemies-of-the-cross identity question (Judaizers or libertines?) can be skipped entirely in favor of the four marks and the tears, and the imperial background of *Savior* can be one sentence. Never cut the colony image, never cut the *because*-clause of verse 12, and never let verse 21 go by without the Third Article. Home, and how we run there — those two things are the session.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Pressing On

Open by letting the class feel the surprise of verse 12. The man who has just received the righteousness from God — last week's whole session — immediately disclaims arrival: *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect*. The verb *obtained* — *elabon* — means to grasp, to secure; *perfect* — *teleioō* — means brought to completion. Paul is neither. The student book's framing deserves the board: the Christian lives in the gap between the *already* of justification and the *not yet* of glorification — and Paul, of all people, lives there too. We

might have expected the apostle to claim settled spiritual maturity. He does the opposite, and his honesty gives every student in your room permission to be unfinished.

Then the sentence that keeps the whole session gospel, and your Most Important move below depends on it: *But I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own*. Both verbs are the same Greek word — *katalambanō*, to take hold of. Paul is grasping at what has already grasped him. The Christ who took hold of him on the Damascus road is the Christ he now runs to take hold of more fully; the believer's reaching toward Christ is grounded in Christ's reaching toward the believer. Paul is not generating the desire — he is following it. Say the student book's summary sentence and let it sit: we do not chase Christ to make Him love us; we chase Him because He has already loved us and laid hold of us. The running is the form gratitude takes in people who have been seized.

Then the hammer: *But one thing I do*. After all the disclaimers — one thing. Not a hundred small spiritual practices; the whole Christian life reduced to a single forward motion, in two participles. *Forgetting what lies behind* — and be precise, because the student book is: *epilanthanomenos* does not mean erasing memory; Paul has just recounted his Pharisaic past in detail. It means refusing to let the past — the past of accomplishments *or* the past of failures — determine the present. The credentials have been let go; the persecutions have been left to the mercy of Christ; neither pride nor regret is permitted to slow the runner. Pause one beat on that pairing. Half your class is dragged backward by old guilt, half by old glory, and this verse cuts both tow ropes. And *straining forward to what lies ahead* — *epekteinomenos*, the athlete's word: the runner in the final stretch, body angled at the tape, everything pointed forward.

And the finish: *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*. The *upward call* — *anō klēseōs* — is the summons from above, the invitation to come up; and notice what the prize is: the call itself. Being summoned, at last, into the full presence of the One who has been calling all along. Paul is running toward the moment the Lord says, in effect, *come up here*. Then guard the doctrine one last time, in the student book's own balance: the race is real, the straining is real — but the goal is not earned by the running. The runner is simply the one who has heard the call and is answering it. He runs not to make himself worthy of the summons but in response to the summons already issued.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Teach the *because* before the strain. One week after the portfolio went to the dump, *press on* and *straining forward* will sound, to anxious ears, like the credentials sneaking back — unless verse 12's order is established first: *Christ Jesus has made me his own*, therefore *I press on to make it my own*. Grasped before grasping; seized before striving; the call before the run. Say it when you enter the passage, say it again at the prize, and once more at *stand firm*. The test of the session is whether your students leave saying "I get to run" rather than "I have to run" — the same five words, and the whole difference between the gospel and its counterfeit. If the order holds, even the sweatiest verbs in Philippians stay good news.

Mature Thinking and the Gentle Provision

Verses 15–16 contain a wordplay your students will enjoy and a tenderness they will need. *Let those of us who are mature think this way* — and *mature* is *teleioi*, the adjective from the very root (*teleioō*) Paul just disclaimed. The play is intentional, and the student book lands it perfectly: there is a maturity Christians do possess, and it is not the maturity of having arrived — it is the maturity of having recognized that *no one* has arrived. The mature Christian knows he is still running. The immature Christian imagines he has finished. Write that pair on the board; it inverts most of what the world means by spiritual maturity.

Then the gentle provision, one of the most pastorally tender sentences in Paul: *and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you*. There is room here for the slower learner — the Christian who has not yet grasped justification, who still wrestles with confidence in the flesh — and Paul, so fierce with the false teachers, is patient with the slow believer. The work of correction belongs, finally, to the Spirit; Paul teaches what he can and trusts God for the rest. Two applications, briefly: this is how your students should treat fellow Christians who have not yet seen what they see — and, quietly, it is how you should regard the student in your own class who is not there yet. *God will reveal that also to you* is a teacher's verse as much as a student's. Then verse 16's balance: *only let us hold true to what we have attained* — forward-leaning, but resistant to reversal. We press on, and we also hold the line; even the immature Christian is fully justified, fully in Christ, held by the grace that called him — and meanwhile, what has been given is to be held.

Enemies of the Cross

The tone darkens, and you should let it. Paul points first to the positive — *join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example* — and then to the grief: *For*

many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Mark the tears before you mark anything else. Paul does not write this paragraph from superiority; he writes it from sorrow, about people he does not name — perhaps the Judaizers of verse 2, perhaps libertines who heard grace as license, perhaps both; the student book declines to decide, and so should you. What matters is the description, in four marks.

Their end is destruction — *apōleia*, ruin, the final loss of the soul: whatever they intend, the trajectory ends somewhere terrible. *Their god is their belly* — *koilia*, the seat of appetite, enthroned where God belongs: whatever the lips say, what is actually worshiped is the body's gratification, and the belly is a god who cannot save. *They glory in their shame* — the categories inverted: what should make them blush has become their banner. And *minds set on earthly things* — and here make sure the class hears the letter's vocabulary turning on itself: the phrase is *ta epigeia phronountes*, built on *phronein*, the *think/set the mind* verb of the whole epistle. *Have this mind* was Session Three; this is the anti-mind — people who cannot imagine a hope that is not earthly. Then the detail that gives the paragraph its full weight: Paul does not call these men unbelievers. He calls them enemies of the cross — people possibly inside the community, perhaps baptized, perhaps at the assemblies — for whom the cross is precisely what they will not have, because the cross undoes belly-worship, undoes glorying in shame, undoes the earthbound mind.

Close the segment with the Lutheran frame the student book supplies, because it disciplines every conversation this paragraph will start: the visible church always includes wheat and tares, and we are not given the authority to decide, finally, who is who. We are given the responsibility to recognize the marks — and when we see them, the right response is not contempt but tears; not dismissal, but the same patient, sorrowful warning Paul gives here. And then the sentence of hope that keeps the paragraph evangelical: even those whose end is destruction are not yet destroyed. The cross they have made themselves enemies of is the cross that could yet save them.

Our Citizenship Is in Heaven

Now the harvest, and reap it slowly. *But our citizenship is in heaven*. The word is *politeuma* — and your class has been waiting for it since Session Three, when Paul told this congregation to *politeuesthe*, live as citizens worthy of the gospel, without yet naming the city. Now he names it. Not Rome. Not Philippi. Heaven.

Then rebuild the colony, with the map in your hand. The Philippians lived in a Roman colony — a piece of Rome planted on Macedonian soil. They held Roman citizenship, followed Roman law, traded in Roman coin; their identity was Roman though their bodies were hundreds of miles from Rome itself, and when great events happened in the capital — an accession, a triumph — they celebrated as Romans, at a distance. Paul takes the image his readers are proudest of and turns it on its axis: the church is a colony, but the city

is not Rome. Christians are citizens of heaven, planted in this present world as an outpost of the kingdom of God — identity heavenly while the body is local, dealings in the coinage of the gospel, law the law of Christ. Build the address block on the board: *Residence: Philippi. Citizenship: Heaven.* Then turn to the room: same block, your town on the first line.

And from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Two words to weigh. The verb *await* — *apekdechometha* — is an intensified compound: eager, expectant waiting, the waiting that leans forward — a colony waiting for the arrival of its lord, scanning the road. And *Savior* is politically loaded, and the student book wants your class to feel it: the first-century emperors — Augustus above all — were hailed as Savior; the imperial cult saturated a colony like Philippi. To confess *the Lord Jesus Christ* as Savior in Caesar's empire was to declare that the real Savior is not in Rome but in heaven — an allegiance running deeper than Caesar's, said by people who knew the cost. Your class met this once before, at the Hymn's *Kyrios*; here it comes home to the colony.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

When the citizenship verse lands, name the doctrine it seeds: the two kingdoms. The student book says it outright in its synthesis — the kingdom of the right hand and the kingdom of the left find their meeting point here — and two minutes secure it. Heavenly citizenship does not exempt Christians from their earthly callings; it transforms them. The colonist of heaven still pays Philippi's taxes, serves Philippi's neighbors, keeps Philippi's peace — not despite belonging to another city but *because* the King of that city has stationed him here. The mother in her kitchen, the worker at his trade, the citizen at the ballot — each a colonist, embodying in his particular place the values of the city he ultimately belongs to. This one move inoculates the class against both errors the verse attracts: the escapism that abandons the world because heaven is home, and the captivity that confuses any earthly polity with the kingdom of God. Augsburg Confession XVI stands behind you; Jeremiah's *seek the welfare of the city* stands behind it.

He Will Transform Our Lowly Body

Verse 21 tells the colony what its Savior will do on arrival, and the verb matters: *who will transform* — *metaschēmatizei* — *our lowly body to be like his glorious body*. Transform — not discard. The body is not abandoned; it is reconfigured. What was *lowly* — *tapeinōseōs*, humble, subject to weakness and decay — becomes *glorious* — *doxēs*, radiant with God's own glory. This is the Christian hope of bodily resurrection, and the student book draws the line your students need drawn: we do not confess the mere immortality of the soul, in the manner of Greek philosophy; we confess — every week, in the Creed — *the resurrection of the body*. This body. The body that was baptized; the body that received the sacrament; the body that lived out its vocation in a particular place — that body will be raised, con-

formed to the resurrection body of Christ Himself. For the aging, the ill, and the grieving in your room, this is the tenderest doctrine of the session; teach it looking up from your notes.

And the power clause: *by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself*. The same power that opened His tomb will open ours; the transformation of every saint and the completion of Christ's lordship over every creature happen in one motion. Then let the student book gather it: this is the destination of all the pressing on — not a return to Eden, not escape into disembodied bliss, but the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come, glorified existence in glorified bodies in the presence of the glorified Christ. The race of verses 12–14 ends *here*. The upward call has a body waiting at the top.

Stand Firm, My Beloved

Read 4:1 aloud and let the endearments pile up the way Paul piles them: *Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown... my beloved*. He rarely speaks this tenderly anywhere; the chapter's love spills onto the page — and there is your board entry: *my joy and crown* — for the first time on the list, joy with faces. Then the command that is also a benediction: *stand firm thus in the Lord* — the same verb as 1:27, returned at the end of all this teaching. Stand firm *thus*: in the righteousness from God by faith, in the pressing on, against the enemies of the cross, in the hope of the resurrection. The student book's closing line is the segment's: the Christian life is, in the end, a stand — on what Christ has done, in what He has given, toward what He has promised — taken together, by the citizens of a city we have never yet seen, waiting for the Savior who will come from there.

Gathering the Threads

The synthesis names the passage as the eschatological climax of the letter's Pauline center: righteousness received, the Christian now runs — pressing on, holding true, watching the road, awaiting the Savior — and the already/not-yet tension holds throughout: justified, being sanctified, one day glorified, running not to earn what he has but to receive more fully what is promised. Vocation runs alongside the eschatology — the colonist serving his earthly city under heaven's flag — and the resurrection of the body receives its full Pauline statement against every spiritualizing heresy. Close with the student book's image of the waiting itself, because it sends your class to Sunday: the Lord we eagerly await is the same Lord who has already met us at the font, who feeds us in the Supper, who walks with us in the Word — and who will, at the appointed hour, come from heaven to bring us home. The colony is not waiting for a stranger.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions, and this week the teaching hour is full enough that one unhurried conversation is the wise choice. Notes on each:

Question 1 — The disclaimer of arrival. A gentle opener with real depth: where have you settled into having arrived? Lifelong church people will recognize the temptation better than they expect — the maturity-as-knowing-you're-running inversion gives them new language for it. Keep Paul's honesty as the model: unfinished is not failing.

Question 2 — Forgetting what lies behind. The pastoral powerhouse of the set. The question's pairing — failures *or* successes that determine your present — reaches both halves of the room: the guilt-dragged and the glory-dragged. Expect quiet, weighty answers, and resist resolving them too quickly; *left to the mercy of Christ* is the destination, and some students need the whole conversation to get there.

Question 3 — God will reveal that also to you. The humility question, lovely for intergenerational classes: where were *you* the slower learner? Answers here often become testimonies of the Spirit's patience — and the second half quietly converts the testimony into gentleness toward the Christians who currently try one's patience. A short conversation with long effects.

Question 4 — The marks in our time. Handle with the passage's own posture: the question explicitly says *without naming names*, and the discipline matters. Keep answers at the level of patterns — appetite enthroned, shame celebrated, hope shrunk to the earthly — and return twice to the tears. If the conversation warms toward contempt, read verse 18 again; Paul weeps where we are tempted to sneer, and the difference is the gospel.

Question 5 — The practical difference of heavenly citizenship. The harvest question, and the strongest single choice this week. The first half grounds the colony image in Monday; the second half — where the citizenships conflict, and how you navigate — is where the two-kingdoms teaching earns its keep in your students' actual lives: the workplace policy, the cultural pressure, the political season. Keep the navigation principled rather than partisan, and let *allegiance deeper than Caesar's* do its quiet work on every party in the room.

Question 6 — Stand firm, and the thus. A strong closer, especially asked person by person: what are the pressures that would push you off your stand, and what is the *thus* — the basis — you stand on? The question rehearses the whole session in one answer, and ending the hour with a room full of stated foundations is its own benediction.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question for Session Six, make it Question 5 — the practical difference of heavenly citizenship and the navigation of conflicting allegiances. It harvests the session's central image, it puts the two kingdoms to work where your students live, and it sends the colony out the door knowing both its address and its assignment. Question 2 is the strong alternative for a class carrying visible weights from the past. Whichever you choose, consider closing by reading 3:20–21 aloud together — the colony, in its own voice, naming its city and its coming King.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ The citizenship verse with the full colony image, and verse 21 with the Third Article — the session's heart, ten minutes minimum. Never cut it.
- ♦ The race of 3:12–14 with the *because*-clause order — grasped before grasping — in six or seven minutes.
- ♦ The tears of verse 18 and the wheat-and-tares frame, even if the four marks shrink to one breath. The posture matters more than the inventory.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 5.
- ♦ *Stand firm* and the endearments of 4:1 — one minute, and the joy-board entry.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The maturity wordplay of verses 15–16. Two sentences: mature means knowing you're still running; and God will reveal the rest in His time.
- ♦ The enemies-of-the-cross identity question. Skip Judaizers-versus-libertines entirely; the marks and the tears carry the teaching.
- ♦ The imperial-cult background of *Savior*. One sentence — *a title Caesar claimed, confessed of Christ at known cost* — preserves the edge.
- ♦ The 1 Corinthians 15 connections on the resurrection body. Name the cross-reference and move on; the Further Study list holds it.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be Philippians 3:20–21 taught whole: the colony given its true address — *our citizenship is in heaven* — and its true expectation — a Savior who will transform this lowly body into the likeness of His glorious one. A student who leaves knowing where home is, Who is coming from there, and what He will do with these failing bodies has the session, the Creed's last clauses, and a hope sufficient for every waiting room in their future. Establish that, and the shortened hour has still delivered the letter's brightest promise.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **1 Corinthians 15:35–58.** Paul's full exposition of the resurrection body — sown perishable, raised imperishable; *we shall all be changed*. The long answer to every question verse 21 raises, ending in the same trumpet this passage waits for.
- ♦ **Hebrews 11:13–16.** The strangers and exiles *seeking a homeland... a better country, that is, a heavenly one* — and the God who *has prepared for them a city*. The whole pilgrim's geography of this session, in the Old Testament saints' own itinerary. (Classes that have studied First Peter's elect exiles with this author will recognize the country.)
- ♦ **Jeremiah 29:4–7.** *Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile*. The Old Testament root of the colonist's double life — heaven's citizens commanded to serve the earthly city's good. The two kingdoms, seven centuries early.
- ♦ **1 Corinthians 9:24–27.** The runner's regimen — *run that you may obtain it* — Paul's other great athletic passage, with the same prize-orientation and the same refusal to coast.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Small Catechism, the Creed, Third Article with explanation.** *On the Last Day He will raise up me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ*. Verse 21 in the words your students memorized — the session's resurrection hope, confirmation-vocabulary edition.
- ♦ **Augsburg Confession, Article XVI.** Civil affairs — Christians may rightly hold office, render judgments, serve as soldiers, buy and sell, marry: the charter of the colonist's earthly service, and the confessional ground of the two-kingdoms move.

- ♦ **Luther, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* (1523).** The Reformation's foundational two-kingdoms treatise — how the Christian belongs wholly to Christ and still serves wholly in the world's structures. The deep background to everything this session says about citizenship.
- ♦ **“Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying.”** The king of chorales — the watchmen, the midnight cry, the Bridegroom's arrival. *Apekdechometha* set to Nicolai's tune; if your class sings this week, sing the waiting.

Commentaries

- ♦ **R. C. H. Lenski, *Philippians*.** Careful and confessional on the already/not-yet of verses 12–16 — no perfectionism, no passivity — and richly dogmatic on the resurrection body of verse 21.
- ♦ **Harlyn J. Kuschel, *Philippians* (People's Bible Commentary).** Warm on the race and pastoral on the enemies-of-the-cross paragraph; his treatment keeps the tears in view, which is exactly the note a lay reader needs.
- ♦ **Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT).** The fullest accessible account of *politeuma*, the colony background, and the imperial resonance of *Savior* — the historical texture behind this session's central image, drawn in detail.

A Final Word

You have just taught your class where they live. That is not a small thing. Most Christians carry their citizenship the way Philippi's residents carried their papers — proud of the wrong city, or vaguely embarrassed by the right one — and this week your students heard the address read out properly: residents of their town, citizens of heaven, colonists with an assignment and an Arrival to wait for. The verse will go home with them; *politeuma* has a way of resurfacing at tax time, at election season, and in hospital rooms, which is to say everywhere the two cities touch.

Notice, too, what your whiteboard has become. Seven weeks of entries under *joy* — *chara*, and this week's line — *my joy and crown* — put faces on the list for the first time. The board is one session from finished, and it is already preaching the letter's secret: joy located in the Lord, grounded in His works, embodied in His people. Next week the list receives its imperative.

For next week: your students will read Philippians 4:2–9 before they arrive — and Session Seven opens with something this letter has not yet shown us: a conflict, by name. Euodia and Syntyche, two co-workers at odds, called to agree in the Lord — and then the cascade your students have been waiting eight weeks to study slowly: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice... do not be anxious about anything... and the peace of God, which*

surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus — with the *whatever is true* list to close. It is the most quoted stretch of the letter and the most pastorally loaded hour of the study; the anxious members of your class have been waiting for it whether they know it or not. Prepare with them in mind.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may you and all your students — colonists of heaven, planted for now in your own Philippi — stand firm thus in the Lord until the Savior comes from the city where you have always belonged.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION SEVEN

The Peace of God

Philippians 4:2–9

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Seven — the most pastoral hour of the study. This week your class reaches the stretch of Philippians most of them already half-know: *Rejoice in the Lord always... let your reasonableness be known to everyone... do not be anxious about anything... and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* — closing with the *whatever is true* catalog. These are the verses on the kitchen plaques and the sympathy cards, and your work this week is the happy opposite of Session Two's: not to rescue a verse from overfamiliarity by making it strange, but to let a familiar paragraph finally land with its full weight, in order, as Paul built it — a real church quarrel first, then the joy, then the gentleness, then the exchange, then the peace.

Because the paragraph begins where your students live: with two named Christians who cannot get along. Euodia and Syntyche are the letter's only conflict with faces, and Paul's handling of them — symmetrical, public, tender, and grounded in the book of life — is a complete short course in congregational reconciliation. Do not rush past them to get to the famous verses; the famous verses are Paul's medicine *for* situations like theirs, and the sequence is the teaching.

One pastoral note outranks all others this week. *Do not be anxious about anything* will be heard, by some in your room, through years of clinical anxiety — and through years of having this very verse used on them as a club. Decide now that it will not be used that way in your classroom. Notice what Paul actually does: he does not scold the anxious; he gives them an exchange — the worry lifted out of the head and into the ears of God — and a promise that comes to meet it. Anxiety in this passage is answered, not shamed. Say that early, say it plainly, and add the Lutheran footnote that the God who guards hearts through prayer also works through physicians and counselors, because vocation is one of His means too. The student for whom you say it will likely never tell you. Say it anyway.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Paul brings the whole letter down into the texture of one congregation's week — two co-workers entreated to agree in the Lord, joy commanded twice from a prison cell, gentleness grounded in the Lord's nearness, and then the great exchange: every anxiety lifted into prayer with thanksgiving, answered by the peace of God standing garrison over hearts and minds in Christ Jesus; teach the joy command as the harvest of seven weeks of grounds and the peace as promise rather than technique, and the most quoted paragraph in the letter becomes the most pastoral hour of the study.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Seven of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Philippians 4:2–9 aloud several times, and practice the sequence as a sequence: quarrel, joy, gentleness, exchange, peace, diet, practice. The order is the argument.
- ♦ Read Matthew 6:25–34. Paul's *do not be anxious* stands in the stream of Jesus' own *do not be anxious about your life*, and the Sermon on the Mount's birds and lilies are the richest cross-light on this passage.
- ♦ Reread the Small Catechism's introduction to the Lord's Prayer — *that we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father* — and skim Luther's little letter "A Simple Way to Pray." Both stand directly behind verse 6, and the second is this session's best take-home gift for a struggling pray-er.
- ♦ Stand in front of your joy board and read all seven weeks of entries in order. This is the week the board pays off — the Most Important move below depends on it — and you will want the list in your bones before you turn the class toward it.
- ♦ Pray by name for the anxious in your class, and for any Euodias and Syntyches you know are sitting in the same pews.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible and the student book; the whiteboard with the *joy — chara* list — complete, legible, and positioned where the whole class can see it. It is this week's central visual aid.
- ♦ One new entry ready, the list's own imperative: *Rejoice in the Lord always — the command that gathers the list* (4:4).

- ♦ For the board, beside the joy list: the four prayer words of verse 6 — *prayer, supplication, thanksgiving, requests* — and, drawn simply, a gate with a sentry. The garrison image of verse 7 deserves thirty seconds of chalk.
- ♦ Copies, if you can manage them, of Luther's "A Simple Way to Pray" — or at least the reference written where students can photograph it. Question 4 will create the appetite; have the food ready.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **Joy as a command with a location.** *Rejoice in the Lord always* is imperative — and it is not law without gospel, because the letter has spent four chapters supplying the grounds. Christian joy is not a feeling produced by circumstances; it is the steady gladness of those who belong to Christ — and Christ does not change. The command can say *always* only because its location holds in every weather.
- ♦ **The Lutheran doctrine of prayer.** Verse 6 is prayer taught the catechism's way: thanksgiving frames the asking, because the One being asked has already given Christ. We come as children to a dear father, not as beggars working up courage at a stranger's door. The relationship is named before the requests are made — exactly as the Lord's Prayer itself begins.
- ♦ **Peace as promise, not technique.** *The peace of God... will guard* — future indicative, a promise, not a wellness strategy. The peace does not come from figuring the circumstances out; it surpasses understanding because it comes from leaving the circumstances in God's hands. And it is military: *phroureō*, the garrison verb — a sentry posted at the gates of heart and mind. In Christ Jesus, and nowhere else.
- ♦ **Sanctified attention.** The mind is shaped by what it dwells on, and the Christian is responsible for the dwelling. *Logizesthe* — reckon, deliberately attend — over the six-fold diet of verse 8 is the sanctification of the intellect: not denial that dark things exist, but refusal to be colonized by them. What we look at, we tend toward; what we dwell on, we become.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review: the joy board, read in full
0:05–0:14	Euodia and Syntyche: the appeal, the companion, the book of life (4:2–3)
0:14–0:21	Rejoice in the Lord always: the board receives its imperative (4:4)
0:21–0:27	Reasonableness, for the Lord is at hand (4:5)
0:27–0:38	The exchange: anxiety, prayer, and the garrison of peace (4:6–7) — the heart of the session
0:38–0:46	Whatever is true: the mind's diet (4:8)
0:46–0:50	Practice these things; the God of peace (4:9)
0:50–0:54	Gathering the threads: from quarrel to peace
0:54–0:58	Discussion (choose one or two questions)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 8 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Verses 6–7 are the heart — the exchange and the garrison — and verse 4 with the joy board is the strong second; protect both. If time gets tight, the identity of the *true companion* can be one sentence, the Aristotle note under *epieikes* can go entirely, and the six adjectives of verse 8 can be walked in a single unhurried breath with the two summary clauses. Never compress the exchange, never skip the thanksgiving, and never teach *do not be anxious* without the *but* that follows it. The session's gift is the trade Paul offers; make sure your class leaves holding both ends of it.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Euodia and Syntyche

Open with the surprise: after four chapters of warmth, the letter's first named conflict. *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord*. Walk the grammar the way the student book does, because the grammar is the pastoral care. The verb *parakalō* appears twice — once for each woman, addressed individually, by name, as one addresses adults one respects. Neither is grouped into “the problem”; neither is scolded; the appeal is perfectly symmetrical. And *agree* is literally *think the same thing* — *phronein*, the verb your class has been tracking since Session Three. Everything the letter has said about the mind

of Christ now lands on two actual people who are not, at the moment, thinking the same thing.

Then the detail your students will feel: Paul names them *publicly*, in a letter he knows will be read aloud to the gathered church. Let the room squirm a little, then give the student book's reading: this is candor, not humiliation. The disagreement touches the unity of the body, so the appeal is made before the body — and the whole body will witness the reconciliation when it comes. Fill in who these women are: their names mean *sweet fragrance* and *good fortune*; they *labored side by side* with Paul — *synathlein*, the very athletes-in-form-ation verb of 1:27 — in the gospel's first days at Philippi, perhaps from the mornings at Lydia's house. These are not fringe complainers. They are founders. And founders can quarrel — which is its own quiet comfort to every congregation that has watched pillars collide. Note, too, what Paul does *not* say: the content of the dispute. He does not consider it important enough to name. What he names is the way back: *in the Lord* — agreement found not in negotiated compromise but in the One in whom both women stand.

Then the third party: *Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women*. Give the identity question one sentence — *gnēsie syzyge*, true yokefellow; possibly a proper name, possibly Epaphroditus, most likely a respected man in the congregation — and spend your time on the role, because the role is the teaching: not to arbitrate, not to take sides, not to declare a winner, but to *help* — to come alongside and let a hard conversation bear fruit. Christian reconciliation is rarely a private transaction between two parties; it usually needs a third, and the body has the responsibility to supply one. Every congregation has Euodia-and-Syntyche situations; this verse tells the church what kind of person to send.

And then the sentence that grounds it all, one of the quiet wonders of the letter: *whose names are in the book of life*. Euodia. Syntyche. Clement. The rest. Sketch the lineage in a minute — Moses pleading over the book in Exodus, the psalmist's book of the living, Daniel's names found written, Revelation's Lamb's book from before the foundation of the world — and then land the student book's point with full weight: the book of life is not a record of human achievement; it is a record of those whom God has loved from before the foundation of the world. Whatever the friction between these two women today, their names are written where it matters — they belong to God, and therefore to one another, and the disagreement cannot finally separate what God has inscribed. This is the gospel landing in the middle of an interpersonal conflict: what God has written, God will keep. Reconciliation in the church does not start from the quarrel. It starts from the book.

Rejoice in the Lord Always

Now turn to the board, and take your time, because seven weeks of quiet preparation come due in this segment. Read verse 4 aloud: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice*. Note the doubling — Paul commands it, then commands it again so it cannot be

missed — and note the source: a prisoner, four chapters deep in chains, rival preachers, and the prospect of his own execution, commanding joy *always*.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Do not teach verse 4 as a bare imperative — turn to the joy board and let seven weeks of grounds speak first. Read the list aloud, slowly, in order: joy from partnership in the gospel; joy grounded in the One who finishes what He begins; joy from the gospel's advance through chains; joy that Christ is proclaimed whatever the preacher's motives; joy completed in the church's like-mindedness; joy in shared sacrifice; joy located in the Lord, not in credentials; joy embodied in people — my joy and crown. Then say it: *for seven weeks this letter has been listing reasons. Only now does it issue the command.* Rejoice *always* is not law screamed at the joyless; it is the harvest of grounds — the imperative that gathers the list. A student who hears 4:4 with the board behind it hears gospel; a student who hears it bare hears one more demand to perform a feeling. You built this board in Session One for exactly this minute. Spend it.

Then secure the location, in the student book's own terms. The joy is *in the Lord* — not in finances, not in health, not in the absence of conflict, not in the satisfaction of being right. The Lord is the location, and the only location that holds steady through every kind of weather: the Lord on the sweet days and the bitter ones, in the prison and on the throne. That is why Paul can say *always* — the command rests on a relationship that does not fluctuate. And give your students the student book's image to take home, because it is the whole Lutheran account of Christian affect in one picture: the joy of belonging to the Lord runs underneath the changing weather of the days, like a deep river under the surface of the seasons. Add the board's final framing entry, and let the list stand complete.

Reasonableness, for the Lord Is at Hand

Verse 5 seems to come from nowhere until the class sees how it grows out of the joy. *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.* The word — *epieikes* — resists one-word translation, and walking its range is the teaching: gentleness, forbearance, the willingness not to stand on one's rights, the disposition to be lenient — the opposite of harshness, of insistence, of the spirit that always collects what it is owed. The student book's formulation deserves repeating: the Christian *epieikes* holds the law lightly enough to let the other person live. And it is to be *known to everyone* — visible, recognizable, on display — to neighbors, employers, officials, even the men who might one day make the arrest. The world ought to be able to point at the Christians and say: those people are gentle; those people do not stand on every offense.

Then the ground: *The Lord is at hand*. Near in time — He is coming — and near in space — He is present; the student book reads both, and probably Paul means both. Either way the logic is the same, and it is the session's hidden hinge: the one who knows the Lord is at hand can afford to be patient with everyone else. The joyful Christian, secure in the Lord, has nothing to prove and nothing to defend; he can be gentle because he is not afraid, forbearing because he is not anxious, lenient about today's slight because the Lord is coming and will sort what is truly owed. Notice aloud how the verse anticipates what comes next: gentleness and anxiety are connected at the root — and Paul is about to dig the root up.

The Exchange: Anxiety, Prayer, and the Garrison

Now the heart. Read verse 6 whole: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God*. Begin with honesty about the verb — *merimnate*: to worry, to fret, to carry tomorrow's troubles into today — and about its universality. The student book's catalog will sound like your class's diary: health, finances, children, reputation, the future of the world, the future of the church — and anxiety's peculiar power to multiply itself, the more we worry the more we find. Then the scope: *about anything*. The Christian life is not to run on anxiety as its fuel.

And then — immediately, before anyone's defenses rise — the *but*. Paul does not leave the command hanging in the air as a moral demand; he gives the alternative in the same breath, and the alternative is the session: anxiety is not to be suppressed by willpower but *displaced* — lifted out of one's own head and into the ears of God. The thing that would have become anxiety becomes, instead, a prayer. Walk the four piled-up words on your board: *proseuchē*, prayer in general; *deēsis*, the specific petition; *eucharistia*, thanksgiving; *aitēmata*, the itemized requests. Whatever you are tempted to worry about — pray about it, petition Him about it, thank Him in the middle of it, lay the specific items before Him. The exchange is concrete: same subject matter, different address.

Pause on the unexpected ingredient, because the student book does: *with thanksgiving*. Paul does not say *pray, asking earnestly*; he says *pray, with thanksgiving* — because the Christian comes not merely as a beggar but as a son, to a Father who has already proved Himself worth thanking. Thanksgiving frames the asking; gratitude is the wrapping paper on every petition, because whatever we are asking for, the One we are asking has already given Christ.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

When the thanksgiving lands, open the catechism your students memorized and show them they already own this verse. Luther's introduction to the Lord's Prayer: God *tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.* That is Philippians 4:6 in confirmation vocabulary — the relationship named before the requests are made, exactly as the Our Father itself begins with the address before it asks for anything. Two minutes here turn an apostolic command into a family habit your students learned at age twelve. And for the student who confesses that prayer is exactly where their anxiety wins, have Luther's "A Simple Way to Pray" ready to commend — the Reformer teaching his barber to pray through the catechism one phrase at a time. Four hundred years of anxious Christians have been steadied by that little letter; yours can be next.

Then the promise, and insist on its tense: *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, WILL guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Not might; not a vague hope; a promise that comes to meet the prayer. Be precise about what is and is not promised: Paul does not say the circumstances will change, or that the answer will arrive in the form requested. He says the peace will come — and that the peace will *guard*. The verb is military: *phroureō*, the word for a garrison protecting a city, a sentry standing watch at a gate. Draw your sentry. The peace of God does not merely visit; it takes up post at the gates of heart and mind — anxiety tries to enter, and the peace keeps it out; despair tries the walls, and the peace repels it. And the famous phrase — *surpasses all understanding, hyperechousa panta noun* — let your class hear the echo: it is the same root as the *surpassing worth* of Session Five. The peace towers over every kind of understanding, including our own, because it is not the result of having figured the circumstances out; it is the result of leaving the circumstances in God's hands. Then the address one last time: *in Christ Jesus*. Outside of Christ there is no such peace; in Christ there is a peace the world cannot give and cannot take away. This, the student book reminds you, is the peace the Augsburg Confession's whole shape witnesses to — the peace of those who know God is not their enemy — the peace that carried martyrs to their deaths singing, and that carries every ordinary Christian through every ordinary trial.

And here, in your own voice, the pastoral sentence promised in the note above: this promise is for the anxious, not against them. Paul answers anxiety; he does not shame it. And the God who garrisons hearts through prayer is the same God who works through the physician and the counselor — means He has placed in vocations for exactly this care. No one in this room should hear verse 6 as a verdict on their struggle. It is an invitation with a promise attached.

Whatever Is True

Verse 8 is the mind's menu, and frame it with the connection the student book draws: the peace guards the gates — and verse 8 tells the garrisoned city what to import. Read the list aloud, all of it, before you touch a single word: *whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable — if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise — think about these things.*

Then walk the six, briskly and warmly. *True* — *alēthē* — first because it is the foundation: the mind feeds on what is actually so, in a world of lies and half-truths — and the gospel, the promises, the history of God's dealings are the truest things on offer. *Honorable* — *semna* — dignified, weighty, worthy of respect; the opposite of the trivial. *Just* — *dikaia* — what aligns with God's character and gives each his due. *Pure* — *hagna* — clean, undefiled; the world's endless preoccupation with what should make a Christian blush has no place on the menu. *Lovely* — *prospilē* — what draws the heart, beauty itself being God's gift and witness. *Commendable* — *euphēma* — well-spoken-of, the opposite of what is gossiped and dragged through the mud. And the two summary clauses — *excellence (aretē)* and *worthy of praise* — gather all six into one genus. Then the verb, and let your Session Five veterans smile: *logizesthe* — reckon, take account of — the bookkeeper's verb again, now applied to attention. Deliberate mental focus; not merely having these things in mind but returning to them, dwelling on them, feeding on them on purpose.

Give the doctrine its name — the sanctification of attention — and the student book's two sentences that carry it: we are responsible for what we attend to, and the mind is shaped by what it dwells on. Not because the dark things do not exist — they do, and Paul has spent whole paragraphs on them — but because the Christian is not to be the one whose mind is *colonized* by them. In an age of feeds engineered to colonize, this may be the most counter-cultural verse in the session; let Question 6 do the applying. And the Lutheran note belongs here too: ours is a tradition of intellectual seriousness from Luther onward, and Lutheran piety has always known that the affections are shaped by the attention. What we look at, we tend toward. What we dwell on, we become.

Practice These Things; the God of Peace

Verse 9 keeps the list from floating into mere contemplation. *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me — practice these things.* The verb is *prassete* — do, carry out. The thinking must issue in a doing; the mind disciplined toward what is true and honorable produces a life that practices truth and honor — and Paul, without embarrassment, offers his own example as the pattern, transmitted through his teaching, his presence, and this letter. Then the closing promise, and savor the shift in the wording: *and the God of peace will be with you.* Verse 7 promised the peace of God; verse 9 promises the God of peace. Not only the gift, but the Giver — the same God your class has watched empty Him-

self, be exalted, and clothe sinners in righteousness, now present among His people by His Spirit. The chapter has wandered toward peace all along, and it ends with Peace Himself in residence.

Gathering the Threads

The synthesis is the passage's arc, and the student book draws it beautifully — put it on the board in one line: the chapter began with two Christian women at odds, and it ends with the God of peace among His people. Quarrel named, appeal made, joy commanded, gentleness grounded, anxiety exchanged, peace promised, mind fed, practice begun, God present. The arc of the passage is itself the gospel — and it is what every congregation is in its best moments, and can be, by the grace of the One who is always at hand. Run the Lutheran threads in a breath — vocation in the *epieikes* shown to everyone; the doctrine of prayer in its clearest scriptural articulation; sanctification in the diet of the mind — and name the deepest gift last: the peace that is not produced by circumstances, that runs underneath every storm, that the Philippians could know and your students can know, because the Lord is at hand.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions, and this week every one of them touches a nerve your students actually have. Choose one or two. Notes on each:

Question 1 — The public naming. A genuinely hard wisdom question: when is a Christian disagreement addressed publicly, and when privately? Let the class wrestle honestly — Matthew 18's private-first pattern will surface, and Paul's public appeal here is its complement, not its contradiction: the dispute was already public in effect. Handle the final clause — *where in your own congregation is there a Euodia-and-Syntyche situation?* — with care: invite reflection, not identification. No names; the principle, not the case.

Question 2 — Joy that couldn't bear the weight. A searching and gracious question: where have you tried to rejoice in something that collapsed under the rejoicing? Expect answers about careers, health, children's successes, even church programs — good things asked to be load-bearing. The relocation half is the gospel half; keep the board in view as students answer.

Question 3 — Your epieikes, known. The mirror question. *How is your gentleness known among the people who know you?* lands differently than asking whether one is gentle — reputation is harder to fudge than self-image. The second half, the Lord-is-at-hand connection, turns confession into resource: fear is usually under the harshness, and nearness is the cure for fear.

Question 4 — The exchange in real time. The session's heart as a practice question: what does it actually look like to feel the anxiety rising and lift it into prayer? Invite mechanics, not just aspiration — the pause, the named request, the deliberate thank-you — and let students borrow each other's habits. The thanksgiving-dropout half is quietly diagnostic; many will realize their prayers have become all *deēsis* and no *eucharistia*. This is the moment to put "A Simple Way to Pray" in hands.

Question 5 — Have you experienced this peace? The testimony question, and in many classes the richest conversation of the study. Stories of the peace standing guard — in the hospital corridor, at the graveside, through the diagnosis — preach better than any teaching segment; receive them without rushing. The final clause — *where do you need to ask God for this peace today?* — can move the room from testimony to intercession; if the moment is right, close the discussion by actually praying for what was named.

Question 6 — Your mental diet. The most immediately practical question of the set, and the one every student can act on this week. Keep it concrete — the feeds, the news cycles, the late-night scrolling — and keep it free of legalism: verse 8 is a menu, not a quarantine, and the goal is colonization resisted, not culture fled. The best answers end in one named, practical change; press gently for it.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question for Session Seven, make it Question 4 — the exchange in real time. It converts the session's heart into a practicable habit, it surfaces the thanksgiving most prayer lives have lost, and it sends every student home with something to *do* the next time the worry rises at 2 a.m. Question 5 is the strong alternative for a seasoned class with stories to tell — and can become the most worshipful twenty minutes of the study. Whichever you choose, consider closing the hour by praying verses 6–7 over the class, slowly, with the sentry still drawn on the board. Some promises are best delivered standing watch.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ The exchange and the garrison of verses 6–7, in full — the four words, the thanksgiving, the tense of the promise, the sentry. This is the session; never cut it.
- ♦ Verse 4 with the joy board read aloud — the seven weeks of grounds before the imperative. The study's longest setup deserves its payoff even in a short hour.

- ♦ The pastoral sentence for the clinically anxious. Thirty seconds, spoken plainly.
- ♦ Euodia and Syntyche compressed to the symmetrical appeal and the book of life — four minutes; the reconciliation pattern can return another day, but the book grounds everything.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 4.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The *true companion* identity discussion. One sentence — *a trusted third party, asked to help, not to judge* — carries the role.
- ♦ The Aristotle background under *epieikes*. Keep “holds the law lightly enough to let the other person live” and move on.
- ♦ The six adjectives walked individually. Read the list aloud once, beautifully, name *logizesthe* and the colonization sentence, and let Question 6 carry the application.
- ♦ Verse 9’s example language. Keep *practice* and the shift from the peace of God to the God of peace — one minute.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the exchange of verses 6–7 taught whole: anxiety — about anything — lifted into prayer with thanksgiving, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, standing garrison over hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. A student who leaves knowing that worry has a forwarding address, that thanksgiving belongs in the envelope, and that a sentry answers the mail has received the most practically merciful teaching in the letter. Establish that, and the shortened hour has still kept the watch.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Matthew 6:25–34.** *Do not be anxious about your life* — the Lord’s own teaching behind Paul’s: the birds, the lilies, the Father who knows what you need, and *sufficient for the day is its own trouble*. The Sermon on the Mount as the headwaters of verse 6.
- ♦ **1 Peter 5:6–7.** *Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.* The same exchange in Peter’s hand — humility, the mighty hand of God, and the cast that leaves the

burden where it lands. (Veterans of this author's First Peter study will be casting on familiar ground.)

- ♦ **Isaiah 26:3–4.** *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you.* The Old Testament's verse 7 and verse 8 in one breath — peace and the stayed mind, joined seven centuries before Paul joined them.
- ♦ **John 14:25–27.** *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives... Let not your hearts be troubled.* The upper-room bequest behind the garrison — the peace of verse 7, in the Giver's own voice, on the night He was betrayed.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Small Catechism, the Lord's Prayer, Introduction.** *As dear children ask their dear father.* Verse 6's thanksgiving-framed boldness in the words your students memorized — the family grammar of all Christian prayer.
- ♦ **Large Catechism, the Lord's Prayer (opening sections).** Luther on the command and the promise of prayer — God has commanded it and attached His promise to it, so that prayer rests not on our worthiness but on His word. The doctrinal spine under verse 6.
- ♦ **Luther, "A Simple Way to Pray" (1535).** The Reformer's letter to his barber — praying the catechism one phrase at a time, the garland of four strands, the honest counsel for wandering minds. The single best practical gift this session can put in a struggling pray-er's hands.
- ♦ **"If Thou But Trust in God to Guide Thee."** Neumark's great chorale of anxiety exchanged for trust — *who trusts in God's unchanging love builds on the rock that naught can move.* Verses 6–7 in the hymnal; if your class sings this week, sing it over the worriers.

Commentaries

- ♦ **R. C. H. Lenski, *Philippians*.** Pastorally rich on the Euodia-Syntychē appeal and exact on the force of *phroureō* — the garrison given its full military weight, and the promise kept a promise.
- ♦ **Harlyn J. Kuschel, *Philippians* (People's Bible Commentary).** Warm and practical across the whole passage; his pages on verses 6–7 read like a visitation pastor's counsel, which is precisely their use.
- ♦ **Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT).** Excellent on the structure of the closing exhortations, the vocabulary of verse 6, and the Greco-Roman background of the verse 8 virtues — with the Christian re-grounding Paul gives them clearly drawn.

A Final Word

You have just taught the paragraph your students will use most. Sessions Three and Five gave them the letter's heights; this session gave them its kitchen table — the quarrel, the worry, the 2 a.m. vigil — and the apostolic medicine for each: the book of life under the conflict, the board full of grounds under the joy, the exchange under the anxiety, the sentry at the gate. Do not measure this week by the discussion's depth alone. Measure it by the Tuesday three weeks from now when someone in your class feels the worry rising and, almost without thinking, turns it into a request with a thank-you attached. That Tuesday is this session's true classroom.

The board is finished. Eight entries, seven weeks, one imperative — leave it up if you possibly can, or photograph it before it is erased, because Session Eight will want one last look at it. And the page of hopes from Session One: find it this week, read it over in private, and bring it. Next week you will need it.

For next week, the close of the letter and of the study. Your students will read Philippians 4:10-23 before they arrive — Paul's thanks for the renewed gift, the hard-won secret of contentment in plenty and hunger, the most misquoted verse in the letter restored to its context — *I can do all things through him who strengthens me* — the promise that *my God will supply every need of yours*, and the greeting that completes a circle eight weeks in the drawing: *especially those of Caesar's household*. Session Eight has no Looking Ahead; it has a looking back, and a sending. Prepare it with extra tenderness. Last sessions are remembered.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your heart and your mind — and the hearts and minds of all your students — in Christ Jesus, this week and always.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION EIGHT

The Secret of Contentment

Philippians 4:10–23

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Eight — the last hour of the study, and an hour unlike the seven before it. Tonight you are part teacher, part steward of an ending: the letter closes, the joy board comes down, and the page of hopes you have carried since Session One finally gets read aloud. Plan the hour knowing that its climax is not a teaching segment but a remembering — and that last sessions are what classes remember longest. Resist every temptation to cram. The passage is generous, the teaching is rich, but the gift of this session is the sending, and the sending needs room.

The text itself is a marvel of endings. Paul finally addresses the matter that occasioned the whole letter — the gift carried by Epaphroditus — and in thanking the Philippians he unveils the most quietly radical claim in the epistle: *I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content*. Learned — not inherited, not faked, not resigned. Then the most misquoted verse in the letter arrives, and your work with it should wear a smile rather than a scold: your students *love* verse 13, and you are not confiscating it — you are restoring it, and restored it is far better than the slogan. Read in context, *I can do all things through him who strengthens me* stops being about championships and starts covering chemotherapy wards, layoffs, and long Februarys. No one who hears the correction kindly will want the slogan back.

And then the letter's secret triumph, eight weeks in the building: *All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household*. In Session Two your class watched the chains cut a road through the Praetorian Guard; tonight they hear where the road arrived. The letter that began with a prisoner ends with believers inside the emperor's own administration — the theology of the cross, vindicated in a closing greeting. Teach it as the climax it is. Then read the hopes, pray the grace, and send your people home content. You will have earned the *Soli Deo Gloria* this week more than most.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Paul closes the letter by receiving the Philippians' gift with great joy and without desperation — unveiling the learned secret of contentment in every circumstance, restoring *I can do all things* to its true work as a confession of endurance, naming their generosity a fragrant offering to the God who will supply every need according to His riches in glory — and then the quiet climax: greetings from the saints of Caesar's household, proof that the chains cut their road all the way to the heart of the empire; teach the secret as Christ Himself, read back the hopes from Session One, and send the class out under the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Eight of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Philippians 4:10–23 aloud, and then — this week only — read the whole letter through one final time in a sitting. You are about to teach its last page; having the first page fresh will let you draw the circle closed, especially from 1:12–13 to 4:22.
- ♦ Find the page of hopes from Session One. Read it privately, slowly, and pray over each line. Decide the order in which you will read them aloud, and whether any hope needs a word of pastoral care attached (a hope written by someone who has since suffered a loss, for instance, deserves your forethought).
- ♦ Read 1 Timothy 6:6–10 — *godliness with contentment is great gain* — Paul's own doctrinal twin to this passage, written to a co-worker years later. The continuity will steady your teaching of *emathōn*.
- ♦ Review the Small Catechism's First Article explanation and the Large Catechism on the First Commandment. The first is 4:19 in confirmation vocabulary; the second — *a god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge* — is the deep grammar beneath contentment itself.
- ♦ Pray thanksgiving over the eight weeks — by name, for your students, and honestly, for what the study has taught the teacher.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible and the student book; the whiteboard with the complete *joy — chara* list, displayed one final time.

- ♦ One last entry ready: *joy at the revived gift — received from the Lord's hand* (4:10). Then the list is finished. Consider photographing it before class and printing copies for the room; a study's whole argument on one page is a rare keepsake.
- ♦ The page of hopes from Session One — physically in your hand, not in your memory. The reading is the session's climax, and the artifact matters: your students will recognize the paper.
- ♦ If your class shares refreshments, this is the week to make them celebratory. Eight weeks in one letter is an accomplishment, and the early church knew that endings call for feasts.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **Contentment as learned gift.** *I have learned — emathon — in whatever situation I am to be content.* Not temperament, not stoic resignation, not pretending hunger is not hunger. A skill acquired in the school of experience, anchoring the inward life in the One who is steady when circumstances are not. The contented Christian has Christ, the righteousness from God, the peace that surpasses understanding, the upward call — the One who is always more than enough — and so the deepest level of his life is held in either weather.
- ♦ **Verse 13 restored.** The *all things* of verse 13 is the *any and every circumstance* of verse 12. The strength is the strength to be content — to be at peace, not to despair, to keep going, to keep loving — in whatever situation the Lord assigns. Not a triumphalist claim about achievement; a confession about endurance. Restored to context, it is a Lutheran verse to its core: the Christian's strength is never his own.
- ♦ **The economy of the kingdom.** Paul seeks not the gift but *the fruit that increases to your credit* — the ledger language of Session Five, now kept on the Philippians' behalf. Gifts to God's servants are received by God as sacrifice — fragrant, acceptable, pleasing — and the Giver-God answers with the promise of 4:19: every *need* supplied, *according to* (not merely out of) riches that cannot be exhausted. The Philippians can be generous because the God they serve is not.
- ♦ **The gospel's advance, confirmed.** *Especially those of Caesar's household* completes the arc begun at 1:12–13. The empire that imprisoned the apostle could not silence the gospel; the gospel infiltrated the empire from within. Three baptisms at a Macedonian riverside to saints in the imperial bureaucracy, in one generation — the theology of the cross, signed and dated.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely — but protect the final twelve minutes at all costs; they are the study's planned ending.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; the joy board, read whole one last time
0:05–0:11	I rejoiced in the Lord: the concern that revived (4:10)
0:11–0:22	The secret of contentment, and verse 13 restored (4:11–13) — the heart of the session
0:22–0:30	Giving and receiving: the only partner church (4:14–17)
0:30–0:36	A fragrant offering; every need supplied (4:18–20)
0:36–0:43	The saints of Caesar's household; the grace benediction (4:21–23)
0:43–0:48	Gathering the threads: the letter whole
0:48–0:53	Discussion (one question)
0:53–0:58	The reading of the hopes
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and sending

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Verses 11–13 are the teaching heart — the learned secret and the restored verse — and the hopes reading is the untouchable climax; build the hour backward from those two fixed points. If time gets tight, the partnership history of verses 15–16 can be two sentences, the revived-plant image one, and the fragrant-offering cultus one. Caesar's household must never be cut — it is the letter's own ending — but it can be taught in four tight minutes. Whatever else flexes, the class walks out having heard the secret named as Christ and their own eight-week-old hopes read back to them. Those two things are the session.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

I Rejoiced in the Lord

Open by naming what your class may not have noticed: only now, at the letter's end, does Paul address the matter that occasioned the whole letter — the gift the Philippians sent by the hand of Epaphroditus. Everything else came first: the thanksgiving, the Hymn, the great accounting, the citizenship, the peace. The thank-you note became one of the treasures of the New Testament on its way to saying thank you.

And what a thank-you. *I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.* Give your class the verb's picture — *anethalete*, the word for a plant's new growth after dormancy: dead-looking in winter, new shoots in spring, the same plant all along. Their care for him had not died; it had been waiting for its season, and the gift was its new green. Then mark the pastoral grace of the next clause, because it is a masterclass in receiving: *you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.* Paul leaves no room for the Philippians to feel negligent — he reads their hearts charitably, receives the gift not as a transaction but as the visible sign of a love that was there all along. The student book draws the lesson for every Christian receiver: to receive a gift well is to receive the love it expresses, and to give thanks for it is, finally, to thank the Lord who put the love in the giver's heart. The Philippians are the instruments; the Lord is the Giver — which is why the rejoicing is, one last time, *in the Lord*. Add the board's final entry, and let the list rest complete.

The Secret of Contentment

Now the heart, and begin with the qualification Paul rushes to make: the gift was welcome, but it did not arrive to a desperate man. *Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.* Stop on *learned* — *emathon* — and let the student book's point land with its full surprise: contentment is not a temperament. It is not the luck of an easygoing disposition. It is a *learned* state — a skill acquired by going through what has to be gone through. Paul did not always have it. He had to be taught. There is enormous comfort in that sentence for every discontented saint in your room: the content are not the born-lucky; they are the schooled.

Then the curriculum, in its two pairs. *Brought low* — *tapeinousthai*, and your veterans should hear the echo: the verb form of the *lowly* body of 3:21 — beaten, imprisoned, hungry, shipwrecked, stripped of resources; Paul has been there and learned contentment there. And *abound* — *perisseuein* — the seasons of support, comfortable lodging, ample food; he has been there too. Then the student book's shrewdest observation, which will surprise your class: it is the second lesson — *abounding* — that is some-

times harder. Contentment in poverty teaches dependence on God; contentment in plenty teaches *not depending on the abundance* — and many a Christian has handled hard times more faithfully than easy ones. Let the room sit with that for a moment. Most of your students are being tested by plenty, not famine, and have never heard plenty named as a test.

Then the famous word: *I have learned the secret* — *memuēmai* — a term borrowed from the mystery religions, where initiates were inducted into hidden knowledge. Paul takes the pagan word and converts it: the secret he has learned is no esoteric mystery but the Christian's hidden discipline of finding sufficiency in Christ regardless of outward conditions — and it is *learned*, not downloaded with faith, acquired over time in the school of experience, by the Lord's own teaching. Guard the doctrine with the student book's Lutheran precision: contentment is not resignation. The contented Christian is not pretending circumstances are good when they are not, not denying that hunger is hunger or loss is loss. He is saying that his inward state is not finally hostage to the outward state, because the inward state is anchored in the One who is steady when nothing else is. He has Christ — the righteousness from God, the peace that surpasses understanding, the upward call — the One who is always more than enough. And so, in fair weather or foul, the deepest level of his life is held.

Now the verse, and bring your smile. *I can do all things through him who strengthens me*. Name its career honestly — the pillows, the T-shirts, the pregame recitations, the slogan pressed onto every ambition: *I can pass this exam, win this match, build this business through Him who strengthens me*. Well-meaning, the student book allows — and almost always divorced from its context. Then perform the restoration, and make it visual: read verses 12 and 13 together and show the class that the *all things* of verse 13 is the *any and every circumstance* of verse 12. The strength Paul confesses is the strength to be content — at peace, not despairing, still going, still loving — in whatever situation the Lord has placed him. Not a triumphalist claim about accomplishing whatever he sets his mind to; a confession about the One who holds him steady through every kind of weather. *Through Him who strengthens me* is not a slogan about ambition. It is a confession about endurance — and read this way, the student book says, it becomes a Lutheran verse to its core: the strength to endure poverty is from Christ, the strength to handle wealth is from Christ, the strength to live joyfully under whatever the Lord assigns is from Christ. Paul is not boasting. He is testifying.

Then say the closing of the segment almost exactly as the student book gives it, because eight weeks have earned the plainness: this is the secret. Not a trick. Not a posture. Not positive thinking. *Christ*. The One who emptied Himself for us is the One who fills us, by His Spirit, with strength to be content in whatever lot we are given — and as we walk with Him, the contentment grows, because the One who is its source becomes more and more our own.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

Someone will ask — tonight or in the parking lot — the only question verse 13 leaves open: *where do I go to get this strength?* Answer like a Lutheran: to the places where the Strengthener has promised to be. Christ strengthens through His means — the Word in your ears every Lord's Day, the absolution spoken over you, His body and blood placed on your tongue at the rail. The strength of verse 13 is not summoned by intensity of feeling or willpower; it is *fed* to you, week after week, at font, pulpit, and altar. This is the study's last and best gift to give: eight weeks of Philippians ending not in a technique but in a direction — toward the Divine Service, where the secret of contentment is served in bread and wine. A class sent from a Bible study to the means of grace has been sent exactly right.

Giving and Receiving

Contentment, Paul hurries to add, does not make the gift unwelcome: *Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble* — and the verb is the letter's signature word one final time: *synkoinōnēsantes*, built on *koinōnia*. By their gift the Philippians entered partnership with his trouble itself — made his trouble their trouble, stood with him in his chains by sending what they could. The partnership of Session One has been load-bearing all the way to the end.

Then the remembering, and tell it as the honor it is. *In the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.* Sketch the westward sweep — Philippi to Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth — and the lonely arithmetic: through all of it, one church gave. While others sent nothing, Philippi sent; while others forgot, Philippi remembered — *even in Thessalonica*, days down the road, *once and again*, twice before the dust of the founding had settled. A church days old had already grasped that the work of the gospel is corporate work, that giving is the form partnership takes. The student book offers it as the model for every congregation, and your class should hear the application without embarrassment: the work of pastor, missionary, teacher, and translator is not solo work; the partnership is concrete; it involves resources. Then Paul's careful pivot, with the ledger language of Session Five making its curtain call: *Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.* Paul is keeping books — *their* books — and what he wants growing on their account is not the gift given but the fruit the giving produces: righteousness, love, treasure in heaven. The Lord has arranged the economy of His kingdom so that to give is to receive, and the one who loses for the gospel's sake is the one who finds. Paul rejoices not because he has gotten something, but because — in the deeper ledger — they have.

A Fragrant Offering; Every Need Supplied

Verse 18 raises the stakes higher than any thank-you note in history: *I have received full payment, and more... having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent — a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.* Walk the cultic vocabulary briskly — *osmēn euōdi-as*, Leviticus's phrase for the smell of sacrifice rising to the LORD; *dektēn*, the technical term for an offering that meets the law's criteria; *euareston*, what the LORD receives with delight — and then say what the vocabulary means: the Philippians' gift to Paul was a gift to God. What they sent to a chained man in Rome, God received as offered to Himself. There is the deepest reason for Christian giving, and the student book widens it to every vocation: the mother feeding her child, the member supporting his pastor, the church sending to the missionary — each, in the deepest sense, offering a sacrifice that rises fragrant to God.

And then the promise, verse 19, and weigh every phrase. *And my God* — Paul's own God, the One he has staked his life on — *will supply* — future tense, certain — *every need of yours* — every need, not every want; what is actually required for the life God has given them to live — *according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus*. Press the preposition the way the student book does: not *out of* His riches, which might mean a fraction of the abundance, but *according to* them — calibrated to them, on their scale — and the riches are infinite, located in glory, channeled through Christ. Then the two sentences your students should carry out the door, the second being one of the finest in the whole volume: God is no man's debtor — and the Philippians can be generous because the God they serve is not. Verse 20's doxology follows like thunder after lightning — Paul so moved by his own promise that he bursts into praise — *to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.* Let your reading of it sound like what it is.

The Saints of Caesar's Household

Now the close, and the circle. *Greet every saint in Christ Jesus* — every single one; Paul names no names because every name matters. *The brothers who are with me greet you* — the Roman team, Timothy and the rest, sharing the house arrest. And then the line that has caught every reader for two thousand years: *All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.*

Unpack the phrase precisely, as the student book does: not the emperor's wife and children, but the vast network of slaves, freedmen, and officials who ran the imperial bureaucracy — thousands of members across the empire, legally the emperor's household, the working core of the imperial machine. They cooked the meals, wrote the letters, administered the estates, guarded the prisoners. And among them — *saints*. Christians. People who, even as they served Caesar, called Jesus Lord.

Then draw the circle your class has been traveling for eight weeks, because this is the letter's own climax. In Session Two, Paul claimed his chains had *advanced* the gospel and named the Praetorian Guard; tonight, in his closing greetings, he reports the result: there are believers inside the emperor's own offices. The chains cut their road into the very heart of the empire — the man arrested in chains became the apostle of the saints of Caesar's house. And mark the manner: Paul does not boast; he mentions it in passing, in a greeting — a quiet triumph, which is the only kind the theology of the cross produces. The empire that imprisoned him had not silenced the gospel; the gospel had infiltrated the empire from within. The work that began with three baptisms — Lydia's household, a slave girl, a jailer — reached Caesar's household within a generation. And the student book's final turn belongs in your closing voice: the same gospel that did that work then is the gospel at work in the world today.

Then the last verse, and read it as the benediction it is: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit*. The letter ends where it began — grace opened it in 1:2; grace closes it now, named more intimately: the grace *of the Lord Jesus Christ*, the grace He Himself is, resting on the inmost being of the Philippians — and, the student book adds, on every reader who has come along for the journey. Your class has. Say the benediction over them slowly. In a few minutes you will pray it.

Gathering the Threads

The final synthesis gathers the chapter and then the volume. The chapter: contentment as learned gift; verse 13 restored from slogan to confession; vocation in the giving economy — gifts to servants received as sacrifices to God, returning as fruit on the giver's account; and the gospel's advance climactically confirmed in Caesar's own house. Beneath it all, the student book names the hum your class has been hearing for eight weeks: Christ is the substance. The contentment is Christ. The strength is Christ. The peace is Christ. The supply is Christ. The grace that ends the letter is Christ's own. From the first verse to the last, Paul has been writing about One Person.

And then the volume: read the student book's closing paragraph aloud, or shadow it closely, because it is the study's own retrospective. *To live is Christ* — Paul has shown us what it means to say it: shown us in his chains, in his thanksgiving, in his counting of all things as loss, in his pressing on, in his rejoicing, in his contentment. And as the letter ends, he commits the Philippians — and us — to the grace of the Christ who has been with him from the beginning and will be with us to the end. Then turn the room toward the hopes.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

The reading of the hopes is the study's planned climax — protect it, and perform it with care. The mechanics matter: produce the actual page from Session One, so the class recognizes the artifact; tell them what it is and when it was written; then read every hope aloud, slowly, without commentary between entries — names attached or not, as your class's temperament dictates. Let the room hear what eight weeks did. Some hopes will have been answered beyond asking; some will have been transformed into better hopes; one or two will land on changed lives with a weight you cannot script. Resist explaining. When the page is finished, ask a single question and let it close the study: *What did Philippians give you that you didn't know to hope for?* Take three or four answers — no more — and then pray. Few moments in adult education carry the quiet power of a room hearing its own eight-week-old longings read back over what God has since done. You have been carrying this page since the first night for exactly this. Spend it all.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions, but this week the hopes reading occupies the climactic slot, so choose one question only and keep it to five focused minutes. Notes on each:

Question 1 — The school of contentment. The testimony question, and the deepest of the set: what has been the school of contentment in your life, and where are you still enrolled? In a seasoned class this can be the richest conversation of the night — but it competes for the same emotional space as the hopes reading. Choose it only if you can hold both, or fold its best fruit into the hopes discussion.

Question 2 — Which end of the spectrum. The diagnostic companion to Question 1: brought low or abounding — which has been harder? The plenty-as-test insight gives most classes new self-knowledge in ninety seconds. A good short option.

Question 3 — Verse 13 misused and restored. The consolidating question and this week's recommendation. Everyone has heard the verse misused; many have misused it; and the question lets the class perform the restoration themselves — *how does the context change what you take from it?* Quick, clarifying, and it fixes the session's central teaching permanently. Keep it warm: the goal is a better verse, not a scolded room.

Question 4 — Philippians-style partnership. The stewardship question, and a word to the wise: asked carelessly in week eight, it can sound like a closing pledge appeal. Asked well

— where could partnership with gospel workers *grow*, and where have I held back? — it plants seed for the months ahead. Consider naming it as homework rather than discussing it live.

Question 5 — Giving as offering to God. The doxological version of Question 4: how does knowing your gift rises to God change the giving — and the receiving? The receiving half is the fresh angle; church people rarely consider that receiving graciously is also worship. Lovely, brief, and warm.

Question 6 — Saints in unlikely places. The mission question, and the natural pairing with Caesar's household: where is the gospel advancing in territory you would never have guessed? Answers range from prison ministries to academia to closed countries — and the question sends the class out watching for roads the chains are still cutting. A strong choice if your class leans outward.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question for Session Eight — and you should pick only one — make it Question 3: verse 13 misused and restored. It takes five minutes, every student has something to say, and it welds the session's central correction into permanent memory: the class that laughs together about the T-shirts and then says *endurance, not ambition* in their own words will never lose the verse again. Then move, unhurried, to the hopes. The discussion this week is the appetizer; the reading is the meal.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Even final sessions get compressed. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ Verses 11–13 in full — the learned secret, the two pairs, the restoration of verse 13. The teaching heart; never cut it.
- ♦ The saints of Caesar's household with the circle drawn back to Session Two — four minutes, but the letter's own climax. Never cut it.
- ♦ The reading of the hopes, complete and unhurried, with its single closing question. The study's planned ending; cut discussion entirely before you trim one hope from the page.
- ♦ The grace benediction of verse 23, read over the class.
- ♦ The pointer to *Christ in You* — one minute; the journey continues.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The revived-plant image of verse 10. One sentence carries it.
- ♦ The partnership history of verses 15–16. Two sentences — *one church gave, from the first days, once and again* — preserve the honor.
- ♦ The cultic vocabulary of verse 18. Keep “your gift to Paul was a gift to God” and move on.
- ♦ The formal discussion question. In a forty-five-minute final session, the hopes conversation *is* the discussion.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session's teaching were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the secret named: contentment is learned, and the secret is not a technique, a posture, or positive thinking — it is Christ, who strengthens His people to face plenty and hunger, abundance and need, and whose verse 13 is a confession of endurance rather than a slogan of ambition. A student who leaves owning that — and who heard their own hope from Session One read back over a changed life — has received the chapter, the letter, and the study. Establish those two things, and even the shortest final hour will be remembered for years.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **2 Corinthians 11:23–30.** The curriculum of the school of contentment — beatings, shipwrecks, hunger, danger, the daily pressure of the churches — in Paul's own unsparing inventory. What *brought low* actually cost, and what verse 12 quietly contains.
- ♦ **1 Timothy 6:6–10.** *Godliness with contentment is great gain.* The doctrinal twin of this passage, written years later to a co-worker your class met in Session Four — the learned secret, codified for the next generation.
- ♦ **2 Corinthians 9:6–11.** The cheerful giver, the God who supplies seed to the sower and multiplies the harvest — Paul's fullest statement of the giving economy of 4:14–19, addressed to the Philippians' fellow Macedonians' beneficiaries.

- ♦ **Acts 16:11–15, 40.** Lydia at the riverside — where the partnership in giving and receiving began, with one opened heart and one opened home. The study's first session and its last, holding hands.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Small Catechism, the Creed, First Article with explanation.** *Clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home... all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.* Philippians 4:19 in the words your students memorized — every need, supplied, from the Father's hand.
- ♦ **Large Catechism, the First Commandment.** *A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need.* The deep grammar of contentment: discontent is, at root, a First Commandment problem, and contentment is faith looking to the right place for all good.
- ♦ **Large Catechism, the Lord's Prayer, Fourth Petition.** Luther's expansive *daily bread* — everything that belongs to the support and needs of the body, from good government to faithful neighbors. The catechism's commentary on what *every need of yours* includes.
- ♦ **"Now Thank We All Our God."** Rinkart's table grace written amid plague and war — contentment and thanksgiving fused in three stanzas, by a pastor who buried thousands and still wrote *who wondrous things hath done*. The study's whole final session in the hymnal; sing it as your sending if your class sings at all.

Commentaries

- ♦ **R. C. H. Lenski, *Philippians*.** Firm and pastoral on the contentment passage — verse 13 kept rigorously in context — and warm on the closing greetings; his pages on Caesar's household savor the triumph without overclaiming it.
- ♦ **Harlyn J. Kuschel, *Philippians (People's Bible Commentary)*.** A fitting final companion: brief, confessional, and pastoral to the last page, with the giving section handled at exactly lay altitude.
- ♦ **Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians (NICNT)*.** Excellent on the social conventions of giving and receiving behind verses 10–20, and thorough on the historical texture of *Caesar's household* — the scholarly backing for the session's climax.

A Final Word

The study is finished. Eight sessions, four chapters, one prisoner, one Lord — and a class that now owns this letter in a way few congregations ever own any book of Scripture. Look at what they carry out the door tonight: the grammar of verse 6 from Session One,

where God is the subject of both verbs; the road the chains cut, and the rival preachers who could not spoil the proclamation; the Hymn, sung from the form of God to the slave's cross and up to the Name; the unbreakable sentence of 2:12-13; the portfolio moved to the loss column and the righteousness that is not their own; the address block — resident here, citizen of heaven; the exchange, and the sentry at the gate; and now the secret, which turned out, like everything else in this letter, to be Christ. They came eight weeks ago with hopes on a page. Tonight they heard those hopes read back over lives the Word has been quietly working on the whole time. That is what a Bible study is for, and yours did it.

Take a private moment this week to do what Paul does in this chapter: give thanks. Thank God for the students He sent you — the faithful ones, the questioning ones, the quiet ones whose parking-lot conversations you will never fully know about. Thank Him for what the letter taught the teacher; you did not walk eight weeks through Philippians unchanged either. And then rest. The good work in your class was never yours to complete, and the One who began it has made His intentions plain — He will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. You were the field hand. The harvest is His.

If your class continues with the series, the journey's next leg is ready: *Christ in You*, Volume Three of The Pauline Captivity Letters, takes up Colossians — written from the same Roman custody, carried by Tychicus on the very journey your class heard about in Session One. There Paul lifts the Christology higher and wider than anywhere else: *all things were created through him and for him... and in him all things hold together* — the cosmic Christ, the fullness of God dwelling bodily, the hope of glory which is *Christ in you*. The prisoner kept writing, and the church is still reading. Whether your class continues next month or next season, tell them the road goes on — and that it goes on *in Christ*, which by now they will understand is not a phrase but an address.

The letter you have taught ends with a benediction, and so should this guide — over you, teacher, and over every student the Lord placed in your room: may the God of peace, who supplies every need according to His riches in glory, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus; may you learn, in whatever situation you are, the secret of His sufficiency; and may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit — until the day He comes from the city where your citizenship has been all along.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Soli Deo Gloria