

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**What Does It All Mean? Ecclesiastes 1:1—2:16**

What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? Ecclesiastes 1:3

Day 1: Read Ecclesiastes 1:1—2:16*.

1. List several things that we find out about the author in this week's passage. Note: though the NIV calls the author "Teacher," the Hebrew word is more like "philosophy professor."
2. How does the Teacher prod his hearers to think and to question their assumptions about the meaning of life? What teaching technique does he employ? Note especially what questions he poses.

Day 2: Read Ecclesiastes 1:1—3.

3. How would you characterize the way the book opens (1:2)? Why do you think the writer opens his book as he does?
4. According to verse 2, what word describes the sum total of existence?
5. In a brief sentence state the theme of this week's passage, indeed, the theme of the entire book.
6. What does the phrase "under the sun" mean? Do the things "under the sun" constitute all of existence? Why or why not?

Day 3: Read Ecclesiastes 1:5—2:16.

7. How does observing nature support the Teacher's statement that everything is meaningless? (1:5–7)
8. One might think that wisdom leads to fulfillment, but according to the Teacher, what does wisdom lead to? (1:17, 18; 2:12–16)

* Questions in this Bible study are based on the New International Version of the Bible. If you don't have access to this version, inform your small group leader who may be able to locate a copy for you to use.

9. Where does the Teacher look for happiness and fulfillment next? (2:1–11) What activities does he engage in?

10. Why are the Teacher’s achievements empty and meaningless? Why don’t they bring him the meaning he’s searching for?

Day 4: Read Ecclesiastes 1:4—2:16.

11. This week ask at least one friend what drives her to do the things she does. What gets her out of bed in the morning? Where does she find fulfillment? What is the most important issue that needs to be dealt with in this world?
 - a. She might say that her goal is to make the world a better place. What does the Teacher say about this reason for living? (1:4–11)

 - b. Or she might say that her goal is to become a better person. What does the Teacher say about this reason for living? (1:4, 11–18; 2:12–16)

 - c. Or she might say that her goal is to be successful or to be happy—or just to survive. What does the Teacher say about those reasons for living? (1:8; 2:1–11)

 - d. What other answer might she give and what does the Teacher say about it?

Day 5: Read Ecclesiastes 1:1—2:16.

12. Imagine sitting down and talking with the Teacher. In what ways do you agree that everything is meaningless? In what ways do you disagree? Is life “under the sun” all there is? Does everything end in nothing? From a Christian perspective, how can you refute the Teacher’s argument? (See 1 Cor. 13:13; 15:12–28; Col. 1:16–17.)

13. Think of your most mundane daily task: how does knowing Jesus suffuse it with meaning and significance? Rather than searching for meaning “under the sun,” what comes “from above” that makes all the difference? (See Eph. 1:3–10; Jas. 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:3–4.)

“TO LIVE IS CHRIST”**A Time for Everything Ecclesiastes 2:17—3:22**

“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” Ecclesiastes 3:11

Day 1: Read Ecclesiastes 2:17–26.

1. Up to now the Teacher has been pondering the question posed in 1:3. What is his conclusion and how does it impact his outlook on life? (2:17–18)
2. As he contemplates the destiny of his life’s toil, what brings him such despair? (2:19–21)
3. Moving beyond the realization of the futility of striving for meaning in life, what does the Teacher deem to be the only worthwhile preoccupation? (vs. 24)
4. Who is it that gives the ability to enjoy simple pleasures in life?
5. What makes a Christian’s toil more than “chasing after the wind” (vs. 26)? How can God redeem life that includes mind-numbing tasks or grumpy bosses? (See Col. 3:23–24.) What kind of work has lasting value? (Read Mt. 6:28–33; Mt. 25:34–36, 40.)

Day 2: Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8.

6. Describe your initial reaction to this “big-picture” perspective on time.
7. The word for time in this passage signifies opportunity (a specific point in time or season) rather than “clock” time. Who is the one who sets these times, regardless of human effort? (vs. 1; also see Ps. 31:15.) How does the Christian have a more meaningful relationship to time? (Eph. 5:15–21)
8. Share a struggle that you are having with accepting the time or season that God is calling you to at this point. Reflect on the following verses and allow your heart to be encouraged by Jesus, the center of all time. (Jn. 1:1–4; Gal. 4:4–5; Acts 3:19–21; 2 Tim. 1:9–10)

Day 3: Read Ecclesiastes 3:9–15.

9. What is the human desire and longing behind the question in verse 9?

10. The Teacher admits that there is beauty and a glimmer of eternity in man's heart. (vs. 11)
 - a. What is his gripe about these?

 - b. How does the coming of Jesus illuminate these baffling mysteries? (Eph. 1:7–10; Jn. 1:14)

11. When all is said and done, what does the Teacher consider to be the most worthwhile way to spend your life? (vs. 12; compare 3:22; 5:18–20; 8:15; and 9:7) The Teacher did not know Jesus; nevertheless what can we learn from his insight? (Titus 2:4–5; 1 Thess. 4:11; Psalm 131)

Day 4: Read Ecclesiastes 3:9–15.

12. What truth about God causes people to revere him? (vs. 14) How does this contrast with the quality of man's work?

13. How is knowing that everything God does will endure forever good news for those to whom God's mysteries have been revealed? (Eph. 1:9–10, 18–23; Col. 2:2–3)

Day 5: Read Ecclesiastes 3:16–22.

14. Contrast the Teacher's understanding of human law courts with divine justice. What are his two conclusions? (vss. 16–17)

15. What bleak deductions does the Teacher come to as he contemplates the difference between a human and the average cat? (vss. 18–20) How does the glorious light of Genesis 1:26–27 and 1 Cor. 15:12–22, 42–44 transcend these assertions?

16. In the end the Teacher concludes that there is nothing better than enjoying the simple pleasures of life. List a few scripture verses that you, as a Christian woman with the benefit of knowledge of Christ, might use to convince him otherwise.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Oppression, Labor, and Loneliness Ecclesiastes 4:1—6:12**

“Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot.”

Ecclesiastes 5:18

Day 1: Read Ecclesiastes 4:1–3.

1. Now the Teacher turns to consider another evil under the sun. What is it? (vss. 1–3)

2. He is describing life in the raw, the world as you can imagine it being if Jesus had not come. But what is the fuller, distinctively Christian perspective on the oppression in the world? (Luke 4:18–21)

3. In what sense, then, are the observations of the Teacher about life still true and valid, and in what sense are they not?

Day 2: Read Ecclesiastes 4:4–6.

4. As the Teacher looks around, what does he observe to be the impulse behind all our labor and achievements? (vs. 4) While we admit the truth in this, is there any hope for better motives in the woman ransomed and sanctified by Christ? (1 Thess. 1:3)

5. Verses 5 and 6 are two proverbs that seem contradictory on the surface: verse 5 says that laziness brings one to ruin; verse 6 suggests that rest is better than excessive toil. How do you think they both can be true?

Day 3: Read Ecclesiastes 4:7–16.

6. Who is a real sad sack, in the Teacher’s view? (vss. 7–8)

7. The man described above has no relationships. Though the Teacher finds life meaningless, what practical benefits does he find in relationships? (vss. 9–12)

8. What makes the king in verse 13 foolish? (See Prov. 11:14.) How can you apply this example to something going on in your own life right now?

9. A “rags to riches” story is described in verse 14. But apart from God, what is the final assessment of even this success story? (vs. 16)

Day 4: Read Ecclesiastes 5:1–20.

10. Verses 5:1–7 are all about the use of the mouth. Jot down some cautions the Teacher gives us. Is the Bible telling us we shouldn't pray much? (See 1 Thess. 5:17.) Then what does the caution mean? And how does wordiness tend toward folly? (vs. 3)

11. Is there any hope for our speech? What difference does the Holy Spirit in us make? (1 Cor. 1:5)

12. What's the problem with the love of money? (5:8–17)

13. In the midst of Ecclesiastes' litany of evils and meaninglessness, what does the Teacher say is a “good” thing? (vs. 18) What does he call a gift from God? (vs. 19)

Day 5: Read Ecclesiastes 6:1–12.

14. Is there any automatic correlation between the amount of money and possessions you have and the ability to enjoy them? (vss. 1–2) What's the only way you will enjoy these blessings? (vs. 2)

15. The teacher asks you a question: “Who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow?” As a Christian woman, what's your answer to him? (Consider Eph. 1:11–14; John 15:8, 15.)

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

What Is Good in Life Ecclesiastes 7:1—8:1

“When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other.” Ecclesiastes 7:14a

Days 1 and 2: Read Ecclesiastes 7:1–4.

1. Throughout the first six chapters, the Teacher has often alluded to the transience, absurdity, frustration, and futility of life. What question posed in Ecclesiastes 6:12a does he now attempt to begin to answer in chapter 7?

2. What is better than fine perfume? (vs. 1) Explain what the Teacher is getting at by this statement.

3. Read Ecclesiastes 7:1b–4. List the things that the Teacher compares:

_____ is better than _____
 _____ is better than _____
 _____ is better than _____

4. How would you characterize the things on the left side of the above list—the “better” things? Are they the things that you typically would prefer to experience?

5. By his unusual preferences, what is the Teacher’s message?

Day 3: Read Ecclesiastes 7:5—8:1.

6. Summarize verses 5–6. How many of your friends are willing to confront you? What is wrong with surrounding yourself with people who say only what you want to hear?

7. What things does the Teacher warn against in verses 7–10, and why are these things dangerous?
 - Verse 7:

 - Verse 8:

 - Verse 9:

 - Verse 10:

8. Let's look at several verses to see what the Teacher has learned about wisdom:
 - a. If anger resides in the lap of fools, what does this say about the wise? (7:9)
 - b. What question does the wise person not ask? (7:10)
 - c. How is wisdom a shelter? (7:11–12)
 - d. How do the wise live? (7:16–18)
 - e. What does wisdom bring? (7:19)
 - f. What effect does wisdom have on an individual? (8:1)

Day 4: Read Ecclesiastes 7:13–26.

9. What does the Teacher say about the limits of human wisdom? To what end does a search for wisdom lead?
10. Compare the tone of verses 13–14 and 15–18. What impression does this comparison give you about the reliability of the Teacher as a source of true wisdom?
11. Going beyond Ecclesiastes 7, what is the source of true wisdom? (See Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10.)
12. Think of an example from your own life where you have seen the fear of God directly connected to wisdom.

Day 5: Read Ecclesiastes 7:27–29.

13. With what startling, bitter verdict does the Teacher wind up this chapter? What might you guess has been the quality of the Teacher's relationships with women?
14. What is the Teacher's conclusion about human nature in verse 29? His thoughts in this chapter have been sometimes inconsistent, but here he gets it right. Skim Genesis 1–3. What has he gotten right here at the end of the chapter?

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Human Powerlessness Ecclesiastes 8:2—9:12**

“This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all.”
Ecclesiastes 9:3a

Day 1: Read Ecclesiastes 8:2–9.

1. What practical advice does the Teacher give for getting along with those in authority?
2. What reasons does the Teacher give for obeying the king? (8:2–5) What further reasons for obedience do we find in the New Testament? (1 Pet. 2:13–15; Rom. 13:1–5) Under what circumstances is it right to disobey someone in authority? (Acts 5:29)
3. The phrase “time and procedure” (8:5b, 6) seems to refer to a wise person’s ability to time his or her words and actions well, perhaps when it is necessary to bring up thorny issues with someone in authority. How does verse 7 call into question this commonly accepted bit of wisdom?

Day 2: Read Ecclesiastes 8:9—9:3.

4. What evils are described in 8:9–10?
5. In today’s passage the Teacher makes observations about the fates of the righteous and the wicked.
 - a. What principle is found in verses 8:12b–13?
 - b. What principle is found in verse 14?
 - c. If these observations seem at odds with each other, why might that be? (vss. 16–17)

Day 3: Read Ecclesiastes 8:16—9:4.

6. These verses teach that mere human wisdom is not up to the task of discovering the meaning of life. What have we been given that enables us to discover meaning? (1 Cor. 1:20–25, 30; Eph. 1:7–10; Heb. 1:1–3)
7. What is the Teacher’s assessment of the human heart? (9:3) Is this view just a reflection of his pessimism? What does the rest of Scripture say on the subject? (Ps. 14:1–3; Jn. 8:34; Rom. 3:10–18)

8. The Teacher and the rest of Scripture both attest to the seriousness of sin in the human heart. Why is what the Teacher says only a half-truth? What is he missing? (Ps. 32:1–5; Jn. 8:34–36; Rom. 3:21–26)

Day 4: Read Ecclesiastes 8:7–8; 9:1–12.

9. Do you think about death much? Why or why not? How can it be beneficial to remember in a healthy way that we are all going to die, and that we do not know when?
10. How do the things that you spend time on hold up in the face of inevitable death? Do they retain their value? Or are they shown to be futile?
11. The Teacher states, “The same destiny overtakes all” (9:3). Who is the only person ever to have a choice in the matter of his own death? (Jn. 10:17–18; Phil. 2:5–8)
12. What difference does Jesus’ resurrection, and the promise of our resurrection, make in how we view life now? (1 Cor. 15:13–20; 1 Thess. 4:13–14; 1 Pet. 1:3–9)
13. Describe the Teacher’s idea of what happens after death. Describe the vision given in the New Testament of what awaits believers when they die. (Rev. 21:2–4; 22:1–5)

Day 5: Read Ecclesiastes 8:15; 9:4–12.

14. Focus on 8:15 and 9:7–10. What does the Teacher exhort his hearers to do? Why is this the best advice he can offer? (Hint: What phrase does he repeat four times that shows the limits of his experience and wisdom?)
15. The Teacher has already made it clear that no ultimate meaning can be found in any earthly work or pleasure. Nevertheless, these things have some comparative value for him. Compared to what do these things look pretty good? (8:8; 9:2–4, 10) What hints are there in these verses that his advice is not entirely satisfying, even to him?
16. What picture of life do we get from 9:11? How does this picture compare with messages our culture sends about achieving our dreams? Which view of life do you think is more accurate? Why?
17. What gets the final word in this section of teaching? (9:12) Who gets the truly final word in real life? (1 Cor. 15:51–57)

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Wisdom Is Better Than Folly Ecclesiastes 9:13—10:20

“As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.”
Ecclesiastes 10:1

Day 1: Read Ecclesiastes 9:13–17.

1. What is the value of wisdom in this example story? (vss. 13–15a)
2. How is this similar to the other advantages of wisdom that the Teacher has mentioned? (See 2:13–14a; 7:11–12, 19; 10:12.)
3. How does the story illustrate the Teacher’s point that wisdom has value in the short run but is meaningless in the long run? (See also 2:14b–16.)
4. If we base our assessment of how God feels toward us (9:1) on the long term outcome of events like the one in this passage, what are we led to believe? Does our possession of wisdom, intellect or giftedness provide us any assurance about whether “love or hate awaits” us? (9:1)
5. What does determine how God feels toward us? (See Eph. 2:4–5; 1 John 4:9–10; Titus 3:3–7.) How does this bring you assurance?

Day 2: Read Ecclesiastes 9:18—10:7.

6. What truth do verses 9:18 and 10:1 share about sudden lapses of wisdom or foolish impulses?
7. In the Teacher’s culture, the foolish heart’s inclining to the left (10:2) would have meant that it inclines to the less valuable and the less good. How does this preference show up in the life of the fool? (10:3; See also Prov. 12:23; 13:16.)
8. The Hebrew word translated “error” (NIV) in verse 5 signifies a mistake that comes through negligence, forgetfulness or by accident. What kind of consequences does the ruler’s error in judgment have for his society? (10:6–7)
9. How does this picture of a world turned upside down fit in with the Teacher’s goal of opening our eyes to the meaninglessness of life? (See 1:15, 3:16; 5:8.)

Day 3: Read Ecclesiastes 10:8–11.

10. Verses 8 and 9 give illustrations of people who are engaged in doing their jobs and who fall prey to the dangers inherent in their occupations. What do these stories illustrate in the Teacher's worldview? (See 3:18–19, 22; 7:13–14; 8:7–8; 9:1.)
11. Verse 10b suggests that wisdom or skill will help its possessor to succeed. However, from the Teacher's point of view, what advantage does wisdom or skill provide in tragic situations like the one in verse 11?
12. As Christians how are we to view the types of disastrous situations described in verses 8, 9, and 11? (Consider Romans 5:1–5, 8:28–29, 31, 35–39; 2 Cor. 1:3–10, 4:7–11, 12:9; Heb. 12:7–11.)

Day 4: Read Ecclesiastes 10:12–15.

13. Verses 12 through 15 describe the fool. What is the process of the fool's speech from beginning to end (vs. 13), and what is its outcome? (vs. 12b)
14. What do these verses imply about how the fool thinks of himself and his opinions, and how he thinks about God? (vs. 13) What does scripture say is the root of the fool's folly? (Ps. 14:1)

Day 5: Read Ecclesiastes 10:16–20.

15. The word "servant" in verse 16 is better translated "immature." What characterizes an immature king, and what effect does he have on the land? (cf. Isaiah 3:1–5; 5:11–13, Amos 6:1–7)
16. In contrast, what characterizes a king of nobility and what are the effects of his reign?
17. How is the feast described in verse 19 different from that in verse 16? What does this say about the proper use of God's gifts?
18. Sin has made us twisted and lacking (1:15) as images of God and as subjects of his kingdom. How does Jesus as the true King of nobility (vs. 17) straighten the crookedness of his subjects' hearts (vs. 16)? (See 1 Cor. 10:31; Gal. 5:19–25; Phil. 3:18–21.) Describe a way in which he has done that in your life this week.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Conclusion of the Matter****Ecclesiastes 11:1—12:14**

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” Ecclesiastes 12:13

Day 1: Read Ecclesiastes 11:1–6.

1. Verses 1–6 pile up a variety of images to put over a single message. What is it?
2. What do you think is meant by the metaphor in verse 1? Even if the exact image is a bit obscure (bread on water?), what kinds of personal action seem to be endorsed here?
3. Read verse 2 in the light of Luke 16:9. How might Jesus’ counsel in Luke shed light on the enigmatic Ecclesiastes verse?

Day 2: Read Ecclesiastes 11:1–6.

4. What two pictures in verse 3 (clouds raining and trees falling) have in common? Can human beings control “random” acts of nature?
5. Restate verse 4 in your own words. Since there are not always perfect conditions for launching an enterprise, what does today’s passage recommend that we do?
6. Verse 5 reinforces the idea that there is a limit to human understanding and control of the universe. What directive for action does the Teacher derive from this observation? (vs. 6)

Day 3: Read Ecclesiastes 11:1–6.

7. Apply the Teacher’s counsel on this matter to your own life.
 - a. Does the uncertainty about the outcome of human endeavors lead you to paralysis?
 - b. What are some areas in your life where you should take more risks and more decisive action?
 - c. Why is it “safe” for us children of God to take certain “risks”? (Heb. 13:5b-6)

Day 4: Read Ecclesiastes 11:7—12:8.

8. The Teacher now turns to youth, and commends the enjoyment of it—but with what cautions?

9. Why is it important to “remember your Creator” (12:1) and his final judgment on your actions (11:9) while you are young? Would you think this consciousness of God’s oversight dampens youthful enjoyment or has a positive effect?

10. Ecclesiastes 12:1 says that days are coming for all of us when we will say, “I find no pleasure in them.” Discuss how the various lyrical images in verses 2–7 illustrate this diminishing of pleasure.

Day 5: Read Ecclesiastes 12:9–14.

11. In the original Hebrew, verse 13 is clipped and emphatic (“All is heard. End of the matter.”), the better to highlight the point. What are the twin duties of man, according to 13b?

12. The last verse of the book of Ecclesiastes—regarding God’s personal surveillance and judgment of every single human deed—may at first not seem comforting. But how does it in fact overturn the despair of the theme of “meaninglessness” of life that ran through the Teacher’s words?

13. Ecclesiastes belongs, in the end, to the Old Testament, a time of shadow, a time before Christ. How does the word we have today from God surpass that of Ecclesiastes? (Discuss Heb. 1:1–3.)

14. Cite one helpful thought you will take away from our study of Ecclesiastes, or one way that it has benefited you personally.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Praying with Confidence and Joy****Philippians 1:1–11**

I always pray with joy...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:4b, 6

Day 1: Read Philippians 1:1–2.

1. In other letters Paul introduces himself as an *apostle* of Christ Jesus, but here he calls himself and Timothy *servants* of Christ Jesus. The word he uses for servants was often used in his time for “slaves.” What characteristic(s) of a slave is Paul emphasizing here? (Look ahead to Phil. 2:3–4.)
2. Describe each of the groups to whom this letter is addressed.
 - a. Saints (Rom. 1:5–7; 1 Cor. 6:9–11)
 - b. Overseers (1 Pet. 5:1–3)
 - c. Deacons (Acts 6:1–4)
3. Explain “grace” and “peace” in your own words. (2 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 5:1–2)

Day 2: Read Philippians 1:3–6.

4. In verses 3–5 about what does Paul write with joy?
5. Read Acts 16:11–15, 40 and Philippians 4:15–18. What evidences of partnership are there between Paul and the Philippian Christians?
6. Even deeper than mere partnership, what is at the center of Paul’s relationship with the Philippians? What holds this diverse group together?
7. What ties us together as Christians—social activities or something else? How have you yourself experienced this bond recently?

Day 3: Read Philippians 1:3–8.

8. What gives Paul confidence that his partnership with the Philippian Christians will continue? (vss. 3–7; see also 3 Jn. 4)
9. What is the evidence of a real and living faith? (vs. 6; see also, Mk. 4:13–20; Jn. 8:31; Heb. 3:14)

10. How do Paul's circumstances affect his joy? (4:11–13) What or who is the origin of Paul's joy?
11. What gives you deep joy? How do your circumstances affect your joy?
12. How does your relationship with God affect the way you respond to the circumstances of your life? (Peek ahead to Phil. 4:4–7 to see Paul's own thoughts on this subject.)

Day 4: Read Philippians 1:3–11.

13. We've already seen that Paul prays for the Philippians with thanks (vs. 3) and joy (vs. 4), but what does he pray for them...
 - a. About love? (vs. 9)
 - b. About the future? (vs. 10) (What is needed to discern what is best? Why?)

14. What is the result of "love" without knowledge or depth of insight?
15. What is the result of knowledge without love? (1 Cor. 8:1; 13:1–2)

Day 5: Read Philippians 1:3–11.

16. In verse 11 Paul refers to the "fruit of righteousness." What is the origin of this fruit? (see Rom. 8:5–11; Gal. 5:22–23)
17. Take a look at yourself: what fruit of righteousness is evident? How can you tell whether what you see is really the fruit of God's Holy Spirit or just an ornament that you've decorated yourself with to look like a better Christian? (Jn. 15:1–5)
18. Look again at verses 3–11. What is at the heart of Paul's prayer for the Philippians? What is his deepest desire for them? Their happiness? Their success? Their health? Something else?
19. What do you think was the effect of Paul's words on the Philippians? Read the passage again and imagine that Paul is writing to you personally. What particular things are an encouragement to you?
20. Think for a moment about your own prayers: Are they about God's work or are they mostly about your own personal concerns? It is fine to pray about personal concerns, but is that all you pray about? Stop right now and pray Paul's prayer in verses 9–11 for your own Christian brothers and sisters.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**God's Surprising Purposes****Philippians 1:12–30**

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:21

Day 1: Read Philippians 1:12–14.

1. Explain how Paul turns the concern of the Philippians away from his own circumstances to God's purposes. (vs. 12)
2. Paul is writing this letter from prison. How does his imprisonment provide an unlikely evangelistic opportunity? Describe a time when a life situation presented you with an opening to share the gospel with an improbable audience.
3. What assurance do we have that no circumstance is a barrier to the advancement of the gospel? (Is. 55:10–11; 2 Tim. 2:8–9)
4. How does Paul's suffering in prison bring an unanticipated bonus to the church? (vs. 14)

Day 2: Read Philippians 1:15–18a.

5. Out of what unworthy motives are some leaders in the church sharing the gospel? (vss. 15, 17a) How do they hope their actions will affect Paul? (vs. 17)
6. Others share the gospel out of goodwill and love; what makes the difference? (vs. 16)
7. What is Paul's assessment of and response to those preaching with insincere motives? (vs. 18a) How might Paul's example impact us today as we rub shoulders with less than perfectly transparent Christians?

Day 3: Read Philippians 1:18b–21.

8. Paul is uncertain about the outcome of his upcoming trial and about his future ministry opportunities, but what things empower him to continuously rejoice? (vss. 19–20)

9. The word translated “shame” has to do more with disappointment than embarrassment. So when Paul writes, “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed” (vs. 20), he is saying that he is confident that God will not disappoint. What’s Paul so confident about? (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:12; Phil. 1:6)
10. Why is it so important that Christ be exalted in our bodies? (1 Cor. 6:19–20) What must take place for Jesus to be magnified in our bodies? (Rom. 12:1)
11. Summarize Paul’s thoughts from verse 21 and Galatians 2:20 and discover the essence of Paul’s life and ministry. As you reflect on these passages where does the essence of your life and ministry diverge from Paul’s?

Day 4: Read Philippians 1:22–26.

12. Describe the almost unbearable tension that Paul is wrestling with. (vss. 22–23) What choice do you think is more difficult for Paul to embrace?
13. Which is ultimately superior and why? (vs. 23) Meditate on and be encouraged by the following verses: 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Jn. 3:2; Rev. 21:1–5.
14. Christ is more important than life to Paul; yet at this point, what is more important than departing and being with Christ? (vss. 24–26)

Day 5: Read Philippians 1:27–30.

15. What is the first distinguishing mark of living lives “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (vs. 27)? (vs. 27b; Eph 4:3)
16. How does Paul challenge the Philippians to reorient their thinking about suffering in a startling and fresh way? (vss. 29–30; see also Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 4:7–11)
17. Why shouldn’t we fear those who oppose us? How should we interpret our experience of such opposition? (vs. 28; also 1 Cor. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:13–14)
18. Reread this week’s passage. Share some ways your heart has been challenged to rethink the true nature of joy in living.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Like Christ in Humility****Philippians 2:1–18**

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing.” Philippians 2:5–6

Day 1: Read Philippians 2:1–2.

1. What is it that would make the Apostle Paul’s joy complete? (vs. 2)

2. Though Paul expresses this desire for the Philippians in three phrases (vs. 2), think up one word that would summarize all three.

3. Paul does not expect the Philippians to simply conjure these virtues from thin air. What truth does he ask them to meditate on as the wellspring of the love and unity he exhorts them to? (vs. 1)

Day 2: Read Philippians 2:1–4.

4. Examine yourself to see whether you have any “encouragement,” “comfort,” and “fellowship” with Christ and the Spirit. If so, why? If not, why not?

5. This is the second time in this short letter that Paul exhorts his hearers to strive for unity. From 1:27, argue how important this Christian virtue is to Paul. Why do you think a spirit of unity among Christians is crucial? (Jn. 17:22–23)

6. What two attitudes does Paul contrast in verse 3? Think of a situation in your current life in which you might try humbly considering another person over yourself, rather than acting with selfish ambition or conceit.

7. What would Paul say to today’s slogan, “Look out for #1”? What kind of person does Paul commend? (vss. 4, 19–21)

Day 3: Read Philippians 2:5–8.

8. Who is our model for this life of humility? (vss. 5–7)
9. Read verses 6–8 and explain why you can't outdo Christ in humility and self-sacrifice.
10. If Christ, being God himself, made himself a servant (vs. 7), what should your attitude be? (John 13:12–17; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:8–10) Try to think of ways you can be a “servant” in your marriage or friendships.

Day 4: Read Philippians 2:9–13.

11. What was Christ's reward for his life of humility, servanthood, and self-sacrifice unto death? (vss. 9–11)?
12. As a follower of Christ, what will be your reward if you persevere in the same spirit of humility? (Jas. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6, 10)?
13. As a reward for his obedience unto death, Jesus has been “exalted to the highest place” (vs. 9). How does Paul relate this present reign and power of Christ to your ability to live a godly life? (vss. 12–13)

Day 5: Read Philippians 2:12–18.

14. What do you think it means to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (vs. 12)? As you seek God this way, who is it who is actually doing the work in you? (vs. 13)
15. What two sins of the mouth should you avoid if you want to be blameless and pure? (vss. 14–15)
 - a. Thinking over the last few weeks, how have you found yourself falling into either of these patterns?
 - b. As God works in you (vs. 13), what step can you take in “working out your salvation” (vs. 12) in this area? (Hint: asking the Holy Spirit to make you more aware of this pattern, asking forgiveness, asking for prayer, being thankful, etc.)
16. When you are pure and blameless, what amazing role do you play in this depraved world? (vss. 15–16) Savor the image.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Committed to Jesus and to Others****Philippians 2:19–30**

“I have no one else like [Timothy], who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.” Phil. 2:20–21

Day 1: Read Philippians 2.

1. Quickly review verses 1–18. In a sentence, state the theme of these verses. (Hint: What character trait was modeled for us by Christ Jesus?) What can we surmise is a problem that has cropped up in the Philippian church community?
2. Keeping question 1 in mind, scan verses 19–30. Based on what we’re told about them, why do you think Paul chooses to mention Timothy and Epaphroditus here?

Day 2: Read Philippians 2:19–24.

3. Paul implies that Timothy can bring help to Philippi that many people would not be able to bring. What is unique about Timothy? What might the church in Philippi be able to learn from Timothy?
4. How has Timothy grown to become such a valued coworker of Paul’s?
5. In his commendation of Timothy, what attitude towards Timothy on the part of the Philippians is Paul trying to nip in the bud? (See 1 Tim. 4:12.)

Day 3: Read Philippians 2:19–30.

6. Think about how often you take a “genuine interest” (vs. 20) in the welfare of others. In what ways does genuine interest translate into action?
7. Name some of the interests of Jesus Christ: What is he concerned about? What is important to him? (Give a verse(s) to support your answer. Find one on your own or refer to the following: Matt. 28:18–20; Jn. 3:16; 4:34–35; 6:27–29, 53–58; Eph. 1:6, 12–14; Phil. 2:5–8; Col. 1:19–20; 1 Thess. 4:3a.)

8. What changes would need to be made in your life for you to look after Jesus Christ's interests before your own? (Look at your motives especially; form this into a prayer request to share with your small group.)

Day 4: Read Philippians 2:19–30.

9. What do we know about Epaphroditus? (4:18) How does Paul feel about him?
10. What has Epaphroditus done for Paul? How is this a picture of what Christ has done for us?
11. Why is Paul sending Epaphroditus back to the Philippians? What do you think Paul hopes Epaphroditus will do when he returns home?
12. In 1:7–8 Paul expresses how dear his readers are to him. What further evidence of this appears in this week's passage?
13. What news might Paul find encouraging to hear about the Philippians? (Recall 1:9–11.)
14. What do we learn here about how Paul and the Philippians have cared for each other?

Day 5: Read Philippians 2:19–30.

15. What phrase shows us where Paul places his hope and confidence? (vss. 19, 24) What difference might this make in Paul's plans? (Jas. 4:13–15)
16. Paul admits to anxiety in this section (vs. 28), and yet, later in his letter exhorts us to be anxious for nothing (4:6). Is he contradicting himself here? Is anxiety sin or isn't it?
17. What does Paul say about how Timothy and Epaphroditus should be treated? (vss. 29–30)
18. Who are the people that you should honor because they have faithfully served Jesus? How have you encouraged them and shown your thanks? Pray for your leaders, thank God for them, and ask God to show you ways to serve them in return.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Profit and Loss Statements****Philippians 3:1–11**

“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord....” Philippians 3:8a

Day 1: Read Philippians 3:1–3.

1. Paul begins this section by reminding the Philippians once again about the source of joy; what is it? (Ps. 32:11; Jn. 15:9–11; Rom. 15:13) Our world seems to clamor for happiness; how does joy differ from happiness?
2. What exactly do the “dogs,” the “mutilators of the flesh,” want the Philippian Christians to do? Why is this a problem against which Paul wants to “safeguard” the flock in Philippi? (Gal. 3:1–7; 5:1–6)
3. Paul uses “dogs” to describe those belonging to the “false circumcision” (NAS) group. This was usually a derogatory term used to describe Gentiles, those outside of the covenant community. Why does he use such a harsh tone? (Gal. 2:4; 6:12–13; Rev. 22:14–15)

Day 2: Read Philippians 3:1–11.

4. When circumcision was first instituted by God, what was its purpose? (Gen. 17:10–11) What greater time and reality was this sign pointing forward to? (Jer. 4:4; Jer. 9:25–26; Deut. 30:6)
5. Now that Christ has come, what does Paul state are the three marks that identify the truly circumcised people of God? (vs. 3)
6. What do you think is the point of the discussion about confidence beginning in verse 3b? Reflect on whether Paul believes you can have one foot in each of the confidence camps?

Day 3: Read Philippians 3:4–8.

7. What things did Paul formerly consider to be to his “profit” (vs. 7)?
8. Paul had invested a lot in these things. Why did he put them on the rubbish heap?

What kind of profit might he have been looking for in them?

What is the only thing that Paul lists now, in the profit column? (vs. 8)

9. What things do you consider to be to your own profit, before God or others? What are the things that you think give you a certain standing or that you use to reassure yourself when something goes wrong ("Well, at least I...")? Such things might be material possessions, relationships, abilities, or even virtues.
10. What did Paul's misplaced confidence in those things that were to his "profit" lead him to pursue? (vs. 6a)
11. Something happened in Paul's life to bring him to awareness that his confidence in his privileges attainments and self-righteousness was all wrong. What was that? (Paul was formerly known as Saul, see Acts 9:1–16.)
12. Write down your own story of Christ revealing himself to you, and consider sharing it with the group. If you don't have your own story, what are some things from Paul's experience that speak to you?

Day 4: Read Philippians 3:7–11.

13. Is there in fact "a righteousness of [one's] own that comes from the law" (vs. 9)? Discuss.
14. Reflect on some of Paul's other letters and elaborate on what is meant by "the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith" (known as justification). (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:21–28; Rom. 5:6–9; Titus 3:3–8) What part do we play in this?
15. What three things does Paul want to know—not merely know about, but know deeply? (vs. 10) Why? (vs. 11) Would all three be on your list? If not, where do you struggle?

Day 5: Read Philippians 3:7–11.

16. Are we to think from the "somehow" in verse 11 that there is some doubt about whether believers will be raised from the dead? (1 Cor. 15:12–23; 1 Thess. 4:16–17)
17. How does resurrection power enable us to live differently? (Eph. 3:14–21; Col. 1:18–20) Take a moment to pray that God would "open the eyes of your heart" (Eph. 1:18) to believe that his resurrection power is available to you in a specific situation you are in the midst of.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Pressing Toward the Goal****Philippians 3:12—4:1**

“I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” Philippians 3:12

Day 1: Read Philippians 3:12–14.

1. What is the “all this” (vs. 12) that Paul aspires to, but has not yet fully obtained?
2. Have you “arrived” in your Christian life? Are you perfectly sinless? Will you “arrive” someday at perfect Christ-likeness? (1:6; 1 Jn. 3:2–3)
3. Is significant progress in Christian growth made in this present life, or does all the significant growth take place only at Christ’s return? (1:9–11, 2:12–16; 2 Cor. 3:18)

Day 2: Read Philippians 3:12–14.

4. What is Paul’s attitude—and resolution—about his present state of Christian maturity? (vss. 12–13)
5. Paul says, “one thing I do” (vs. 13). What is it? Do you do that too? (vs. 14)
6. What in your past do you need to let go of so that you can make progress in pressing on?
7. What meditation is not wise to engage in? Why do you suppose this is an unhelpful preoccupation?

Day 3: Read Philippians 3:13–14.

8. What exactly does Paul “press on” (vs. 14) toward? (vss. 7–11) For what purpose has God taken hold of you? (1 Pet. 2:9)

9. To what does Paul compare this muscular lifestyle of “pressing on”? (1 Cor. 9:24–26) Think of some ways you can begin to live like that. (Hint: Jn. 6:29; Jas. 4:8, 10; 1 Thess. 5:16–22; 1 Pet. 2:2)

Day 4: Read Philippians 3:14–17.

10. What is one mark of a mature believer? (vss. 13–15)
11. What will God make clear to you if you take this mature view and forsake dwelling on the past and begin pressing toward Christ?
12. What does Paul counsel about observing the Christian walk of other mature believers? What have you learned by observing other believers in your own life?

Day 5: Read Philippians 3:17—4:1.

13. Many an unbeliever has no qualms about praising Jesus as a good teacher. But “many live as enemies of the *cross* of Christ” (vs. 18). What is it about the cross of Christ that is so offensive? (1 Cor. 1:18, 23–25)
14. What motive is working in the enemy of Christ? (3:19) What is his or her mind on continually? (vs. 19)
15. Why is the mature Christian’s mind not absorbed by things of the earth? (3:20)
16. What will the Lord Jesus do someday soon, and how will it affect you? (vss. 20–21)
17. Use this week’s passage to summarize how we, as believers growing in our faith, should “stand firm in the Lord” (4:1).
18. Where in your own life do you need to pray for the grace to “stand firm”?

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Always Rejoicing Philippians 4:2–9**

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Philippians 4:4

Day 1: Read Philippians 4:2–3.

1. What two women does Paul plead with to agree in the Lord? What do we know about these women? (vs. 3)
2. Why does Paul make such an issue of their disagreement? (Jn. 13:34–35; Phil. 2:1–8)
3. What keeps Christians from resolving their disagreements? (Jas. 4:1–6) What part does humility play in the process of reconciliation? (Phil. 2:3)
4. Think of another Christian with whom you disagree. What has been the result of your disagreement:
 - On your own heart?
 - On others?
 - On the reputation of Christ and his Gospel?
5. Name one specific thing that you will do to begin to agree with this person “in the Lord” (vs. 2).

Day 2: Read Philippians 4:4–9.

6. Paul delivers a number of imperatives in these verses; list them.
7. “Rejoice in the Lord always,” Paul writes. How is your joy affected by changes in your circumstances?
8. When Paul exhorts the Philippians to “rejoice in the Lord always,” what gives his words authenticity? (2 Cor. 11:24–28) In what kinds of circumstances have his readers seen him rejoicing—indeed, in what situation does Paul find himself as he writes? (Phil. 1:7)
9. Why can Paul (and why can we) rejoice in the midst of suffering? (Hab. 3:17–18; Mt. 5:11–12; Rom. 5:3–5; 1 Pet. 1:6–7; 4:13)

Day 3: Read Philippians 4:4–5.

10. In verse 5 Paul writes, “Let your gentleness be evident to all.” This can be translated, “Be known for being forbearing and gracious.” Speaking honestly, what do you want to be known for, and why?
11. Take one more look at Philippians 2:5–8. What is Jesus known for?
12. Why do you think Paul mentions gentleness (vs. 5) in the context of dealing with stress?
13. What reason does Paul give for letting your “gentleness be evident to all”?

Day 4: Read Philippians 4:6–7.

14. What things are you worried about? How do your worries affect your prayer life?
15. “Do not to be anxious about anything,” Paul writes. What does he want us to substitute for worry?
16. What effect does a thankful heart have on our prayer life? What is the relationship between thanksgiving and faith?

Day 5: Read Philippians 4:5–9.

17. What is the identity of the “guard” that Paul mentions in verse 7?
18. Why do our hearts and minds need guarding (protecting)?
19. What do we know about the “peace of God”? (Jn. 14:27; Rom. 5:1)
20. What kinds of things should fill our mind? What is the connection between what we think about and what we say and do? (Lk. 6:45)
21. Why is it so important to be an active part of a Christian community? (vs. 9; Heb. 10:24–25)

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Grateful and Content in All Circumstances Philippians 4:10–23**

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances...I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:11b, 13

Day 1: Read Philippians 4:10–19.

1. In this passage Paul thanks the Philippians for the gift they sent through Epaphroditus; beyond the gift itself, what is the source of Paul’s rejoicing? (vss. 10, 17)

2. Paul states in 4:11 that he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances.
 - a. Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–28 and Philippians 1:13–17. What kinds of temptations might Paul face in the midst of these difficult circumstances?

 - b. Paul also states that he knows how to be content with plenty. What kinds of temptations might Paul face in the midst of prosperity and abundance?

3. In what ways does God enable Paul to “learn” the secret of being content?

4. While both want and plenty can threaten our faith and our growth in Christ, they can also be a means of increasing them. Consider the present circumstances in your life. Where are you finding it difficult to experience the contentment Paul speaks of? How can you be a learner in the place where God has you?

Day 2: Read Philippians 4:12–17.

5. While Paul is grateful for the Philippians’ gift, it is clear that something other than material gifts enables him to cope with his present difficulties. What is it that enables him to keep going? (vss. 12, 13, 17)

6. Stoic philosophers of Paul’s time used the term “contentment” to mean self-sufficiency. In their view this was the most valuable attribute of a wise person. The Stoics sought to be unaffected by physical deprivation or physical comfort. How does Paul’s understanding of contentment agree with and yet radically differ from the Stoics?

7. Paul's ability to "do everything" comes "through" or literally "in [Christ]" (vs. 13). What does it mean to be "in Christ"? How have you seen this work itself out practically in your life? (See also 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 6:10.)

Day 3: Read Philippians 4:14–16.

8. Paul tells the Philippians they have done well to share with him in his troubles. We have already considered Paul's afflictions, how have the Philippians suffered? (2 Cor. 8:1–2 [note: Philippi is located in Macedonia]; Phil. 1:28–30; 2:14–15; 4:2)
9. Paul thanks the Philippians for their aid and commends them for their giving. If the accomplishment of God's purposes is not dependent on human help (Acts 17:24–25) and if all our needs are met in Christ (Phil. 4:19), then why do we need each other? (Matt. 25:35–40; 1 Cor. 3:5–9; 2 Cor. 5:20)

Day 4: Read Philippians 4:11–19.

10. Read Paul's prayer for the Philippians in 1:3–11. In light of this passage, explain what Paul means by the "credit" he looked for in their "account" (vs. 17).
11. How does the language of sacrifice in verse 18 reveal the true value of the Philippians' gift? (Eph. 5:2; Rom. 12; Heb. 13:15–16)
12. Paul promises the Philippians that God will supply *all* their *needs* (vs. 19). What do you think this means? How do verses 11, 12 and 19 help us understand what we truly need? (Rom. 5:3–5, Jas. 1:2–4, and 1 Pet. 1:3–9)

Day 5: Read Philippians 4:19–23.

13. How can deprivation or poverty be a means God uses to meet your truest need? (Prov. 30:8–9; Hos. 13:6; Lk. 16:13; 2 Cor 12:9–10)
14. What does verse 20 reveal as the primary goal of the ministry in which Paul and the Philippians' participate together? (1:5)
15. Pray this doxology for yourself and each other.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Trials of Many Kinds****James 1:1–18**

“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” James 1:12

Day 1: Read James 1:1–8.

1. What does James say we should consider “pure joy” (vs. 1)? Do you think he’s exaggerating?
2. What is James’ reasoning? What is the function of trials in your life? (Rom. 5:3–5)
3. How exactly do trials test your faith? How do they tempt you to not believe in Jesus? Give an example from your life.

Day 2: Read James 1:1–8.

4. How does perseverance develop through trials and the testing of your faith? Share a time when you persevered with Jesus under trial and developed perseverance as a result.
5. If we persevere in faith through our trials what fruit will God bring about in us? (vs. 4)
6. If you lack wisdom, what should you do? What are the chances you will receive what you ask for? (vs. 5)
7. What person will not receive wisdom or anything else from the Lord? (vss. 6–8)
8. Is there anyone who never doubts? What kind of doubt do you think James means? What does double-mindedness look like? (4:4) What does single-mindedness look like? Pray that God would help you believe. (Mk. 9:24)

Day 3: Read James 1:9–12.

9. What do the flowers teach us about the right attitude toward being either rich or poor? (vss. 9–11)

10. Revisiting the idea of persevering under trial, James says that a person who does this will be “blessed.” What do you think it’s like to live under God’s blessing? (1 Pet. 5:10)

11. According to verse 12, for whom are God’s blessings of life reserved?

Day 4: James 1:13–15.

12. James reminds us that God is not in heaven thinking of ways to trip us up. What is the source of temptations then? (vs. 14; Gen. 4:7)

13. Earlier in the chapter James traced the trajectory from trial to faith to perseverance to maturity to a crown of life. What is the ominous trajectory described in verse 14 that you want to avoid?

14. Is it a sin to be tempted? (1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 4:15)

15. At what point in your thinking do you suppose desire “conceives”? Where do you cross the line from temptation into sin?

16. Think to yourself of a time when you were “dragged away” (vs. 14) by a desire, and it gave birth to sin, and then ultimately to a kind of death. How do you think you can nip that process in the bud at the desire stage next time? (Heb. 4:16)

Day 5: Read James 1:16–18.

17. What is James’ answer to the person who thinks she has earned the good things in her life by her own merit? (vss. 16–18) Tell of something good that’s happened to you that had nothing to do with your plans or your good behavior, but was just a pure out-of-the-blue kiss from God.

18. What did God choose to give you? (vs. 18) If he did this much, how does this reassure you about his power and willingness to help you in your trials? (Rom. 8:31–32)

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Listening and Doing James 1:19–27**

“Do not merely listen to the word.... Do what it says.” James 1:22

Day 1: Read James 1:19–27.

1. What three things does James exhort his readers to do in verse 19?
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
2. Next to your answers for question 1, write the opposites. How are your relationships affected by the responses James exhorts us to have, and how are they affected by their opposites?
3. Consider the following passages and explain the relationship that exists between our hearts and our speech: Prov. 4:23–24; 10:20, 32; Lk. 6:45.
4. Identify situations in your life in which you tend to be quick to speak and/or quick to become angry. Ask the Spirit of God to show you where you need to repent and what He would have you do to bring about reconciliation in your relationship(s).

Day 2: Read James 1:20–21.

5. James says that “man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (vs. 20). What is the difference (consider both the motive and the goal) between man’s unrighteous anger and God’s righteous anger? (Matt 18:15–17; Jn. 5:30)
6. Anger says: “Something is wrong and something needs to be done to make it right.” Consider the areas in your life where you are angry.
 - a. In which areas can you allow your anger to motivate you to bring about the righteousness that God desires? (vs. 20; Ps. 4:4; Eph. 4:26)
 - b. What things do you need to entrust to God to make right in his own time? (Ps. 37:5–9; Rom. 12:19–21; 1 Pet. 2:21–24)
7. What does it mean practically to “humbly accept the word planted in you” (vs. 21)?

Day 3: Read James 1:22–25.

8. Why is it so important that we be “doers” of the word and not just “hearers”? (vs. 22; 2:17; Matt. 5:16; 1 Tim. 6:18–19)

9. How is the law (God’s Word) like a mirror? (Rom. 3:20; 7:7; Heb. 4:12)

10. In Romans 3:21–22, 28 Paul clearly teaches that our faith in Christ (not our works) is the means of justification—i.e., being made right with God. If Jesus came to free us from the law, why does James tell us we have to be “doers” of the law?

Day 4: Read James 1:25–26.

11. James probably used the expression “perfect law” as a synonym for sacred scripture. How did Jesus summarize the whole law? (Matt. 22:36–40) How did Paul? (Gal. 5:14)

12. What do you think it means to “look intently” at the perfect law? How do we do this practically?

13. What are some of the results of not keeping a tight rein on one’s tongue? Consider the following verses, as well as your own experience: Prov. 10:19; 12:18; 13:3; 18:6–7.

Day 5: Read James 1:27.

14. What two things does God accept as pure and faultless religious acts?

15. What is God’s attitude toward widows and orphans? (Ps. 68:5; 146:9; Is. 54: 4–5; Jer. 49:11)
How has God modeled his love for widows and orphans in his relationship with us?

16. What practical things can you do to keep yourself from being “polluted by the world” (vs. 27)?
(Rom. 12:1–2; Phil 4:8; Col. 3:1–2; Heb. 12:1–2; James 1:21)

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Judges with Evil Thoughts****James 2:1–13**

“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right.” James 2:8

Day 1: Read James 2:1–9.

1. In James 1:22–25, James exhorts his readers to be doers of the word and not hearers only. Over the course of his letter, James addresses several areas in which these believers have not been doers of the word. Describe the situation of the two guests at a church meeting and the way in which each is received.
2. Why does James consider showing favoritism to be a serious issue for the believers? (vss. 8–9)

Day 2: Read James 2:1–7.

3. Look up the following verses. What standards is God calling his people to?
 - a. Leviticus 19:15, 18
 - b. Deuteronomy 1:17
 - c. Deuteronomy 16:19–20
4. Why does God call his people to these standards? Whose character are the believers supposed to be reflecting? (vs. 1) What is one of the outstanding characteristics of this Lord of Glory? (Deut. 10:17–18; Acts 10:34–35)
5. How has God treated the believers to whom James is writing? (1:17–18) Did they have to do anything special to attract God’s favor toward them? (Titus 3:4–7)
6. How do you see (or not see) yourself like an orphan, a widow, or an alien (Deut. 10:17–18)? How has God treated you?

Day 3: Read James 2:3–7.

7. How have the believers “deceived” (1:22) themselves with regard to their thinking about the rich man and the poor man among them? Whose values have they been reflecting? (1:27b; 4:4)

8. Where do you have a tendency, like these believers, to show favoritism? Is it in the area of wealth, education, outward appearances, or even spiritual maturity? What particular judgments do you make about individuals who either possess or don't possess these traits?

9. How does James seek to turn their world view upside down with gospel truth? How is it that those who are "poor in the eyes of the world" (vs. 5) are actually rich? (Mk. 10:29-30; Lk. 4:18-19; 6:20; 12:32-34)

10. How does James exhort the believers to "wake up and smell the coffee" when it comes to their partiality toward the rich? (vss. 6-7, see also 1:11.)

Day 4: Read James 2:8-13.

11. Why is it that failing in one point of the law makes one "guilty of breaking all of it" (vs. 10)? (vss. 10-11)

12. Since the believers are guilty of breaking all of the law, being "judges with evil thoughts" (vs. 4), what should their standing before the righteous Judge? (vs. 9) What have they received instead? (vs. 13; 1:17-18)

13. What is the "law that gives freedom" (vs. 12) by which we are to live and by which we will be judged? (vs. 8, 1:21) How is this law one of freedom? (Gal. 5:1, 13-14; 22-24)

14. To what judgment is James referring? What will happen to believers at this judgment? (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10)

Day 5: Read James 2:12-13.

15. What does favoritism show evidence of? (vs. 13) How is this true?

16. What is the basis for James' warning in verse 13? (Mt. 18:21-35) What expectation does God have of the people to whom he has shown mercy?

17. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal someone in your life to whom you have not shown mercy (through ignoring, not bearing with them in love, discrimination, etc.). Pray and take a step of faith this week in reaching out to that individual with a merciful spirit.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Faith That Works

James 2:14–26

“You see that [Abraham’s] faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” James 2:22

Days 1 and 2: Read James 2:14–26.

1. How sincere is the person who offers nice wishes to someone in need, but does nothing to help? (vs. 16) How are such wishes like faith without deeds?

2. What words does James use to describe faith that is unaccompanied by action? (vss. 17, 20)

3. Parts of this passage seem to be in tension with other New Testament writers. Compare, for example, what James says in 2:24 (“You see that a person is justified [made right with God] by what he does and not by faith alone.”) with what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8–9 (“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”). How does the Bible say a person is saved? (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 3:21–24; Titus 3:4–7)

4. Paul and James are in fact not at odds. The Bible’s teaching on faith and deeds has been summed up this way: a person is saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. Explore the connection between faith and works (or deeds) by looking up the following verses and writing the references in the appropriate part of the chart.

Mt. 7:16–21; Gal. 2:16; Gal. 3:10–11; 2 Pet. 1:5–9; 1 Jn. 3:17–18

SAVED BY FAITH ALONE	FAITH THAT SAVES IS NEVER ALONE

5. How do the following verses bring faith and deeds together? Jn. 6:28–29; Gal 5:6, 13; 1 Thess. 1:3; 1 Jn. 3:23.

Day 3: Read James 2:14–26.

6. What kinds of good deeds has James exhorted his readers to thus far? (For example, 1:12, 19–21, 22, 26, 27; 2:1, 8, 12–13.)
7. Good deeds fall into two categories, both of which are found in 1:27—serving others (“look after orphans and widows in their distress”), and striving for personal purity (“keep oneself from being polluted by the world”). As believers grow in good deeds of both kinds, they reflect God’s character more and more. What do we learn about God from the way he commands us to live? (Ps. 146:5–9; Is. 58:6–7; Lk. 6:35–36; 1 Pet. 1:14–16; 1 Jn. 4:7–8)
8. Often Christians err by emphasizing one category of good deeds and neglecting the other. Do you have a tendency to focus on one area more than the other? Does your church?

Day 4: Read James 2:20–24.

9. Look back at Genesis 22:1–18 for the account of Abraham and Isaac. What did Abraham actively believe as he carried out the Lord’s command? (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:3–6; Rom. 4:18–22; Heb. 11:17–19)
10. How was Abraham’s faith “made complete by what he did” (vs. 22)?

Day 5: Read James 2:25–26.

11. Read Rahab’s story in Joshua 2:1–21. What did she believe? (Josh. 2:9–11) What actions did she take based on this faith? What was the result for her of this active faith? (Josh. 6:17, 22–23)
12. In what extraordinary way did God honor this Gentile woman of faith? (Mt. 1:1, 5)
13. Consider your own life. Does the way you live demonstrate what you believe? Do you sometimes rationalize a lack of fruit in your life by pointing to grace? Do you avoid helping another person because you don’t feel particularly loving? Do you ever use kind words or even a promise of prayer to come across as compassionate, while avoiding taking action in a particular situation? Pray about a situation that may require you to act. Pray that whatever action you take would be motivated by faith and love and hope.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Taming the Tongue****James 3:1–12**

With the tongue we praise our Lord...and with it we curse men...made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. James. 3:9–10

Days 1 and 2: Read James 3:1–2.

1. This week, in conjunction with studying James 3, do the following “tongue” exercise: for the whole week do not gossip, do not criticize another person, do not complain, do not defend yourself or make excuses, do not boast about anything. At the end of this lesson you’ll have a chance to evaluate how you do with this exercise.
2. With his words “faith without deeds is dead” (2:26b) still ringing in our ears, James warns that not many of us should presume to be teachers. Read James 1:22, 26 with 3:1. How do these earlier verses give force to the warning in 3:1? (Peek ahead to Jas. 3:13.)
3. Why will the teacher be judged more strictly than others? (Lk. 12:42–48; 2 Tim. 2:14–18)
4. What do you think are some of the problems and temptations that come with the responsibility of teaching in a church community? (See Matt. 23:5–7; Phil. 1:15–17)
5. Where do you have trouble “practicing what you preach”? What is James’ message to you?

Days 3 and 4: Read James 3:3–12.

6. What is the main point of this passage?
7. In these verses there are several examples of small things overpowering large things. List them.

8. Look again at verses 5–6. To what does James compare the tongue? What does this reveal about the tongue?

9. Look at several of the following verses and list some characteristics of an untamed tongue. (Prov. 11:9, 13; 12:5–6, 18–19; 13:3; 16:27–28; 18:2; 25:18; Eph. 5:4; Phil. 2:14)

10. In your own experience do James’ words about the tongue ring true? What trouble has your own untamed tongue gotten you into?

Day 5: Read James 3:3–12.

11. Recall the tongue exercise from Day 1. Share what God has been teaching you this week about your own inability to control your tongue.

12. From verse 8 it seems that there is no use even trying to tame our tongues. What gives us hope? Read the following verses and jot down the main idea of each.

1 Cor. 3:16 _____

2 Cor. 5:17 _____

Gal. 2:20 _____

13. What do these verses have to do with James 3:11–12? (See also Matt. 12:34b: “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”)

14. What criteria does the Lord give us in Ephesians 4:29 for the way we use our tongue?

15. If Christ lives in us we have a choice about how to use our tongues. What does faith have to do with taming our tongues? By whose power do we do good works? (For help review Lesson 19; see also Jn. 15:4–5 and Gal. 5:22–23.)

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**True Wisdom****James 3:13–18**

“But the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure....” James 3:17

Day 1: Read James 3:13.

1. Since wisdom—like air or thoughts—cannot be observed with the naked eye, what are the manifestations of it that verify its presence? (vs. 13)
2. According to Scripture, does wisdom always go hand in hand with a good life, or is it possible to have a wise mind and a morally shameful lifestyle? (vs. 13b)
3. When you think of the “good life,” what comes to your mind? How does that differ from the biblical view?

Day 2: Read James 3:13–14.

4. James says humility comes from wisdom (vs. 13b). Why do you think this is so?
5. Why is true wisdom incompatible with humility’s opposite—pride? (Consider 1 Pet. 1:24.) What does the truly wise woman understand about herself? (Rom. 12:3–6a)
6. It would seem odd that people “boast” of a sin as shameful as “harbor(ing) envy and selfish ambition” (vs. 14), but what do we learn from the following verses about human speech and posturing where wisdom is absent? (Prov. 1:10–18; Rom. 1:28–32; Phil. 3:18–19; 2 Pet. 2:17–19)

Day 3: Read James 3:14–17.

7. Verse 15 informs us that earthly wisdom is worse than just slightly inferior. Find the phrase in this verse that tells where this kind of wisdom really comes from.

8. What does “earthly” or “the devil’s” wisdom lead to in the end? (vs. 16)

Day 4: Read James 3:17–18.

9. List from verse 17 the hallmarks of true wisdom.

10. James says that the wisdom from above is “first of all pure.” Perhaps that speaks to the question of motives. What would a “pure” motive look like? (You may consult all dictionary definitions of “pure.”)

11. Regarding purity, how is the ministry of a godly evangelist like Paul (2 Cor. 4:1–2; 10:11) different from the ministry of an ungodly one (Phil. 1:15–17)?

12. The second attribute of heavenly wisdom in the list is “peace-loving.” If you are presently trying to decide a course of action in a difficult situation in your life, how would this desire for peace influence the course you take? (Gal. 6:1; 1 Tim. 2:24–26)

13. Third on the list of wisdom’s qualities is “considerate.” What does true wisdom, then, always take into account besides the sterile “facts” of a case?

Day 5: Read James 3:17–18.

14. Next, true wisdom is “submissive.” How does that strike you? Does submitting to another person (even if you are right!) sound like wisdom to you?

15. Finally, true wisdom is “full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.” All the descriptions of wisdom in verse 17 conceive of wisdom as not a mere mental exercise but a concern for other people’s welfare. Think of a particular problem you’re having with some person in your life. Write down the problem and all the attributes of wisdom in verse 17 and see if you can make a start on a direction for handling it in a wise way.

16. What is the fruit of the life of a wise peacemaker? (vs. 18) Share a time when you exercised wisdom and a desire for peace and the outcome was blessed.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Fights, Quarrels, Submission****James 4:1–12**

*“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
Come near to God and he will come near to you.” James 4:7–8*

Day 1: Read James 4:1–12.

1. Multiple choice: “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” (vs. 1)
 - a. other people
 - b. circumstances
 - c. you
2. When there are fights and quarrels, what is going on internally? (vs. 1) What sinful attitudes does James say are present? (vss. 2–3)
3. What do people tend to do when their desires are frustrated and they don’t get what they want? (vs. 2) What do you tend to do when your desires are frustrated?
4. You may never have “killed” anyone. But what deeper insight into murder does Jesus offer? (Matt. 5:21–22)
5. What is the sobering truth about the kind of wanting that ends in “fights and quarrels” and “killing”? (2 Peter 2:19b)

Day 2: Read James 4:1–3.

6. What are the two reasons given by James that a person might not obtain what she desires? (vss. 2b–3)
7. Think of a time when you wanted something—and even prayed for it—but you discovered that you wanted it for the wrong reason. Looking back, what motives were driving you? Were you aware of them at the time?
8. How can our motives be discerned? (Ps. 139:23–24)

9. What should you do if you discover that you want things for the wrong reasons? (See Heb. 4:15–16; James 5:16; 1 Jn. 1:9) What hope do we have? (Ps. 51:10)

Day 3: Read James 4:4–5.

10. What does “friendship with the world” (vs. 4) mean? (1 Jn. 2:15–16)
11. Why do you think James equates “friendship with the world” with adultery?
12. Friendship with the world, on the surface, doesn’t sound so bad. But what impact does James say it has on our relationship with God?
13. James says the Holy Spirit in us “envies intensely”. Why is that so? (1 Cor. 6:19–20). How do you feel about the fact that God’s Spirit is passionate about your affections?

Day 4: Read James 4:6–10.

14. To whom does God give more grace? (vs. 6b)
15. What does a “humble” person do? (vss. 7–9)
16. Does God want you to “grieve, mourn, and wail” over your sin forever, or is it a temporary state? (vs. 10; Lam. 3:22–23) What promises does God make to the person who humbles herself like that? (vss. 6, 8, 10)

Day 5: Read James 4:11–12.

17. Think of some subtle ways you have of slandering or speaking evil of others, and repent of this now, asking God for grace.
18. Why is it foolish as well as sinful to judge and slander another person? (2:12–13; vss. 11–12; Rom. 2:1)
19. Pray to have your desires aligned with God’s own desires. Will he refuse such a prayer? (1:5)

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Warnings to the Rich****James 4:13—5:6**

“...you ought to say, *‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’*” James 4:15

Day 1: Read James 4:13—5:6.

1. What words would you use to describe the tone of this passage? Why do you think James uses this tone?

2. In 4:13–17, James warns his readers against the sin of presumption.
 - a. What are they presuming?

 - b. What are they doing in light of their presumptions?

 - c. What does their presumption reveal about their hearts (4:16)?

 - d. What does it reveal about God’s place in their thoughts, plans, and daily activities?

Day 2: Read James 4:13—17.

3. What images do James and other biblical writers use to describe the nature of a person’s life? (vs. 14; Ps. 39:5; 102:3, 11; 103:15–16)

4. These images are intended to highlight both the uncertainty and brevity of life. In light of these realities,
 - a. What attitudes does James exhort his readers to have? (vs. 15; cf. 4:6)

 - b. What does James admonish his readers to do?

5. Tacking the words “...if the Lords wills” onto statements about future plans may not be difficult, but it takes more than words to live in a way that recognizes that your life is ordered by a good and sovereign God. Look at the following verses; what do they say about God that helps us to know that his will is good? (Ps. 52:8–9; 62:11–12; Jer. 29:11–13; Matt. 6:31–34; Phil 4:6–7; Jas. 1:5, 17; 1 Jn. 5:18).

Day 3: Read James 4:13—17.

6. Why do you think James tells his readers that prideful boasting about one's abilities and accomplishments is evil? (John 15:5; 1 Cor. 4:7; Gal 2:20–21)
7. In what is the Christian's boast to be found? (Jer. 9:23–24; 2 Cor. 12:9–10; Gal. 6:14)
8. We most often think of sin as something that we do, but James makes it clear that not doing what is right is sin as well. (vs. 17) Ask the Spirit of God to reveal an area in your life where He has shown you what is right to do, but you have not followed through and done it. What "good" do you know you ought to do? Ask God to give you the grace to do it this week.

Day 4: Read James 5:1—6.

9. In the first 6 verses of chapter 5, James brings strong condemnation on the sinful attitudes and behaviors of the rich. List the misdeeds of the rich in these verses.
10. What commands of God were these rich people flagrantly disregarding? (Lev 19:13; Deut. 24:14–15; Matt. 22:36–39)
11. The rich thought that amassing wealth would result in security and happiness. In contrast James says that the rich are like animals being fattened in preparation for slaughter – content to eat their fill, oblivious to the disaster that awaits them. What is that disaster? (Prov. 28:20; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7–8)
12. What Day does the Christian know is coming that keeps him or her from succumbing to the temptation to abuse wealth? (Rev. 18:14–20; 22:12)

Day 5: Read James 5:1—6.

13. Apparently the rich assumed they could get away with their sinful actions. James makes it clear that this assumption was a delusion. Who heard the cries of the afflicted and why was this significant? (Ps. 34:6,15–18; Prov. 11:20–21; Heb. 10:30,31)
14. What do these verses teach about a godly perspective about wealth? (Matt. 6:19–24; 1 Tim. 6:6–10, 17–19; Jas. 2:5)
15. So what's so wrong with leading a life of self-indulgence? What does such a life miss? Meditate on Psalm 73.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST**Perseverance and Prayer James 5:7—20**

We consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Jas. 5:11

Day 1: Read James 5:7–20.

1. What hard times have been making James' readers long for Christ's return (vs.7)? (Review Jas.2:6b–7; 5:1–6.)
2. Do you need to be urged to be patient as you contemplate Christ's return? How often do you think of it? Do you ever long for it? Why or why not?
3. What is the difference between standing firm (vs.8) and not standing firm?
4. What things will the Lord's coming change? (Rom. 8:18–25; 1 Jn. 3:2-3; Rev. 21:1–5; 22:1–5)

Day 2: Read James 5:7–9.

5. Why is James' choice of farming imagery an apt illustration of patience?
 - a. What does the "valuable crop" mean to the farmer?
 - b. What does the farmer control in the production of the crop? What does the farmer not control?
 - c. What specific correlations do you see between the life of the Christian and the work of the farmer?
6. Why does James single out the sin of grumbling (vs. 9)? What does James say will happen if you grumble against each other?
7. Grumbling is an example of how we can become impatient with one another and the Lord. Where do you need to stop grumbling and submit to God's process for you?

Day 3: Read James 5:10–12.

8. How did the prophets suffer? Why did they suffer? (vs. 10; 1 Kings 22:24–27; Jer. 38:4–13; Heb. 11:35–38)

9. Job is known for his patience, but in verse 11 he is described as persevering. What is the difference between patience and perseverance?

10. What did the Lord “finally [bring] about” in the case of Job? (Skim Job 42.) Were God’s blessings to Job primarily spiritual or material? (Job 42:1–6; Matt. 5:3)

11. God’s testing and God’s compassion: are they consistent? Why or why not? (Review Jas. 1:2–5.)

12. Who is James quoting in verse 12? (See Matt. 5:33–37.) What is the gist of verse 12? Where can you apply this verse in your own life?

Day 4: Read James 5:13–16.

14. What is your first reaction to trials and suffering? To times of happiness? How does James urge us to meet the lows and highs of our lives?

13. What is the relationship between prayer and patience?

15. How do you know whether or not your prayers are prayers of faith? Look at the way Jesus prayed (Mk.14:36) and the way he taught us to pray (Mt. 6:9–13). What do Jesus’ prayers have in common?

Day 5: Read James 5:16–20.

19. Why is it so important to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other” (vs. 16a)? What impact does this kind of sharing have in the church community?

18. Think about the other believers you are close to. Do you know them well enough and love them well enough to speak into their lives and have them speak into yours?

20. Are you righteous enough to pray effective prayers? Why or why not?

21. Recall some of the main themes of James. Why is James 5:19–20 a good way to close this letter?