



## September 6 — Shine

**Weekly Reading: Ephesians 5–Philippians 3**

**Life Group Passage: Philippians 2:12–18**

### Main Point

As God works within us, we faithfully obey Him and shine for Christ in the way we live.

### Key Verse

“For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.”

Philippians 2:13

### Life Group — The Flow

- 15 minutes — Conversation and relationship-building
- 5 minutes — Looking Back
- 5 minutes — Introduction, Background, and Christ Connection
- 30 minutes — Study and Apply
- 5–7 minutes — Application Exercise
- 10 minutes — Pray Through the Passage and Prayer Requests
- 5 minutes — Conclusion

### If Time Is Limited...

Focus on:

- Main Point and Key Verse
- Background and Christ Connection
- Read Philippians 2:12–13

- Passage 1 questions 1 and 3
- Read Philippians 2:14–18
- Passage 2 questions 1 and 4
- Application Exercise
- Pray Through the Passage
- Final Takeaway

## Looking Back — 5 Minutes

Last week, we studied Paul’s call to restore one another gently, carry one another’s burdens, and refuse to grow weary in doing good.

Discuss one or more:

- Did you have an opportunity to help lighten someone else’s burden this week?
- Where were you tempted to grow weary in doing good?
- Did someone help carry a burden with you?
- What “seed” of faithfulness did you intentionally keep planting even though you have not yet seen the result?

### Transition to Introduction

“Last week, Paul showed us that a Spirit-led life moves toward others with grace and perseverance. Today, he turns our attention toward the work God is doing within us—and how that inner transformation becomes visible in the way we live.”

## Introduction — 5 Minutes

Ask

- What daily task is hardest for you to do without complaining? Why that one?

Allow the group to have some fun with this. Answers might include commuting, cleaning, cooking, laundry, meetings, yard work, getting children ready, exercise, or dealing with a particular responsibility.

Follow-Up

- What usually determines whether something feels like a privilege or a burden to us?

Say

“Complaining can seem like a small issue. Most of us probably do it without thinking much about it.

But in today’s passage, Paul moves from one of the biggest truths imaginable—God Himself is at work within His people—to something as ordinary as the way we complain and argue.

His point is that spiritual growth is not merely something happening privately inside us. As God changes us, that transformation should become visible in the ordinary ways we live.”

### **Transition to Background**

“Paul’s command makes even more sense when we remember what he has just shown the Philippians about Jesus.”

## **Background**

Paul wrote Philippians while imprisoned, yet the letter is marked by repeated calls to joy, faithfulness, and unity.

The church at Philippi had a close relationship with Paul and had supported his ministry faithfully. However, Paul was concerned about signs of tension and self-centeredness within the congregation. Earlier in chapter 2, he urged believers to reject selfish ambition and pursue the interests of others.

Paul then pointed them to the supreme example of Jesus. In Philippians 2:5–11, Christ willingly humbled Himself. Though fully God, He took the form of a servant, became human, and obeyed the Father even to death on a cross. God then highly exalted Him so that every knee will one day bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

The words “therefore” and “so then” in verse 12 connect Paul’s instructions directly to Christ’s example. Because Jesus demonstrated humble obedience, His followers are called to live with that same posture. Yet Paul does not tell believers simply to imitate Jesus through greater willpower. The God who calls them to obedience is also actively working within them.

### **Transition to Christ Connection**

“Before Paul tells believers to ‘work out’ their salvation, he has already reminded them of the Savior who accomplished that salvation for them.”

## Christ Connection

Jesus did what we could never do for ourselves. He lived in perfect obedience to the Father, humbled Himself, and willingly went to the cross to bear the judgment our sin deserved. Through His death and resurrection, everyone who trusts in Him receives forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and new life.

That means Philippians 2:12 cannot mean that Christians must work for salvation. Salvation is the gift of God received through faith in Christ. Instead, believers are called to work out the salvation God has already given them—to increasingly live in a way that reflects the new life they have received. And they do not do this alone.

God Himself works within His people, shaping both their desires and their actions according to His good purpose. Christian growth therefore involves real effort, but that effort rests upon and responds to God's gracious work within us.

### Transition to Study and Apply

“With Christ's obedience behind us and God's power within us, Paul now calls believers to actively live out the salvation they have received.”

## Study and Apply — 30 Minutes

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says and how we can apply it in our lives this week.

### Passage 1 — Philippians 2:12–13

#### God at Work in Us

**Read the Passage** – Have a volunteer read Philippians 2:12–13.

*Lights in the World*

[12] Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,  
[13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (ESV)

## Commentary

Use the following commentary to prepare ahead of time. As you lead, summarize the key insights rather than reading everything word-for-word.

**Verse 12.** Paul begins: “Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed...”

The word therefore points back to Christ’s humble obedience in verses 5–11. Paul is not introducing an unrelated command. The obedience believers pursue should reflect the humble obedience already demonstrated perfectly by Jesus.

The Philippians had obeyed while Paul was physically present with them, but Paul wanted their faithfulness to continue “even more in my absence.” Mature obedience does not depend upon another person constantly watching, correcting, or motivating us. Paul wanted the Philippians’ devotion to Christ—not merely their relationship with Paul—to drive their faithfulness.

He then commands them to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Paul does not say to work *for* salvation.

The verb translated work out carries the idea of bringing something to its intended result or expressing fully what is already present. Paul is calling believers to actively live out the implications of the salvation they have received through Christ.

The phrase “fear and trembling” does not describe terror that believers might lose their salvation. It expresses reverence, humility, and seriousness before God.

Salvation is entirely a gift of grace, but that does not make spiritual growth casual or passive. The God who saved us deserves our wholehearted obedience.

**Verse 13.** Verse 13 explains why believers can obey: “For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.”

Paul holds divine activity and human responsibility together. Verse 12 says “You work,” while verse 13 says: “God is working in you.”

These truths are not competitors. Believers actively pursue obedience precisely because God is already actively at work within them. The word translated working carries the idea of effective, energizing activity. God does not merely stand at a distance offering encouragement. Through His Spirit, He works within His people.

Remarkably, His work reaches both our will and our work. God changes what believers increasingly desire, and He supplies what they need to increasingly do what pleases Him.

This does not mean Christians never experience competing desires or that obedience becomes effortless. Rather, spiritual growth begins and continues because God graciously works within His people to transform both heart and life.

His purpose is ultimately “his good purpose.” Christian growth is not primarily about becoming impressive people. God transforms us so that our lives increasingly accomplish what pleases Him and bring glory to His name.

### Guide Discussion

**You do not need to cover every question. Use those that best help your group engage with the passage.**

- 1. Good for Students.** What do you notice about what believers are commanded to do and what God promises to do in verses 12–13?
- 2. Discuss.** What is the difference between working out your salvation and working for your salvation? Why does that distinction matter?
- 3. Deeper Dive.** How do verses 12 and 13 keep us from the two extremes of either trying to change ourselves entirely through our own effort or becoming passive and expecting God to change us without our obedience?
- 4. Reflective — Index Card.** Where in your spiritual life have you become passive, discouraged, or overly dependent on your own effort instead of actively obeying while trusting God to work within you?

### Teaching Insight

Say

“Spiritual growth is neither ‘try harder by yourself’ nor ‘do nothing and wait for God.’ God graciously works within His people, changing our desires and empowering our obedience. Because He is working in us, we actively pursue the life He has called us to live.”

### Transition to Passage 2

“Paul now moves from the work happening within believers to the difference that work should make around them. And surprisingly, he begins with something as ordinary as complaining.”

## Passage 2 — Philippians 2:14–18

### Shine in the World

**Read the Passage – Have a volunteer read Philippians 2:14–18.**

[14] Do all things without grumbling or disputing,

[15] that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

[16] holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

[17] 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.

[18] Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. (ESV)

### Commentary

**Verse 14.** Paul gives a remarkably broad command: “Do everything without grumbling and arguing.” The word translated grumbling describes muttering or complaining under one’s breath. Arguing refers to disputes, questioning, or contentious disagreement.

Both attitudes grow naturally from self-centeredness.

When circumstances do not go our way, when another person receives what we wanted, or when obedience becomes inconvenient, grumbling exposes the belief that our preferences should determine our response.

This is especially significant in the context of Philippians 2. Jesus willingly humbled Himself and placed the Father’s will above His own comfort. Grumbling and arguing reveal the opposite posture – an insistence that circumstances or people should conform to our desires.

Paul is not forbidding honest questions, appropriate disagreement, or expressing legitimate concerns. His warning is against a habitual spirit of discontent and contention that damages Christian fellowship.

**Verse 15.** The purpose is: “so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation.”

Blameless does not mean sinlessly perfect. Paul describes a life of integrity that does not provide legitimate grounds for accusation. Pure carries the idea of sincerity or unmixed character.

Believers already are children of God. Paul is therefore not telling them how to earn that status. He is calling them to live in a way consistent with the identity they have already received. The surrounding world is described as crooked and perverted—turned away from God’s truth and distorted by sin.

Against that darkness, Paul says that believers “shine like stars in the world.” Stars become most noticeable against a dark sky.

In the same way, ordinary Christian character—humility, gratitude, integrity, love, contentment, and faithfulness—can become striking when displayed within a culture shaped by selfishness and dissatisfaction.

Christians do not shine by drawing attention to themselves. They shine as transformed lives direct attention toward the God who transformed them.

**Verse 16.** Believers are to be: “holding firm to the word of life.”

The phrase can carry the idea of holding firmly to the gospel and may also suggest holding it forth before others. Either way, the word of life remains central to Christian witness. Believers do not shine merely because they are unusually kind, optimistic, or disciplined people. Their lives are shaped by and point toward the life-giving message of Jesus Christ.

Paul looked toward “the day of Christ,” when Jesus will return and every person’s work will ultimately be revealed. He wanted to know that his labor among the Philippians had not been wasted. Their continuing faithfulness would demonstrate that his ministry had produced enduring fruit.

**Verse 17.** Paul then uses the language of sacrifice: “But even if I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrificial service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.”

A drink offering involved pouring out liquid as part of an offering to God.

Paul viewed his own life in similar terms. Even if his imprisonment eventually resulted in death, he was willing for his life to be poured out in service to Christ and for the spiritual good of the Philippians.

This gives greater depth to the image of shining.

Christian witness is not simply being noticeably nicer than everyone else. It includes willingly spending our lives for Christ and others.

Paul could face that possibility with gladness and joy because he did not consider a life poured out for Jesus to be wasted.

**Verse 18.** Paul closes: “In the same way you should also be glad and rejoice with me.” Joy appears repeatedly throughout Philippians, even though Paul writes from imprisonment.

Paul does not deny hardship or pretend sacrifice is painless. His joy rests in something greater than comfortable circumstances. A life faithfully offered to Christ has eternal purpose.

Therefore, Christian maturity is not grim endurance. God’s work within us produces obedience, sacrificial service, visible witness—and ultimately joy

### **Consider This — Dr. Kent Brantly**

In 2014, Dr. Kent Brantly was serving as a Christian medical missionary in Liberia when an Ebola outbreak began. Rather than leaving when the work became dangerous, he continued caring for Ebola patients, and eventually contracted the virus himself.

After recovering, Brantly explained that his family had moved to Liberia because they believed God had called them to serve. Even the worldwide attention surrounding his illness became an opportunity for him to point people beyond himself and toward the suffering of others and the faithfulness of God.

A life that shines for Christ is not primarily a life that attracts attention to itself, but a life willing to be poured out so that others can see Him.

### **Guide Discussion**

- 1. Good for Students.** Why do you think Paul moves from the enormous truth that God is working within us to something as ordinary as complaining and arguing?
- 2. Discuss.** What makes grumbling seem relatively harmless to us? What does it reveal about our hearts when it becomes a pattern?
- 3. Deeper Dive.** Paul says believers should be noticeably different from a “crooked and perverted generation.” What kinds of differences actually point people toward Christ rather than simply making Christians seem different for difference’s sake?
- 4. Reflective — Index Card.** Where could the way you respond to an ordinary frustration, inconvenience, or difficult person make Christ more visible this week?

## Teaching Insight

Say

“We often imagine spiritual maturity in dramatic terms. Paul brings it down to everyday life. A transformed response to frustration, inconvenience, conflict, and sacrifice can make the work of Christ visible. We shine not by advertising ourselves, but by allowing God’s work within us to change the way we live around others.”

### Transition to Application Exercise

“Paul has connected God’s work within us with the way we respond to ordinary life around us. Let’s identify one place where that inner work needs to become visible this week.”

## Application Exercise — 5–7 Minutes

### Work In • Work Out • Shine

**Supplies:** Index cards and pens

Ask members to privately work through three prompts.

#### 1. Work In

- **Where do you most need God to change your desires or attitude right now?**

This might involve:

- a difficult relationship
- an unwanted responsibility
- a recurring temptation
- frustration with circumstances
- discouragement
- resentment
- impatience
- an area where obedience feels difficult

#### 2. Work Out

- **What act of obedience is God calling you to take in that situation?**

Examples might include:

- apologizing
- refusing to complain

- forgiving
- serving
- speaking truth gently
- establishing a faithful habit
- asking for help
- following through on a responsibility
- resisting a temptation
- encouraging someone

### 3. Shine

- **How could your response make the character of Christ more visible to someone around you?**

Write down one person who is likely to see your response this week.

Say

“You are not being asked to create spiritual transformation by yourself. Ask God to work within you—and then faithfully act on what He is producing in you.”

### Transition to Pray Through the Passage

“We have identified where we need God’s work within us and where He is calling us to obedience. Now let’s bring those areas directly to Him in prayer.”

## Pray Through the Passage — 10 Minutes

### Led by the Prayer Champion

Read each verse and prayer prompt aloud. Allow a few moments between prompts for personal reflection and prayer.

*If time is limited, use one or two prompts rather than all four. The goal is meaningful prayer through the passage, not completing every prompt.*

### Prompt 1 — Adoration (have people pray this prompt out loud)

Who God Is

Philippians 2:13 – “For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.”

- Praise God because He is powerful and purposeful. He does not abandon His people to transform themselves but actively works within them according to His good purpose.

## Prompt 2 — Confession (can be silent)

*Where We Need Him*

Philippians 2:14 – “Do everything without grumbling and arguing.”

- Confess a situation where complaining, arguing, or self-centeredness has revealed dissatisfaction with God, your circumstances, or the people around you.

## Prompt 3 — Gratitude (have people pray this prompt out loud)

*What He Has Done*

Philippians 2:15 – “Then you will shine like stars in the world.”

- Thank God that He has made you His child and is transforming your life so that even ordinary faithfulness can point others toward Christ.

## Prompt 4 — Response / Obedience (have people pray this prompt out loud)

*How We Will Obey*

Philippians 2:16 – holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. (ESV)

- Ask God to help you hold firmly to His Word and faithfully live it out in the specific situation you identified during the application exercise.

## Prayer Requests, Praises, and Follow-Up

1. Ask the group for updates from the previous week’s prayer requests and celebrate answered prayers.
2. Invite members to share honestly at whatever level they are comfortable so the group can support one another through prayer and practical care.
3. Ask whether anyone especially needs prayer in an area where obedience feels difficult, discouraging, or costly.

4. Record requests and praises, share them with the group during the week, and follow up at the next gathering.

### **Transition to Conclusion**

“God’s work in us will not always be dramatic or immediately visible. Often it shows up one ordinary act of obedience at a time. As we leave, let’s remember that every one of those choices can become an opportunity to shine.”

## **Conclusion — 5 Minutes**

### **Final Takeaway**

God is actively working within His people. As we respond with faithful obedience, even our ordinary attitudes, relationships, and sacrifices can make Christ visible to the world around us.

### **This Week’s Challenge**

#### **Respond — *What Will I Do?***

Return to your “Work In • Work Out • Shine” card.

When you encounter the situation you identified this week:

1. Ask God to continue His work within you.
2. Choose the faithful act of obedience you identified.
3. Remember that someone may see Christ more clearly through the way you respond.

#### **Reflect — *What Is God Showing Me?***

Consider:

- Where am I trying to change myself without depending upon God?
- Where am I expecting God to change me without taking a step of obedience?
- What circumstances most often expose complaining or self-centeredness in me?
- What does my response to inconvenience communicate about my faith?
- Where is God already changing my desires?
- Am I willing for my time, comfort, and resources to be “poured out” for Christ and others?

## **Review — *How Will I Keep God's Word Before Me?***

Review Philippians 2:13 throughout the week:

**“For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.”**

When obedience feels difficult, remind yourself: God is at work in me.

Then take the next faithful step.

## **Read — *How Will I Prepare for Next Week?***

Continue with the church's Year of Prayer New Testament Reading Plan.

Next Week's Reading: **Philippians 4–Colossians 4**

As you read, pay attention to what the passages teach about the supremacy of Christ and how belonging to Him should transform everyday life.

## **Closing Prayer**

**“Father, thank You that You have not left us to transform ourselves. Through Your Spirit, You are at work within us, shaping our desires and giving us strength to obey. Forgive us for complaining, arguing, and resisting Your work when life does not go the way we want. Help us take seriously the salvation You have freely given us through Jesus. Teach us to obey with humility, serve with joy, hold firmly to Your Word, and willingly pour ourselves out for others. May the ordinary choices we make this week shine brightly and point people toward Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.”**